The Urban Revolution

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University of Minnesota Press
Minneapolis • London

1 || From the City to Urban Society

I'll begin with the following hypothesis: Society has been completely urbanized. This hypothesis implies a definition: An *urban society* is a society that results from a process of complete urbanization. This urbanization is virtual today, but will become real in the future.

The above definition resolves any ambiguity in the use of our terms. The words "urban society" are often used to refer to any city or urban agglomeration: the Greek polis, the oriental or medieval city, commercial and industrial cities, small cities, the megalopolis. As a result of the confusion, we have forgotten or overlooked the social relationships (primarily relationships of production) with which each urban type is associated. These so-called urban societies are often compared with one another, even though they have nothing in common. Such a move serves the underlying ideologies of *organicism* (every urban society, viewed on its own, is seen as an organic "whole"), *continuism* (there is a sense of historical continuity or permanence associated with urban society), and *evolutionism* (urban society is characterized by different

periods, by the transformation of social relations that fade away or disappear).

Here, I use the term "urban society" to refer to the society that results from industrialization, which is a process of domination that absorbs agricultural production. This urban society cannot take shape conceptually until the end of a process during which the old urban forms, the end result of a series of *discontinuous* transformations, burst apart. An important aspect of the theoretical problem is the ability to situate the discontinuities and continuities with respect to one another. How could any absolute discontinuities exist without an underlying continuity, without support, without some inherent process? Conversely, how can we have continuity without crises, without the appearance of new elements or relationships?

The specialized sciences (sociology, political economy, history, human geography) have proposed a number of ways to characterize "our" society, its reality and deep-seated trends, its actuality and virtuality. Terms such as "industrial and postindustrial society," "the technological society," "the society of abundance," "the leisure society," "consumer society," and so on have been used. Each of these names contains an element of empirical or conceptual truth, as well as an element of exaggeration and extrapolation. Instead of the term "postindustrial society"—the society that is born of industrialization and succeeds it—I will use "urban society," a term that refers to tendencies, orientations, and virtualities, rather than any preordained reality. Such usage in no way precludes a critical examination of contemporary reality, such as the analysis of the "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption."

Science is certainly justified in formulating such theoretical hypotheses and using them as a point of departure. Not only is such a procedure current among the sciences, it is necessary. There can be no science without theoretical hypotheses. My hypothesis, which involves the so-called social sciences, is based on an epistemological and methodological approach. Knowledge is not necessarily a copy or reflection, a simulacrum or simulation of an object that is *already* real. Nor does it necessarily construct its object for the sake of a theory that predates knowledge, a theory of the object or its "models." In my approach, the object is included in the hypothesis; the hypothesis comprehends the object. Even though this "object" is located outside any (empirical) fact, it is not fictional. We can assume the existence of a *virtual object,* urban society; that is, a *possible object,* whose growth and development can be analyzed in relation to a process and a praxis (practical activity). Needless to say, such a hypothesis must be validated. There is, however, no shortage of arguments and proofs to sustain it, from the simplest to the most complex.

For example, agricultural production has lost all its autonomy in the major industrialized nations and as part of a global economy. It is no longer the principal sector of the economy, nor even a sector characterized by any distinctive features (aside from underdevelopment). Even though local and regional features from the time when agricultural production dominated haven't entirely disappeared, it has been changed into a form of industrial production, having become subordinate to its demands, subject to its constraints. Economic growth and industrialization have become self-legitimating, extending their effects to entire territories, regions, nations, and continents. As a result, the traditional unit typical of peasant life, namely the village, has been transformed. Absorbed or obliterated by larger units, it has become an integral part of industrial production and consumption. The concentration of the population goes hand in hand with that of the mode of production. The *urban fabric* grows, extends its borders, corrodes the residue of agrarian life. This expression, "urban fabric," does not narrowly define

