

Introduction

This is a book about ways of thinking about cities and city life. Specifically, it is about the potential of cities to offer men and women the ability to comprehend and master the complex, multicultural realities of the modern world. It is also about the ways in which the city and its components—markets, governments, communities, public spaces, individuals' social networks—can thwart and limit this aspiration. More specifically, it is an analysis and a critique of the idea of the city in that strand of urban social theory that has looked to Marx for its theoretical and philosophical foundations. The book has two primary aims: first, to give an account of the intellectual history of an important discussion within progressive social theory and to place it in relation to wider developments in critical social theory, and, second, to suggest directions for a post-Marxian critical urban social theory that can give better answers to the pressing questions concerning identities, space, and social structure than those currently available.

Marxian urban theory (or Marxian urbanism, terms that will be used interchangeably) is above all a theory of modernity and the urban process in terms of the relationship between capitalist forms of development and the spatial patterning of the institutions of everyday life. This body of work is concerned with understanding the effects of money and power (capitalist investment and bureaucratic planning) on the everyday lives of those who live and work in the capitalist city. Its chief

goal is the integration of phenomena of urban spatial relations within Marxian class theory. For example, it seeks to provide a unifying framework that can capture the relationship between the variety of class, community, neighborhood, ethnic, or territorial forms of identity and group belonging that compose both the fabric of everyday life and the patterns of capitalist investment and urban governance in land, housing, and space.

Marxian urbanism's core thesis can be stated as follows: Because the modern city is one component of the larger capitalist social structure, the contradictions and antagonisms that emerge within and across urban space—which at first sight are organized primarily around neither economic classes nor production relations—are best explained in class terms. Conflicts over affordable housing, the fate of neighborhoods facing demolition, the distribution of resources among areas of the city varying by class, race, or ethnicity, and demands for greater community participation in local decision making express the contradiction pitting the interests of real-estate speculators, rentier landlords, and the local state in the greater commodification and valorization of land, housing, and space against the use values embodied in the homes and residential social networks of working people. By showing how the logic of investment and the circulation of capital shape urban political institutions and the spatial organization of everyday life in terms of the reproduction of labor power, and by demonstrating how urban conflicts, issues, and actors are in turn shaped by these urban processes, Marxian urban theory closes the gap between the apparent nonclass actors and issues and the purported class source of conflict.

Although the modern city is viewed as a mosaic of differentiated and overlapping spheres of communities, workplaces, and neighborhoods organized by status, ethnicity, and religion, Marxian urban theory rejects positions that claim that no one sphere has analytical primacy in the determination and explanation of social change, positions that abandon the idea of an objective set of social relations that structure forms of solidarity, consciousness, and identity. To do so would be to abandon the politico-theoretical implications of historical materialism in which the antagonisms that express a structural contradiction are linked to an emancipatory dialectical process of social change. Marxian urbanism thus retains the idea that class structure, identity, and interest formation are the central categories for understanding urban popular struggles and forms of power. As such, it is the perspective most strategically relevant to an emancipatory politics for the contemporary city.

This is the urbanism associated with the Marxian tradition, as well as that adopted by many other sectors of the Left, and it is the urbanism I challenge in this book. Focusing on the question of the identity of urban actors, I will argue against the primacy of class and for the limits of class—and for the limits of Marxian urban theory. It is important to emphasize, however, that the limits I have in mind are primarily theoretical, not empirical. My goal is not to provide empirical evidence of the prevalence of nonclass forms of urban collective action in a given situation. That such forms of action exist would not be very surprising, but it also would not be very illuminating, since it would not engage adequately with the Marxian assumption that nonclass forms of identity should be understood within a totality of displaced or disguised class elements. Rather, I argue that the patterning of social relations across urban space creates a fissure or dislocation—or as I will call it, borrowing a term from Jacques Derrida, “spacing”—within the very process of identification that forms the basis of group and individual identity. Because this spacing is constitutive of identity and is not the deformation of some prior essential identity (e.g., racial differences are not the fragmentation of a prior class unity but are constitutive of class), it thereby precludes the closure of identity around any single boundary or space.¹ The Marxian notion of class identity presupposes such a closure as a potential, if not an accomplished fact (that is, as a *telos*). The recognition of the constitutive nature of this dislocation undermines the claim for the analytically privileged status of class identity vis-à-vis other ones in the city.

