Local politics:
A conceptual exploration

by

Martin Werner Wittenberg

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Abstract

The thesis addresses the question: What is local politics? It is divided into two parts. Part I consists of a review of the literature while Part II develops an original argument. The review section is essentially exploratory in nature. It investigates six kinds of approaches that have been adopted in the study of local politics. Each of these is examined in turn to see to what extent it offers a satisfactory characterisation of local politics. It is suggested that these approaches do not satisfactorily delimit the field of local politics, because they have inadequate conceptions of how the spatial category (the "local") relates to the social category (the "political").

In Part II this relationship between the spatial and the social is examined more closely. It is argued that concepts such as "locality" should be viewed as social constructs, that "politics" is an intrinsically spatial process, and that there is no necessary connection between the "local" and any particular kind of "politics".

In arguing for this position, a number of important issues for political and social theory are addressed. It is suggested that several central categories in political analysis, such as the "state" and "class", need to be reconceptualised. It is also submitted that social theory needs to take spatial relations more centrally into account.

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Declaration

Except where explicitly indicated to the contrary, this study is the original work of the author.

This dissertation has not previously been submitted in any form to another University.

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Introduction

What is local politics? What concepts would be appropriate to analysing it? How does it relate to other kinds of politics? These are the questions that will be addressed in this thesis. It transpires that in dealing with them new perspectives open up on many fundamental concepts in political analysis.

But why ask these questions? Some of these concerns seem somewhat abstruse or motivated by an over-pedantic regard for terminological accuracy. To explain how these questions came to be posed, I would like to start off with an account of how this thesis came to be written. This history will also prefigure some of the arguments of later chapters.

Why this thesis?

The origins of the thesis lie in the particular political circumstances of South Africa in the early to mid 1980s. The launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF), an umbrella anti-apartheid organisation, in August 1983 ushered in a phase of mass mobilisation and resistance on a scale unprecedented in South African history. For the first time in decades there was a sense that the end of apartheid was not only inevitable, but imminent.

The pace with which the political situation changed, repeatedly posed the central question for political practice: ***What is to be done?*** Analyses of the shifting balance of political forces, of state strategy, of the changing nature of domination became urgent necessities.

There were good reasons why I should attempt such an analysis at the local level. Firstly, as Secretary of the UDF in the Natal Midlands, the "local" political terrain was what I was most familiar with. Secondly, it seemed clear that local politics was one of the most crucial arenas in which the struggle between the South African state and the liberation movements was being fought out. The civic movement was at this stage very much the backbone of the UDF

and local struggles - over rents and living conditions in the townships - led to some of the most intense confrontations with the state.

Thirdly, at the time when I embarked on this study, the state was in the process of restructuring local government. The proposal to introduce "Regional Services Councils" as mechanisms for limited redistribution of resources to the Black townships, seemed to be partially a response to local struggles and partially an aggressive strategy to restructure the terrain on which local politics occurred.

The research therefore began with the question: ***What is happening in local politics?*** Central concerns in this regard were questions such as: What are the bases of domination at the local level? How are these changing? How are class alliances forged at the local level? What are the current political projects of different local political forces?

This enterprise soon ran into conceptual and practical problems. Firstly the "entity" which I had chosen to investigate, viz. the "local state" proved to be somewhat difficult to delimit. It seemed clearly unsatisfactory to investigate only the operation of the Pietermaritzburg City Council, a "White" municipality. One of the most effective means of entrenching White domination has been precisely the fragmentation of local government along racial lines. The problem is that the fragmentation doesn't end at a simple Black/White split. In the greater Pietermaritzburg area, some "African" townships fall under the jurisdiction of the Natal Provincial Administration, others are administered by a Township Manager appointed by the Department of Development Aid, based in Pretoria, and yet other areas (those in the KwaZulu bantustan) are controlled by "traditional" chiefs. Furthermore, one of the wealthier "White" areas, Hilton, is also outside the municipal boundaries and is administered by a "Health Committee". It seemed that for the analysis to be meaningful, the concept "local state" had to refer to the whole ensemble of these local state institutions.