the built world of cities but all manifestations of the dominance of the city over the country. In this sense, a vacation home, a highway, a supermarket in the countryside are all part of the urban fabric. Of varying density, thickness, and activity, the only regions untouched by it are those that are stagnant or dying, those that are given over to "nature." With the decline of the village life of days gone by, agricultural producers, "farmers," are confronted with the *agricultural town.* Promised by Khrushchev to the Soviet peasants, agricultural towns have appeared in various places around the world. In the United States, aside from certain parts of the South, peasants have virtually disappeared, and we find islands of farm poverty alongside islands of urban poverty. As this global process of industrialization and urbanization was taking place, the large cities exploded, giving rise to growths of dubious value: suburbs, residential conglomerations and industrial complexes, satellite cities that differed little from urbanized towns. Small and midsize cities became dependencies, partial colonies of the metropolis. In this way my hypothesis serves both as a point of arrival for existing knowledge and a point of departure for a new study and new projects: complete urbanization. The hypothesis is anticipatory. It prolongs the fundamental tendency of the present. Urban society is gestating in and through the "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption."

A negative argument, proof by the absurd: No other hypothesis will work, no other hypothesis can cover the entire range of problems. Postindustrial society? Then what happens after industrialization? Leisure society? This addresses only part of the question, since we limit our examination of trends and virtualities to "infrastructure," a realist attitude that in no way circumvents the demagoguery inherent in this definition. The indefinite growth of mass consumption? Here, we measure current indices and extrapolate from them, thereby running the risk of reducing reality and virtuality to only one of their aspects. And so on.

The expression "urban society" meets a theoretical need. It is more than simply a literary or pedagogical device, or even the expression of some form of acquired knowledge; it is an elaboration, a search, a conceptual formulation. A movement of thought toward a certain *concrete,* and perhaps toward *the* concrete, assumes shape and detail. This movement, if it proves to be true, will lead to a practice, *urban practice,* that is finally or newly comprehended. Needless to say, a threshold will have to be crossed before entering the concrete, that is, social practice as understood by theory. But there is no empirical recipe for fabricating this product, this urban reality. Isn't this what we so often expect from "urbanism" and what "urbanists" so often promise? Unlike a fact-filled empiricism with its risky extrapolations and fragments of indigestible knowledge, we can build a *theory* from a *theoretical hypothesis.* The development of such a theory is associated with a *methodology.* For example, research involving a virtual object, which attempts to define and realize that object as part of an ongoing project, already has a name: *transduction.* The term reflects an intellectual approach toward a possible object, which we can employ alongside the more conventional activities of deduction and induction. The concept of an urban society, which I introduced above, thus implies a hypothesis and a definition.

Similarly, by "urban revolution" I refer to the transformations that affect contemporary society, ranging from the period when questions of growth and industrialization predominate (models, plans, programs) to the period when the urban problematic becomes predominant, when the search for solutions and modalities unique to urban society are foremost. Some of these transformations are sudden; others are gradual, planned, determined. But which ones? This is a legitimate question. It is by no means certain in advance that the answer will be clear, intellectually satisfying, or unambiguous. The words "urban revolution" do not in themselves refer to actions that are violent. Nor do they exclude them.

But how do we discriminate between the outcome of violent action and the product of rational action before their occurrence? Isn't violence characterized by its ability to spin out of control? Isn't thought characterized by the effort to reduce violence, beginning with the effort to destroy the chains that bind our thought?

There are two aspects of urbanism that we will need to address:

1. For years scholars have viewed urbanism as a social practice that is fundamentally scientific and technical in nature. In this case, theory can and should address this practice by raising it to a conceptual level and, more specifically, to the level of *epistemology.* However, the absence of any such urban epistemology is striking. Is it worth developing such an epistemology, then? No. In fact, its absence is highly significant. For the *institutional* and *ideological* nature of what is referred to as urbanism has—until a new order comes into being—taken precedence over its scientific nature. If we assume that this procedure can be generalized and that understanding always involves epistemology, then it is clear that it plays no role in contemporary urbanism. It is important to understand why and how.
2. As it currently exists, that is, as a policy (having institutional and ideological components), urbanism can be criticized both from the right and the left. The critique from the right, which is well known, is focused on the past and is frequently humanist. It subsumes and justifies a neoliberal ideology of "free enterprise," directly or indirectly. It opens a path for the various "private" initiatives of capitalists and capital. The critique from the left, frequently overlooked, is not associated with any so-called leftist group, club, party, apparatus, or ideology. Rather, it attempts to open a path to the possible, to explore and delineate a landscape that is not merely part of the "real," the accomplished, occupied by existing social, political, and economic forces. It is a *utopian* critique because it steps back from the real without, however, losing sight of it.