I am not, it should be emphatically stressed, arguing against the relevance of class, if by this we understand a group that shares economic interests. Given the increasing inequality of economic resources and institutions, the organized collective action of subjects as workers pursuing economic justice is one indispensable element of a progressive political agenda. What I argue against is the idea, still retained by some sections of the Left, that class politics represents, or can in principal represent, the unifying category against the particularism and divisiveness of other identities. What I argue for is rethinking, not ignoring, class, rethinking the concept in the light of the social and theoretical developments of the last several decades that have brought the problem of coalitions to the forefront of both theoretical and strategic considerations. Stanley Aronowitz has summarized the concern of many who have realized that “the question for traditional socialism is whether it will be able to *theorize* its relationship to the new social movements” or be condemned to

go along belatedly, in an ad hoc way, with the democratic demands of groups organizing outside the traditional working-class organizations.²

Weaknesses in the economistic and reductionist assumptions of Marxian theory, including its urban subdiscipline, have become widely recognized and debated.³ Less clear are the alternative conceptual tools that should replace them. The works of the three authors I consider in the following three chapters, Manuel Castells, David Harvey, and Ira Katznelson, represent the most important attempts to meet the objections discussed above. They have sought to get around the problem of class and workplace reductionism by proposing revisionist models of space and class. This attempt has not succeeded, and one of the primary goals of this book is to explain why this is so. A critical urbanism building on the democratic socialist tradition cannot be rescued from the difficulties associated with a Marxian mapping of urban space and the spaces of the subject. At the same time, as will become apparent, imagining a new perspective cannot abandon some key questions inherited from the Marxian tradition. The chapters that follow examine the inadequacies of the most important responses to the critique of class reductionism and go on to propose alternate ways of seeing identity, structure, and space that avoid these shortcomings.

IDENTITY, STRUCTURE, AND THE SPACES OF THE CITY

People dwell, but not in the way that they choose. This paraphrase of Marx's well-known observation captures well the three key themes that underlie this book.⁴ The first concerns the distinct, but related, questions of subjectivity, identity, and agency; the second, the notion of space and its role in the patterning of everyday life; and the third arises from the acknowledgment that there are systematic constraints on action—that we are not free to make ourselves or act in the world just as we would wish. The debates over the interpretation of these three dimensions—identity, space, and structure—are far from settled. Their conceptualization and relations with each other are the subject of widespread controversy and discussion in contemporary social theory. They play such a significant role because they relate to the most significant themes and controversies facing our societies.

THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITIES

Several factors account for the fact that the problematics of identities, subjectivities, and agency are at the center of political and social dis-

course today. By the end of the twentieth century, the cities of the West, especially of the United States and Western Europe, had become places where vast arrays of strangers were brought together, yet under sociopolitical circumstances significantly different from those characteristic of the last great wave of immigration, at the end of the nineteenth century.⁵ These circumstances include the global migration to the cities of the Western countries, creating new patterns of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious heterogeneity that are now challenging the integrative powers of the nation-state to assimilate, within fixed national boundaries, the increasing presence of diasporic, transnational identities structured around noncontiguous spaces. They also include the globalization of capitalist markets, creating new flows of capital and labor while weakening the ability of the nation-state to regulate either, together with the continuing dynamics of identity politics, which in the name of particularity compete with the universalistic basis of national or socialist class political organizations as bases of resistance to the homogenizing tendencies of global markets or bureaucratic defined roles,⁶ and the persistence of racial and ethnic segregation and ghettoization of social space throughout the urban areas of the Western countries, which has undermined the idea of a unitary national identity of equal citizens.

This intensification of heterogeneity and difference—ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious—has raised many questions, particularly in the post-colonial context, where Europe is now decentered.⁷ As the discourses and institutions of nineteenth-century industrialism and modernity, most notably the nation-state and class-based social movements and organizations, lose their structuring power over the lifeworlds of the inhabitants of neighborhoods, cities, and regions, questions over the integrative force of current institutions to embrace this apparent surplus of difference increasingly shape public discourse and debate. Between fragmentation and pluralization lies the anxiety over the figure of the universal, of the totality, pushing contemporary social thought to reengage with the question of identity.