To complicate matters further, it became clear after 1986 that the security apparatus of the central state was becoming increasingly active on the "local" political terrain. The National Security Management System (NSMS) was set up as a co-ordinating structure of state departments under the overall direction of the security forces. Under the auspices of the

NSMS, a network of regional, district and local Joint Management Centres (JMCs) was created. These bodies were responsible for the local implementation of the state's overall security strategy, as well as the "upgrading" of certain townships. In many African areas, particularly in those where local government had collapsed, the JMCs effectively took over the tasks of local government. They probably played key roles in directing local government in other areas as well (cf Swilling and Phillips 1989; Selfe 1989; Boraine 1989).

Secondly, the impact which the security forces had on "local politics" through detentions, bannings of meetings, organisations and individuals, raised the question how the analysis of "local" politics could be separated from that of "national" politics. Paradoxically my own work in the UDF posed the same question. The UDF more than any other political formation had shown how a base in "local" politics could be used to make a "national" political impact. Indeed, the reason why I had embarked on my research in the first place was because it had been intuitively clear that "local" politics was crucially important for the trajectory of "national" politics.

Faced with these perplexing interconnections between "national" and "local" state institutions, between "national" and "local" politics, I found myself confronted with the question how to make sense of this tangle. What concepts would be appropriate to analyse this situation? Did it make sense to even talk about "local politics"? The problem eventually boiled down to the simple question: ***What is local politics?***

The nature of the thesis

The genesis of the thesis shows a movement from the question:

(1) What is to be done?

to (2) What is happening in local politics?

to (3) What is local politics?

The first question corresponds to the level of political practice; the second to that of political analysis; and the third to what may be called meta-political analysis. This distinction is of some importance.

Where political analysis is concerned to explain developments in political practice, meta-political analysis is about the way in which political analysis is conducted. It does not itself make any assertions about politics.

The distinction between political analysis and meta-political analysis is not necessarily equivalent to that between "theory" and "empirical" investigation. A "theory" of the state, for example, could be concerned merely with trying to capture the nature of states and the way they behave, but take for granted that "states" are recognisable entities. Such "theories" would belong to the realm of political analysis. Meta-political analysis, by contrast, would be concerned with investigating the concepts appropriate to analysis of politics - including that of the "state".

The distinction between the development of concepts and their deployment is in many cases difficult to maintain. Concepts, after all, are normally introduced with the purpose that they should be used and the best recommendation for a concept is that it is demonstrably fruitful in political analysis.

Nevertheless the separation of levels between political and meta-political analysis should be borne in mind in following the arguments of this thesis. Many "theories" of local politics are criticised not so much for being "wrong", i.e. of making false statements about what happens in local politics, but because the "theory" does not succeed in explaining what local politics *is*. What kind of failing is that? The problem of operating with inadequate conceptual tools is not so much that one ends up with a false picture of what is happening (although that is also possible) but with a partial one.

Because the thesis is an exercise in conceptual clarification, it does not have a lot to say directly about "what is happening in local politics" or about "what is to be done". This is unfortunate in a thesis which had its roots in these questions. Nevertheless it is also a strength. South Africa's political circumstances and the strategic options facing the liberation movements have changed with such rapidity that whatever I might have volunteered along these lines would probably have been out of date before long. Hopefully the conceptual frameworks developed below will not date so quickly.

The structure of the argument

The thesis is divided into two parts. **Part I** consists of a review of the literature while **Part II** develops my own arguments. The review section is essentially exploratory in nature. I investigate six kinds of approaches that have characterised the study of local politics. Each of these is examined in turn to see to what extent it offers a satisfactory answer to the question: *What is local politics?* Various criticisms are also offered along the way about the adequacy of their explanations of what happens in local politics. Ultimately I suggest that these approaches do not satisfactorily answer my question because they have an inadequate conception of how the **spatial** category (the "local") relates to the **social** category (the "political").