We can draw an axis as follows:



The axis runs from the complete absence of urbanization ("pure nature," the earth abandoned to the elements) on the left to the completion of the process on the right. A signifier for this signified—the *urban* (the urban reality)—this axis is both spatial and temporal: spatial because the process extends through space, which it modifies; temporal because it develops over time. Temporality, initially of secondary importance, eventually becomes the predominant aspect of practice and history. This schema presents no more than an aspect of this history, a division of time that is both abstract and arbitrary and gives rise to operations (periodizations) that have no absolute privilege but are as necessary (relative) as other divisions.

I'd like to plant a few signposts along this path delineated by the "urban phenomenon" (the urban, in short). Initially there were populations that had been identified by anthropology and ethnology. Around this initial zero, the first human groups (gatherers, fishers, hunters, possibly herders) marked out and named space; they explored it while marking it. They indicated place-names, fundamental topoi. It was a topology and spatial grid that peasants, attached to the soil, later perfected and refined without upsetting the overall fabric. What is important is that in many places around the world, and most certainly any place with a history, the existence of the city has accompanied or followed that of

the village. The representation according to which cultivated land, the village, and farm civilization slowly secreted urban reality reflects an ideology. It generalizes from what took place in Europe during the breakdown of the Roman Empire and following the reconstruction of the medieval city. It's just as easy to maintain the contrary position, however. Agriculture was little more than gathering, and was only formalized through pressure (authoritarian) from the urban centers, generally occupied by skillful conquerors who had become protectors, exploiters, and oppressors, that is, administrators, the founders of a state, or the rudiments of a state. The *political city* accompanies or closely follows the establishment of organized social life, agriculture, and the village.

It goes without saying that such an assumption is meaningless when it involves endless spaces characterized by a seminomadic existence, an impoverished itinerant agriculture. It is obviously based primarily on studies and documents concerning "Asian modes of production," the ancient civilizations that created both urban and agricultural life (Mesopotamia, Egypt, and so on).[1] The general question of the relationship between the city and the countryside is far from being resolved, however.

I'm going to take the risk of locating the *political city* at the point of origin on the space-time axis. The political city was populated primarily by priests, warriors, princes, "nobles," and military leaders, but administrators and scribes were also present. The political city is inconceivable without writing: documents, laws, inventories, tax collection. It is completely given over to orders and decrees, to power. Yet it also implies the existence of exchange to procure the materials essential to warfare and power (metal, leather, and so on), and of artisanship to fashion and maintain them. Thus, such a city also comprises artisans and workers. The political city administers, protects, and exploits a territory that is often

vast. It manages large-scale agricultural projects such as drainage, irrigation, the construction of dams, the clearing of land. It rules over a number of villages. Ownership of the land becomes the eminent right of a monarch, the symbol of order and action. Nonetheless, peasants and communities retain effective possession through the payment of tribute.

In such an environment, exchange and trade can only expand. Initially confined to suspicious individuals, to "strangers," they become *functionally* integrated into the life of the city. Those places given over to exchange and trade are initially strongly marked by the signs of *heterotopy.* Like the people who are responsible for and inhabit them, these places are at the outset excluded from the political city: caravansaries, fairgrounds, suburbs. This process of integrating markets and merchandise (people and things) in the city can last for centuries. Exchange and trade, which are essential to the survival of life, bring wealth and movement. The political city resists this with all the power at its disposal, all its cohesiveness; it feels, knows, that it is threatened by markets, merchandise, and traders, by their form of ownership (money, a form of personal property, being movable by definition). There is ample evidence that Athens, a political city, coexisted with Piraeus, a commercial city, and that attempts to ban the presence of merchandise in the agora, a free space and political meeting place, were unsuccessful. When Christ chased the merchants from the temple, the ban was similar, had the same meaning. In China and Japan, merchants were for years an urban underclass, relegated to a "special" (heterotopic) part of the city. In truth, it is only in the European West, at the end of the Middle Ages, that merchandise, the market, and merchants were able to successfully penetrate the city. Prior to this, itinerant merchants—part warrior, part thief—deliberately chose to remain in the fortified remains of ancient (Roman) cities to facilitate their struggle against the territorial lords. Based on this assumption, the renewed