The central motif in contemporary debates is without doubt the radical questioning of the foundationalist assumptions of philosophical and sociological discourses shared by both conventional and Marxian theoretical perspectives. This critique is by now widespread and well known, but its implications and ramifications for both theory and practice are still hotly debated and yet to be worked out. Nonetheless, several themes stand out. There has developed a greater sense that identities—who we are, personally, collectively—are best seen as self-reflexive projects of cre-

ating selves that are not there simply to be discovered or uncovered.⁸ In this view, identities are not expressive of a deep “essentialist” core, but are best seen as contingent and articulated through interdependent and overdetermined practices structured by both conscious intention and unconscious desire. Indeed, many of these motifs have by now entered firmly into the social-theoretical consciousness of the age. Flux, fluidity, multiplicity, overlap, alterity, and hybridity, rather than fixity, naturalness, and ahistorical essence, are the familiar terms in many of the so-called postmodern perspectives on identity. Whether this represents an (objective) illusion symptomatic of a period of capitalist society dominated by the commodity spectacle or whether it reflects the unlocking of the “others” of modernity—that is, the diversity suppressed by certain homogenizing tendencies of the modernist project—also is a central theme in the current debates.

The weakening of nation-states in the face of challenges from outside (the global economy) and from within their borders (identity politics), has put the status of democracy again in question. However, it has not eliminated the moral demand placed on all those who share a common territory and polity to enter into a public realm with some sense of unifying values and beliefs, however tentative and provisional. This democratic requirement sets the current experience of heterogeneity off from previous historical periods, when although differences did exist, the problems of forging a public sphere and a common destiny and of entering into a mutual conversation over the destiny of the groups involved were absent.⁹ This normative imperative continues to influence and structure the problem of a multicultural democracy today. For example, neither the idea of a single, universalist notion of the good nor a fragmented politics of difference is an adequate response to the pressing problems of collective decision making and problem solving in the context of the recognition of the irreducibility of multiple identities.¹⁰ As national governments minimize their regulative and welfare functions, this dilemma becomes increasingly an issue at the subnational levels of the city and the region.

One response to these dilemmas has been to adopt a perspective that takes complexity as the a priori feature of social identity. These approaches typically begin by deconstructing the so-called essentialist presuppositions embedded in political and cultural discourses so as to expose more clearly the fractured, overdetermined nature of identities, and they thus constitute many of the surfaces of emergence of the discourse around identity.¹¹ The meaning of home, the crossing of the bor-

der, the journey of the migrant, have been added to the issues of security, liberation, and authenticity as the leitmotifs of the problem of identity today.¹²

THE SPACES OF DWELLING

To dwell is to live in relation to one's environment, landscape, and community within a certain space. One dwells in the multiple spaces of one's subjectivity, but also in between them, on the borders, in between these spaces. One dwells in and on one's body. One dwells in the spaces between oneself and the image of the other. To dwell "means to inhabit the traces left by one's own living"¹³ in a memory of a time and a place. Although to be modern means to reconcile oneself to a kind of homelessness, nonetheless, to be fully modern means to make oneself at home in the maelstrom and confusions of modern life. As I use it, "the urban" is the name of the locus of the "experience of modernity." It names the everyday spaces of the city, the place of the encounter with diversity, strangers, the overlapping worlds of multiple allegiances, networks, and identities. The spaces of dwelling represent the second dimension examined here.