In Part II this relationship between the spatial and the social is examined more closely. I conclude that there cannot be an adequate answer to the question, because the concept "local politics" is essentially derivative. It is a construct to enable people to talk about the fundamental spatiality of politics.

This is a paradoxical conclusion. After trying to pin down the concept "local politics" throughout the thesis I conclude that this enterprise is doomed to failure. The process of arriving at this conclusion yields a number of important insights, however. Firstly, it leads to a fundamental reconceptualisation of a number of central categories in political analysis such as "the state" and "class". Secondly, it generates several conceptual tools which are useful for analysing political processes happening in local areas.

The structure of the thesis in detail

Part I opens with five chapters dealing in turn with five kinds of answers which have been given to the question: *What is local politics?*

Chapter 1 is concerned with the work of Williams, Cox, Pahl, and Rex and Moore. They see local politics as revolving around the fact that differing spatial access to resources and to

externality effects can impose differing costs and benefits on particular groups in society.

Chapter 2 deals with Castells's and Dunleavy's view that local politics is defined by processes of collective consumption.

Chapter 3 reviews contributions by Fischer and Castells in which urban areas are seen as the stage on which movements which challenge the predominant value-systems of society in general make their appearance.

Chapter 4 looks at the conception that local politics is particularly concerned with processes of urban land use changes. Scott's work on the "urban land nexus", Lojkine's theory of urbanisation as well as discussions of rent by Lamarche and Harvey are covered.

Chapter 5 examines the view that local politics is based on "uneven development" within the national space. The accounts that are reviewed are Harvey's view that local politics is about the formation of local class-alliances; Duncan and Goodwin's theory that local government arises due to the problems of making provisions for local specificities in ruling from the "centre"; and suggestions by Cooke and Urry that class organisation is spatially based.

It should be noted that not all theorists covered in the review have explicitly tried to answer the question: *What is politics?* Some (e.g. Harvey) have presented accounts of what happens in local politics. Implicit in these, however, is some conception of what local politics is about. In interpreting these implicit conceptions as explicit answers to my question, and then finding the answer inadequate, one is clearly doing the theorist concerned something of an injustice. The purpose of the review, however, is not to demolish any particular account of what happens in local politics. It is to explore some of the answers that have been given and could be given to the question - and the difficulties involved in making these answers coherent.

It should also be noted that the approach is **thematic**. Contributions have been grouped according to the similarity of the kinds of answer which they present. As a result, Castells and Harvey appear in more than one chapter. In the case of Castells this is not problematic, as this division corresponds to the rupture between his earlier and later work. In the case of Harvey

it is more awkward because it leads to a separation of his account of rent and land use change from his treatment of uneven development. This unfortunately seemed the most logical way of dealing with the issue.

Despite the fact that the material is ordered thematically, the development is roughly chronological with Chapter 1 representing on the whole the earliest contributions and Chapter 5 more recent ones. This thematic approach has to some extent also governed the selection of material. An attempt has been made to cover the most influential approaches to the analysis of local politics current in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly those operating with a broadly "radical" (neo-Weberian or neo-Marxian) perspective. Inevitably, however, many interesting contributions to the study of what happens in urban areas or in local politics are not reviewed - simply because they do not seem to make any new points about what local politics is. Notable among the omissions are "community power studies" and case studies of the operation of local government in particular areas. In order to partially plug this gap a selection of such studies is presented in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 reviews Dahl and Polsby's study of New Haven; Cockburn's account of Lambeth Council; and studies by Simmie and Saunders of Oxford and Croydon respectively. These local case studies all have the intention of illuminating political processes operating within society more generally. Localities are therefore not the focus of research, but its locus (Masotti and Walton, 1976).

A comment on the selection of the studies reviewed in Chapter 6 is probably called for. The accounts were chosen because they exemplify something of the diversity of approaches within political analysis generally - ranging from a pluralist perspective through a structuralist neo-Marxian position to neo-Weberian approaches. Furthermore the works of Dahl, Cockburn and Saunders have been particularly influential within the politics and local politics literature.