political city would have served as a frame for the action that was to transform it. During this (class) struggle against the overlords, who were the owners and rulers of the territory, a prodigiously fecund struggle in the West that helped create not only a history but history itself, the marketplace became centralized. It replaced and supplanted the place of assembly (the agora, the forum). Around the market, which had now become an essential part of the city, were grouped the church and town hall (occupied by a merchant oligarchy), with its belfry or campanile, the symbol of liberty. Architecture follows and translates the new conception of the city. Urban space becomes the meeting place for goods and people, for exchange. It bears the signs of this conquered liberty, which is perceived as Liberty—a grandiose but hopeless struggle. In this sense, it is legitimate to assign a symbolic value to the *bastides,* or walled towns, of southwest France, the first cities to take shape around the local marketplace. History is filled with irony. The fetishism associated with merchandise appeared along with the rise of merchandise, its logic and ideology, its language and world. In the fourteenth century it was believed that it was sufficient to establish a market and build stores, gateways, and galleries around a central square to promote the growth of goods and buyers. In this way, both the nobility and the bourgeoisie built merchant cities in areas that were undeveloped, practically desert, and still crisscrossed by herds and migratory, seminomadic tribes. These cities of the French southwest, although they bear the names of some of our great and wealthy cities (Barcelona, Bologna, Plaisance, Florence, Grenada, and so on), were failures. The *merchant city* succeeded the political city. At this time (approximately the fourteenth century in western Europe), commercial exchange became an urban *function,* which was embodied in a *form* (or forms, both architectural and urban). This in turn gave urban space a new *structure.* The changes that took place in Paris illustrate this complex

interaction among the three essential aspects of function, form, and structure. Market towns and suburbs, which were initially commercial and artisanal—Beaubourg, Saint-Antoine, Saint-Honoré—grew in importance and began to struggle with centers of political power (institutions) for influence, prestige, and space, forcing them to compromise, entering with them in the construction of a powerful urban unity.

At one moment in the history of the European West, an event of great importance occurred, but one that remained latent because it went unnoticed. The importance of the city for the social whole became such that the whole seemed to shift. In the relationship between town and country, the emphasis was still on the countryside: real property wealth, the products of the soil, attachment to the land (owners of fiefs or noble titles). Compared with the countryside, the town retained its heterotopic character, marked by its ramparts as well as the transition to suburban areas. At a given moment, these various relationships were reversed; the situation changed. The moment when this shift occurred, this reversal of heterotopy, should be marked along our axis. From this moment on, the city would no longer appear as an urban island in a rural ocean, it would no longer seem a paradox, a monster, a hell or heaven that contrasted sharply with village or country life in a natural environment. It entered people's awareness and understanding as one of the terms in the opposition between town and country. Country? It is now no more than—nothing more than—the town's "environment," its horizon, its limit. Villagers? As far as they were concerned, they no longer worked for the territorial lords, they produced for the city, for the urban market. And even though they realized that the wheat and wood merchants exploited them, they understood that the path to freedom crossed the marketplace.

So what is happening around this crucial moment in history? Thoughtful people no longer see themselves reflected

in nature, a shadowy world subject to mysterious forces. Between them and nature, between their home (the focal point of thought, existence) and the world, lies the urban reality, an essential mediating factor. From this moment on society no longer coincides with the countryside. It no longer coincides with the city, either. The state encompasses them both, joins them in its hegemony by making use of their rivalry. Yet, at the time, the majesty of the state was veiled to its contemporaries. Of whom or what was Reason an attribute? Royalty? Divine right? The individual? Yet this is what led to the reform of the city after the destruction of Athens and Rome, after the most important products of those civilizations, logic and law, were lost from view. The logos was reborn, but its rebirth was not attributed to the renaissance of the urban world but to transcendent reason. The rationalism that culminated in Descartes accompanied the reversal that replaced the primacy of the peasantry with the priority of urban life. Although the peasantry didn't see it as such. However, during this period, the *image of the city* came into being.