At the immediate empirical level, the spaces of the everyday are where people experience the world: homes, streets, neighborhoods, workplaces, public parks, "the city." Through and within these spaces, people experience, concretely, the abstractions of capitalist modernity. Recent social history scholarship has shown, for example, the extent to which the solidarity underpinning the labor movement throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was crucially dependent in many cases upon the local communal bonds that tied together workers' experience in both the workplace and the residential community. These studies have shown that early working-class "culture" as a way of life depended on the articulation of the spaces of home, community, family, and workplace into dense social networks—a conclusion that eludes those aspatial perspectives that view the "point of production" as a unique source of identity for a working-class identity. As Marx and Engels saw, the emergence of the labor movement depended on the concentration of workers into factories and neighborhoods in which a sense of solidarity and common culture, beliefs, and interests could be articulated. Conversely, the decline of working-class organization and support (particularly in the United States) is in part due to the decentralization and diffusion of local communal networks by suburbanization and an increasingly differentiated

and autonomous cross-class housing market (cross-class in the Marxian, but not Weberian, sense) in which workplace, residential, family, and communal identities are more distinct and separate.¹⁴

At the same time, recent theorists with sociospatial and philosophical perspectives on the city have argued that conventional ways in which space has been conceptualized are no longer adequate. Most important in this regard is the weakening of the local, bounded, physical space of the neighborhood or locale as the dominant scale for understanding individual and group identity, which the community-studies tradition took as its point of departure. The bounded community remains today as only one of a wider range of spaces that constitute identity and community. Inherited from the sociospatial conditions of nineteenth-century European and North American industrialization and urbanization, in which artisanal and working-class communities (as well as the nation-state) were spatially and socially bounded, this physicalist conception is no longer adequate for capturing the spaces of identity or power today.¹⁵

For many transnational, diasporic migrant communities, in contrast to those of the nineteenth century, individual and community identities are structured across multiple, sometimes contradictory spaces in complex patterns of imaginary representations and memory that suggest the need for a reconceptualization of identity and consciousness as fully constituted within fixed boundaries. For example, with reference to the Mixtec identity of migrants from Oaxaca, Mexico, to California, one writer has observed that the form that the new migration takes “erodes standard identities . . . and intersperses the self and other in interpenetrating spaces.”¹⁶ But physicalist assumptions persist in the face of changing conditions. A recent ethnographic study conducted in the community-studies tradition examined the public interactions of blacks and whites and the factors reproducing racial segregation and identities in American inner cities. It failed to examine the part played by the electronic commercial media, advertising, and other representations in explaining the patterns of behavior, however.¹⁷ This oversight resulted from an exclusive focus on the bounded institutions of the local neighborhood. What eluded its vision was the fact that the ways racialized bodies are represented “outside” the locale, in television, film, and music videos, could in many cases be variables influencing the identity of local residents that were as important as or more important than anything occurring within “the neighborhood.” Indeed, empirical studies employing social-network theory offer support for the idea of a loosening of the boundedness of the local

community.¹⁸ What is needed is a new imaginary to think the type of space and spatiality in these instances.

Many elements of contemporary social and geographic thought are extremely suggestive in this regard. Most important of these is the far-reaching reconceptualization of the boundary and the border in terms of undecidability, ambivalence, and hegemony. The critique of the conceptual assumptions underlying the dualism of inside/outside, self/other, and so on, provides many new ways to overcome the traditional ideas of nonpermeable spaces. Robert Park's image of the early-twentieth-century city as "a mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate," rooted as it was in assumptions from sociological objectivism, appears less and less relevant to a world characterized by identities whose primary ground is overdetermined, hybrid, and overlapping. This does not mean that identities cannot represent themselves in terms of rigid otherness or exteriority, or that, as in the case of racial or ethnic residential segregation, the promises of hybrid spaces cannot be violated. What it does mean is that such boundedness is not the expression of a preexisting identity constituted outside discourse, representation, or power but, on the contrary, the institution of a hegemonic closure and rejection of precisely those promises. The idea of spacing, rather than space, best captures these new modalities. Derrida has described spacing as "the index of an irreducible exterior, and at the same time of a movement, a displacement that indicates an irreducible alterity."¹⁹ Rethinking the city in terms of the interpenetrating and the undecidable—that is to say, overdetermined—spaces of gendered identities can help lead us to a cosmopolitan ethic, an openness to the other proceeding from the recognition of the stranger within us.

THE PROBLEM OF STRUCTURE

And yet, however more potentially fluid and open the identity choices seem to be, these choices cannot take place in a vacuum of unconstrained possibilities. Marx sought to account for the most important macrostructures that shape the possibilities of individual and collective action, and many observers have followed him in identifying the capitalist economy as the most significant framer of meaning and action. Marx's theory of the role of the capitalist economy in shaping consciousness, action, and the possibilities of social change was considerably more far-reaching than the important recognition that proletarianization was the most important phenome-

non in the lives of nineteenth-century European workers.²⁰ Marx explicitly sought to link two dimensions of modern societies: economic crisis and class-based collective action. The capitalist economy, taking on a seemingly independent life of its own, had broken away from the immediate control of individuals and communities. Its motions and regularities apparently followed an independent, invisible logic, abstracted from the discursive practices of the everyday. It worked (and still works) “behind our backs.” At the same time, in linking the rise of the workers’ movement to economic crisis, Marx implicitly tackled the more general problem of the relationship between what today we call structure and agency. He showed how the logic of the abstracted structures of the economy, through crises and the need to expand accumulation, disturbs the reproduction of the communal substratum of everyday life, ushering in resistance, protest, and, potentially, transformation.

Of course, the conceptualization of the economy and its relationship with forms of politics, culture, and ideology has been extensively debated over the last thirty years. Today, there is no question of maintaining a reductive topology in which the economy determines, even in a complicated way, a superstructure of social forms of life and institutions. Yet despite many cogent and compelling critiques of economic determinism, we cannot lose sight of the question Marx was attempting to answer. No serious account of obstacles to and possibilities of progressive social change can ignore the fact that there are powerful shaping macrostructures. Huge new agglomerations of capital and labor, finance, and resources are re-creating the cities and spaces within which we all must live. Far-reaching transformations and intensifications of the capitalist economy on a global scale and changing forms of state power are rearranging settlement patterns, labor flows, and intergroup relations into new forms of urbanism with important implications for political realignment, cultural-political agendas, new forms of inequality, and exclusion, as well as creating new opportunities for change.²¹ Symbolic economies of commodified fantasy and desire such as the Disneyfication of New York’s Times Square drive many political-economic projects of urban economic development.²² Saskia Sassen and Susan Fainstein, for example, have demonstrated the way global economic forces have transformed major world urban centers and constrain local policy options.²³ These forces appear to possess an apparent quasi-natural objectivity that is difficult for localities and regions to escape. At the same time, they create conditions in which neighborhoods and localities seek to resist the local effects and contradictions produced by these large-scale changes.²⁴

Nonetheless, it is no longer possible to conceive of the economy as the determining structure in the old manner. The disagreement arises over how to describe its contents in a manner consistent with the critique of economism and how to conceptualize the “objectivity” of the structures in a manner consistent with the critique of essentialism. The first remains an area of controversy, especially within the Left. An increasing number of historians, however, are arguing that the social transformations of the modern period, such as the creation of the nation-state, urbanization, industrialization, and the development of a market economy regulated and constituted through law and institutions, are best seen in terms of the mutually reinforcing logic of the economy and state power.²⁵ Rather than view the state as a reflection of the functional needs of the economy, they view *both* bureaucratization and commodification as structuring forces. Modernity is thus seen through the eyes of both Marx and Weber.²⁶

The second and more complex issue is the way that the apparent objectivity of the structure should be conceptualized. Many critics of poststructuralism or postmodernist perspectives, including most Marxian writers, see the thoroughgoing deconstruction of the objectivity or the “real” as leading to the abandonment of structure for agency, in which identity, consciousness, and agency are “free-floating,” “unconstrained,” and so forth. Many discourse theorists do indeed give the impression of throwing out the structural baby with the objectivistic bathwater. Indeed, it is regrettable that few poststructuralist analysts of social and political institutions (in contrast to philosophers or literary critics) have engaged seriously with the debates in social theory over the links between identity and structure. Yet I do not think that the charge that certain postmodern positions imply a return to idealistic premises is valid. Despite the undertheorization of the nature of structure, especially in relation to political and economic institutions, it is best to read most variants of discourse theory as attempts to rethink the notion of structure and to deconstruct the identity/structure dyad in ways compatible with the critique of objectivism. Nonetheless, this venerable problem of social theory (the problem of linking the macro and the micro, or social/system integration) needs to be taken up by an anti-essentialist critical social theory.