The city had writing; it had secrets and powers, and clarified the opposition between urbanity (cultured) and rusticity (naive and brutal). After a certain point in time, the city developed its own form of writing: the map or *plan,* the science of *planimetry.* During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when this reversal of meaning took place, maps of European cities began to appear, including the first maps of the city of Paris. These are not yet abstract maps, projections of urban space onto geometric coordinates. A cross between vision and concept, works of art and science, they displayed the city from top to bottom, in perspective, painted, depicted, and geometrically described. This perspective, simultaneously idealist and realist—the perspective of thought and power—was situated in the vertical dimension, the dimension of knowledge and reason, and dominated and constituted a totality: the city. This shift of social reality toward the urban, this (relative) discontinuity, can be easily indicated on a space-time axis, whose continuity can be used to situate and date any (relative) breaks. All that is needed is to draw a line between the zero point and the terminal point (which I'll assume to be one hundred).

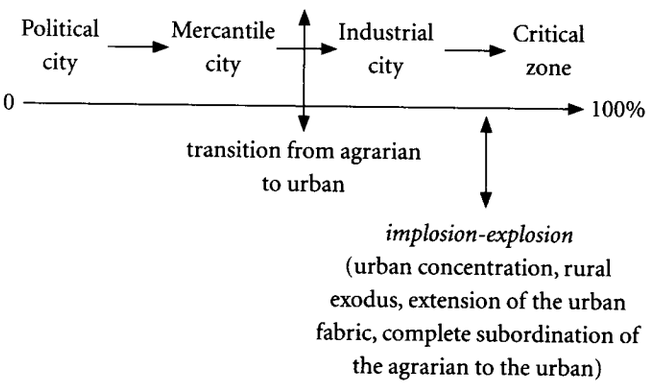
This reversal of meaning can't be dissociated from the growth of commercial capital and the existence of the market. It was the rise of the mercantile city, which was grafted onto the political city but promoted its own ascendancy, that was primarily responsible. This was soon followed by the appearance of industrial capital and, consequently, the *industrial city.* This requires further explanation. Was industry associated with the city? One would assume it to be associated with the *non-city,* the absence or rupture of urban reality. We know that industry initially developed near the sources of energy (coal and water), raw materials (metals, textiles), and manpower reserves. Industry gradually made its way into the city in search of capital and capitalists, markets, and an abundant supply of low-cost labor. It could locate itself anywhere, therefore, but sooner or later made its way into existing cities or created new cities, although it was prepared to move elsewhere if there was an economic advantage in doing so. Just as the political city resisted the conquest—half-pacific, half-violent—of the merchants, exchange, and money, similarly the political and mercantile city defended itself from being taken over by a nascent industry, industrial capital, and capital itself. But how did it do this? Through corporatism, by establishing relationships. Historical continuity and evolution mask the effects and ruptures associated with such transitions. Yet something strange and wonderful was also taking place, which helped renew dialectical thought: the non-city and the anti-city would conquer the city, penetrate it, break it apart, and in so doing extend it immeasurably, bringing about the urbanization of society and the growth of

the urban fabric that covered what was left of the city prior to the arrival of industry. This extraordinary movement has escaped our attention and has been described in piecemeal fashion because ideologues have tried to eliminate dialectical thought and the analysis of contradictions in favor of logical thought—that is, the identification of coherence and nothing but coherence. Urban reality, simultaneously amplified and exploded, thus loses the features it inherited from the previous period: organic totality, belonging, an uplifting image, a sense of space that was measured and dominated by monumental splendor. It was populated with signs of the urban within the dissolution of urbanity; it became stipulative, repressive, marked by signals, summary codes for circulation (routes), and signage. It was sometimes read as a rough draft, sometimes as an authoritarian message. It was imperious. But none of these descriptive terms completely describes the historical process of implosion-explosion (a metaphor borrowed from nuclear physics) that occurred: the tremendous concentration (of people, activities, wealth, goods, objects, instruments, means, and thought) of urban reality and the immense explosion, the projection of numerous, disjunct fragments (peripheries, suburbs, vacation homes, satellite towns) into space.

The *industrial city* (often a shapeless town, a barely urban agglomeration, a conglomerate, or conurbation like the Ruhr Valley) serves as a prelude to a *critical zone.* At this moment, the effects of implosion-explosion are most fully felt. The increase in industrial production is superimposed on the growth of commercial exchange and multiplies the number of such exchanges. This growth extends from simple barter to the global market, from the simple exchange between two individuals all the way to the exchange of products, works of art, ideas, and human beings. Buying and selling, merchandise and market, money and capital appear to sweep away all obstacles. During this period of generalization, the effect of

the process—namely the urban reality—becomes both cause and reason. Induced factors become dominant (inductors). The *urban problematic* becomes a global phenomenon. Can urban reality be defined as a "superstructure" on the surface of the economic structure, whether capitalist or socialist? The simple result of growth and productive forces? Simply a modest marginal reality compared with production? Not at all. Urban reality modifies the relations of production without being sufficient to transform them. It becomes a productive force, like science. Space and the politics of space "express" social relationships but react against them. Obviously, if an urban reality manifests itself and becomes dominant, it does so only through the urban problematic. What can be done to change this? How can we build cities or "something" that replaces what was formerly the City? How can we reconceptualize the urban phenomenon? How can we formulate, classify, and order the innumerable questions that arise, questions that move, although not without considerable resistance, to the forefront of our awareness? Can we achieve significant progress in theory and practice so that our consciousness can comprehend a reality that overflows it and a possible that flees before its grasp?

We can represent this process as follows:



What occurs during the *critical phase?* This book is an attempt to answer that question, which situates the urban problematic within the overall process. Are the theoretical assumptions that enable us to draw an axis such as the one shown above, introduce directed time, and make sense of the critical zone sufficient to help us understand what is taking place? Possibly. In any event, there are several assumptions we can make now. Lacking any proof to the contrary, we can postulate that a second transition occurs, a second reversal of direction and situation. Industrialization, the dominant power and limiting factor, becomes a dominated reality during periods of profound crisis. This results in tremendous confusion, during which the past and the possible, the best and the worst, become intertwined.

In spite of this theoretical hypothesis concerning the possible and its relation to the actual (the "real"), we should not overlook the fact that the onset of urban society and the modalities of urbanization depend on the characteristics of society as it existed during the course of industrialization (neocapitalist or socialist, full economic growth or intense automation). The onset of urban society at different times, the implications and consequences of these initial differences, are part of the problematic associated with the urban phenomenon, or simply the "urban." These terms are preferable to the word "city," which appears to designate a clearly defined, definitive *object,* a scientific object and the immediate goal of action, whereas the theoretical approach requires a critique of this "object" and a more complex notion of the virtual or possible object. Within this perspective there is no science of the city (such as urban sociology or urban economy), but an emerging understanding of the overall process, as well as its term (goal and direction).

The urban (an abbreviated form of urban society) can therefore be defined not as an accomplished reality, situated behind the actual in time, but, on the contrary, as a horizon,

an illuminating virtuality. It is the possible, defined by a direction, that moves toward the urban as the culmination of its journey. To reach it—in other words, to realize it—we must first overcome or break through the obstacles that currently make it *impossible.* Can theoretical knowledge treat this virtual object, the goal of action, as an abstraction? No. From this point on, it is abstract only in the sense that it is a *scientific,* and therefore legitimate, abstraction. Theoretical knowledge can and must reveal the terrain, the foundation on which it resides: an ongoing social practice, an urban practice in the process of formation. It is an aspect of the critical phase that this practice is currently veiled and disjointed, that it possesses only fragments of a reality and a science that are still in the future. It is our job to demonstrate that such an approach has an outcome, that there are solutions to the current problematic. The *virtual object* is nothing but planetary society and the "global city," and it stands outside the global and planetary crisis of reality and thought, outside the old borders that had been drawn when agriculture was dominant and that were maintained during the growth of exchange and industrial production. Nevertheless, the urban problematic can't absorb every problem. There are problems that are unique to agriculture and industry, even though the urban reality modifies them. Moreover, the urban problematic requires that we exercise considerable caution when exploring the realm of the possible. It is the analyst's responsibility to identify and describe the various forms of urbanization and explain what happens to the forms, functions, and urban structures that are transformed by the breakup of the ancient city and the process of generalized urbanization. Until now the critical phase was perceived as a kind of black box. We know what enters the box, and sometimes we see what comes out, but we don't know what goes on inside. This makes conventional procedures of forecasting and projection useless, since they extrapolate from