Taken together, these three dimensions, identities, space, and structure, define the project of critical urban theory and give rise to four related sets of questions.²⁷ First, how are we best to conceptualize social actors and explain the variation of social action and collective identities

across time and space? Second, what are the spatial patterns of economic, political, and cultural institutions? What explains the geography and morphology of modern societies? What accounts for their transformations? What are the meanings of space, and how is it represented and used in everyday life? Third, what are the major macrostructures that limit and constrain social action and the spaces of identity? Fourth, how should the three dimensions be related to each other?

This book is an attempt to provide some answers to these questions. To do this, I focus on the Marxian tradition in urban theory because, although inadequate in many respects, it has been the most important response to this problematic. Accordingly, in the next section, I provide a brief overview of the contribution and limitations of this body of writing as a whole so as to provide the broader context within which the more detailed analysis of the work of the three major writers in the field should be read.

IDENTITIES, SPACE, STRUCTURE, AND THE LIMITS OF URBAN THEORY

Mike Savage and Alan Warde have summarized the main contribution of urban sociology and related branches of thought over the last century as the elucidation of the interdependence of the social institutions that form everyday experience in their contextual spatial settings.²⁸ Marxian urban theory emerged in the late 1960s as the most ambitious and important attempt to reinterpret this tradition of urban theory within a critical, normative framework. (It is not surprising, therefore, that Walter Benjamin's sociospatial readings have recently been taken up with much interest by critical urbanists. Benjamin's work converges with the central concerns of critical urban theory to unmask and rearticulate the meaning and experience of everyday life—in the streets, in the arcades, and in the parks—within the dynamics of capitalist modernity.)

To understand the reasons behind the emergence of Marxian urban theory, it is important to recall the dominant perspectives on conflict and power in urban political life in the 1950s and 1960s in Western Europe and North America, which were largely articulated from within conventional political science and urban sociology.²⁹ Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?* published in 1961, which provided a powerful argument for the pluralist nature of the local political system (and, by implication, the national political system as well), quickly became the dominant analytical paradigm, both in the United States and in other countries such as

the United Kingdom. For the pluralists, the absence of widespread conflict in the postwar period indicated that the political system was competitive and open to new interest groups, that the distribution of power was noncumulative, and that there was a widespread (although not necessarily unanimous) consensus over the goals and values of public policy in local government. Urban sociology also advanced a largely non-conflictual view of urban life based on an ecological paradigm that in turn was based on biological and mechanistic models derived from the natural and physical sciences. In this perspective, the patterns and transformations of urban space (changing configurations of ethnic and class segregation, the spatial distribution of economic and political functions), explained in terms of an evolutionary paradigm of functional adaptation influenced by “natural” demographic and market variables, reflected an equilibrium of social, demographic, and economic forces in space.

The eruption of social protest around a range of issues, from the new social movements to the “ghetto riots” in the cities of the Western world in the 1960s, clearly rendered these frameworks inadequate. As Claus Offe has pointed out, interpretations that viewed all movements occurring outside formal political channels as the irrational and expressive demands of anomic deviants were at odds with the characteristics of most of these movements.³⁰ For example, the modernist values and goals of racial justice, equality, dignity, respect for environment, greater local autonomy, and community participation in local decision making espoused by largely working-class and middle-class actors did not support the theories of “irrational” collective behavior or of urban life as consensual and nonconflictual. Especially with regard to urban conflict and urban movements, the dominant explanations simply did not expect the emergence of conflict.

Marxist theory seemed to offer a more promising framework for understanding urban conflict, and both political and theoretical interest in it revived in the 1960s. It differed from the prevailing orthodoxy by seeing conflict, antagonism, and contradiction not as a breakdown of the system but as being at the heart of society and social change. Although Marxism expected conflict, it had more trouble with reconciling two distinctive features of urban conflict with the theory of class antagonism. First, the arenas within which the urban crisis manifested itself and around which mobilization occurred have been typically outside the workplace, in the residential community. Second, the social actors involved in urban struggles were not only outside labor organizations such as trade unions, but they could not be described as occupying uniquely working-class posi-

tions, being cross-class or multiclass in composition. These two factors represented a challenge to Marxian explanations of the urban crisis, an area of inquiry that up until that time had not been explicitly addressed within the Marxian paradigm.

Throughout Western Europe and North America in the postwar period, the dynamics of urbanization, real-estate investment, and speculation in city land caused the displacement of large numbers of poor and working-class people. It also brought an alliance of local government and real-estate capital, and in some cases local organized labor, into increasing opposition with local residents who mobilized to protect their homes and neighborhoods. Residents joined together to resist redevelopment, more often than not with little success. Although the participants could be classified as “workers,” they were acting as cross-class coalitions of residents or as consumers of housing and space. Because these urban conflicts were over consumption items such as the right to housing and over space, the right to inhabit a locale, their relationship to the class organizations such as trade unions (or also, as in France, the Socialist or Communist Parties) was either nonexistent or fraught with tension.³¹ All this added up to new actors, new social contradictions, and new challenges for progressive theory and strategy.

Contemporary observers confirmed the sense of important socioeconomic and political transformations. Reflecting on the Paris student rebellions, for example, Alain Touraine spoke of “new class struggles in new areas of social life such as urban life, the management of needs and resources, of education, which nonetheless were not economic conflicts. Today the working class is no longer the protagonist par excellence of historical evolution.” Daniel Singer wrote that the French crisis (of May 1968) “does not confirm the extreme theories about the birth of a new revolutionary class taking place traditionally attributed to industrial workers, the proletariat. They suggest new splits, new cleavages, and new alignments reflecting new social contradictions.”³²

As the “city” began to take shape as an object and terrain of political and ideological conflict, Marxian theorists and socialist politicians took up the challenges of interpreting these new historical realities. Henri Lefebvre, one of the grand old men of Marxist philosophy in France, spoke already in 1968 of “the right to the city” and pointed to the transformation of industrial to urban society as the most significant feature of contemporary social experience. The Situationists and Guy Debord (their best-known member) made the spaces of the city the canvas on which a new antipolitics could be imagined.³³ However, the urban chal-

lenge for the Left was captured most systematically by the sociologist Manuel Castells, who was associated at the time with the revisionist Marxism of Louis Althusser and Nikos Poulantzas. He observed toward the end of the 1960s:

We are witnessing increasing political intervention in the urban neighborhoods, in public amenities, transport, etc., and at the same time, the charging of the sphere of “consumption” and “everyday life” with political action and ideological confrontation [that require] new tools of intellectual work. We looked for these tools, mainly, in the Marxist tradition. Why there? Because we had to answer questions linked to topics such as social classes, change, struggle, revolt, contradiction, conflict, politics. These terms and themes refer us back to a sociological theory at the heart of which is the analysis of society as a structure of the class struggle. But this theoretical preference (or venture) poses particularly difficult problems for urban analysis. For here the Marxist tradition is practically non-existent and the development of theory must be linked to the historical recognition of the new problems posed by everyday life.³⁴

The Marxian urbanists who in the late 1960s and 1970s began to work out a new paradigm at the confluence of Marxian and urban theory sought to meet the challenge by demonstrating the links between the sources of urban social contradictions in the class-contradictory nature of capitalist society and the manifestation of these contradictions in urban conflicts and antagonisms. This was necessary because the new urbanization seemingly had severed the link between capitalist structure and working-class agency that had been most apparent in the industrial city. At the most general level, the task was, first, to show how the dynamics of capitalist economic development create the institutions of urban governance and the patterns of everyday life, such as the separation between workplaces and community residential spaces,³⁵ and, second, to then show how these urban structures shape new patterns of group identity formation and conflict among urban actors. Because urban social movements typically embrace issues of consumption (e.g., affordable housing, transportation), political autonomy and community control, and other quality-of-life issues, and not issues involving production relations, this argument was necessary to close the gap between the class source of social contradictions and the nonclass effects of the urban crisis.

At the same time, all theorists turning to this problem recognized, in varying degrees to be sure, the need for a solution that did not simply reduce the urban to matters of class. Sensitized to the problems of totality and reductionism by Althusser, Marxian urbanists embraced the need