the actual, from a set of facts. Projections and forecasts have a determined basis only in the fragmentary sciences: demography, for example, or political economy. But what is at stake here, "objectively," is a totality.

To illustrate the depth of the crisis, the uncertainty and perplexity that accompany the critical phase, an element of contrast may be useful. Is this merely a question of style? Yes, but not entirely. Here, I would like to introduce the pros and cons of streets and monuments. I'll leave other issues—nature, the city, urbanism, the urban—for later.

For the street. The street is more than just a place for movement and circulation. The invasion of the automobile and the pressure of the automobile lobby have turned the car into a key object, parking into an obsession, traffic into a priority, harmful to urban and social life. The day is approaching when we will be forced to limit the rights and powers of the automobile. Naturally, this won't be easy, and the fallout will be considerable. What about the street, however? It serves as a meeting place (topos), for without it no other designated encounters are possible (cafés, theaters, halls). These places animate the street and are served by its animation, or they cease to exist. In the street, a form of spontaneous theater, I become spectacle and spectator, and sometimes an actor. The street is where movement takes place, the interaction without which urban life would not exist, leaving only separation, a forced and fixed segregation. And there are consequences to eliminating the street (ever since Le Corbusier and his *nouveaux ensembles*): the extinction of life, the reduction of the city to a dormitory, the aberrant functionalization of existence. The street contains functions that were overlooked by Le Corbusier: the informative function, the symbolic function, the ludic function. The street is a place to play and learn. The street is disorder. All the elements of urban life, which are fixed and redundant elsewhere, are free to fill the streets and through the streets flow

to the centers, where they meet and interact, torn from their fixed abode. This disorder is alive. It informs. It surprises. The work of Jane Jacobs has shown that, in the United States, the street (highly trafficked, busy) provides the only security possible against criminal violence (theft, rape, aggression). Wherever streets disappeared, criminality increased, became organized. In the street and through the space it offered, a group (the city itself) took shape, appeared, appropriated places, realized an appropriated space-time. This appropriation demonstrates that use and use value can dominate exchange and exchange value.

Revolutionary events generally take place in the street. Doesn't this show that the disorder of the street engenders another kind of order? The urban space of the street is a place for talk, given over as much to the exchange of words and signs as it is to the exchange of things. A place where speech becomes writing. A place where speech can become "savage" and, by escaping rules and institutions, inscribe itself on walls.

Against the street. A meeting place? Maybe, but such meetings are superficial. In the street, we merely brush shoulders with others, we don't interact with them. It's the "we" that is important. The street prevents the constitution of a group, a subject; it is populated by a congeries of people in search of . . . of what exactly? The world of merchandise is deployed in the street. The merchandise that didn't make it into specialized locales or markets (marketplaces, halls) has invaded the entire city. In antiquity the streets were merely extensions of places with specialized functions: the temple, the stadium, the agora, the garden. During the Middle Ages, artisans occupied the streets. The artisan was both producer and seller. The artisans were followed by merchants, who, although only merchants, soon became masters. The street became a display, a corridor flanked by stores of various kinds. Merchandise became spectacle (provocative, attractive) and

transformed the individual into a spectacle for others. Here, more than elsewhere, exchange and exchange value take precedence over use, reducing it to a residue. Therefore, the critique of the street must be more incisive: the street becomes the focus of a form of repression that was made possible by the "real"—that is, weak, alienated, and alienating—character of the relationships that are formed there. Movement in the street, a communications space, is both obligatory and repressed. Whenever threatened, the first thing power restricts is the ability to linger or assemble in the street. Although the street may have once had the meaning of a meeting place, it has since lost it, and could only have lost it, by reducing itself, through a process of necessary reduction, to nothing more than a passageway, by splitting itself into a place for the passage of pedestrians (hunted) and automobiles (privileged). The street became a network organized for and by consumption. The rate of pedestrian circulation, although still tolerated, was determined and measured by the ability to perceive store windows and buy the objects displayed in them. Time became "merchandise time" (time for buying and selling, time bought and sold). The street regulated time outside of work; it subjected it to the same system, the system of yield and profit. It was nothing more than the necessary transition between forced labor, programmed leisure, and habitation as a place of consumption.

In the street, the neocapitalist organization of consumption is demonstrated by its power, which is not restricted to political power or repression (overt or covert). The street, a series of displays, an exhibition of objects for sale, illustrates just how the logic of merchandise is accompanied by a form of (passive) contemplation that assumes the appearance and significance of an aesthetics and an ethics. The accumulation of objects accompanies the growth of population and capital; it is transformed into an ideology, which, dissimulated beneath the traits of the legible and visible, comes to seem

self-evident. In this sense we can speak of a *colonization* of the urban space, which takes place in the street through the image, through publicity, through the spectacle of objects—a "system of objects" that has become symbol and spectacle. Through the uniformization of the grid, visible in the modernization of old streets, objects (merchandise) take on the effects of color and form that make them attractive. The parades, masquerades, balls, and folklore festivals authorized by a power structure caricaturize the appropriation and reappropriation of space. The true appropriation characteristic of effective "demonstrations" is challenged by the forces of repression, which demand silence and forgetfulness.

Against the monument. The monument is essentially repressive. It is the seat of an institution (the church, the state, the university). Any space that is organized around the monument is colonized and oppressed. The great monuments have been raised to glorify conquerors and the powerful. Occasionally they glorify the dead or the beauty of death (the Taj Mahal) in palaces and tombs. The misfortune of architecture is that it wanted to construct monuments, but the idea of *habiting* them was either conceived in terms of those monuments or neglected entirely.[2] The extension of monumental space to habiting is always catastrophic, and for the most part hidden from those who are subject to it. Monumental splendor is formal. And although the monument is always laden with symbols, it presents them to social awareness and contemplation (passive) just when those symbols, already outdated, are beginning to lose their meaning, such as the symbols of the revolution on the Napoleonic Arc de Triomphe.

For the monument. It is the only conceivable or imaginable site of collective (social) life. It controls people, yes, but does so to bring them together. Beauty and monumentality go hand in hand. The great monuments were transfunctional (cathedrals) and even transcultural (tombs). This is what

gave them their ethical and aesthetic power. Monuments project onto the land a conception of the world, whereas the city projected (and continues to project) social life (globality). In their very essence, and sometimes at the very heart of a space in which the characteristics of a society are most recognizable and commonplace, monuments embody a sense of transcendence, a sense of being *elsewhere.* They have always been u-topic. Throughout their height and depth, along a dimension that was alien to urban trajectories, they proclaimed duty, power, knowledge, joy, hope.

2 || Blind Field

In this book I have not, for the most part, followed the historical method as it is generally understood. Superficially it may appear that I have been describing and analyzing the genesis of the city as object and its modifications and transformations. But my initial concern has been with a virtual object, which I have used to describe a space-time axis. The future illuminates the past, the virtual allows us to examine and situate the realized. The breakdown of the preindustrialist and precapitalist city caused by the impact of industry and capitalism helps us understand the conditions and antecedents of the industrial city. Its predecessor, the mercantile city, in turn enables us to comprehend the political city on which it was superimposed. Marx believed that adulthood comprises the child as subject (awareness) and enables us to understand its point of departure, the rough form that may be richer and more complex than the adult, as a real object. And it is bourgeois society, however complex and opaque it might be, that allows us to understand the most transparent societies, ancient and medieval society. Not the opposite. With the arrival of time and historicity, our awareness is