Chapter 7 concludes the review of the literature (i.e. Part I) by trying to place all the different accounts into some broad comparative perspective. It suggests that there are three dimensions along which answers to the question can differ among each other - in the way they conceptualise the spatial component (i.e. the "local"), the way they conceive of the

social component (i.e. "politics"), and the way these relate to each other (to make "local politics"). I suggest that the greatest weakness in all attempts to characterise local politics is their inability to satisfactorily pin down the spatial framework and to relate it to the social component.

This leads on to **Part II**, which discusses these three dimensions in turn.

Chapter 8 is concerned with the question: *What are localities?* Ultimately I come to the conclusion that there are no "objective" ways of defining "cities" or "localities". Instead these should be seen as social constructs to enable people to talk about the differences between places. In this chapter, for the first time in the thesis, some attempt is made to distinguish between the concepts "localities" and "cities". Up to this point "local politics" and "urban politics" have been treated as interchangeable terms. The reason for this loose terminology initially, is that the conceptual apparatus is not yet ready to make this distinction. Furthermore it is not necessary to differentiate between "localities" and "cities" for the purposes of the literature review, as very few authors distinguish on theoretical grounds between the "local" and the "urban".

Chapter 9 investigates political processes by looking at four themes - the sources of political conflict, political actors, the state and the trajectory of political conflict. It argues that these components of political analysis are all intrinsically spatial.

Chapter 10 then analyses how "localities" and "politics" relate. It suggests that there can be no necessary relationship between them. Nevertheless the perspective of the "locality" is very useful in tracing the way in which political conflict develops. Ultimately the concept "local politics" needs to be seen as derivative - as a way of capturing the pervasive spatiality of politics. The chapter concludes with some reflection about the general status of spatial concepts in social theory.

A note on terminology

As befits a thesis which tries to be sensitive to the importance of concepts in depicting what happens in society, I have also attempted to avoid the use of sexist terminology. Where it proved to be too awkward to refrain from use of gendered pronouns (in particular in the use of examples), I have tried to be roughly even-handed in use of "she" and "he".

Use of racial terminology throws up many problems too. It is impossible to talk about the structure of South African society and its spatial structure without using the terms "White", "Indian", "Coloured" and "African". The term "Black" is used as collective term for the last three categories. In general I have used "scare quotes" when referring in a passage for the first time to concepts such as "White" group area or "African" township. Clearly these do not have an intrinsic racial character but have it by virtue of government legislation. Nevertheless it becomes tedious to use scare quotes continuously, so I then drop them for subsequent discussion.

Part I

Approaches to the study of local politics

1. Social inequality and spatial inequality

Urban living is highly unequal. Some people live close to amenities such as shops; others have to travel some distances before they get access to these resources. Some people live close to noisy highways; others live in the seclusion of suburbia. A number of theorists have focused on this "spatial inequality" in an effort to define the field of urban politics.

Williams: Social access

One writer who has done so is Williams (1971). He describes the point of departure for his analysis as follows:

> One of the most basic and primitive means that man uses to satisfy his needs and desires is the occupancy of place. The control of place in time is used as a means of access to objects. The unique spot or place which each of us occupies in time defines that to which we can relate around us. Because objects are not randomly distributed, neither is the value and meaning of places. Selective control of place, therefore, becomes an instrument for the attainment of goals. Once man gives *social* meaning to place, the urban process may be said to have begun. Once social structures and processes are created for allocating such places, urban politics may be said to have begun. (p.12)[1]

He suggests that access which is afforded by a particular location can be measured along three dimensions, i.e. access to artefacts, networks of interactions and social structures. The first relates to the buildings, structures or other resources to which access is conferred by virtue of the occupation of a particular site. The second arises out of the fact that social interactions occur across space, and spatial propinquity enables certain interactions or makes them more convenient. Finally, certain social structures include spatial boundaries in their definition - e.g. municipalities, school districts, utilities and a variety of other services. (p.28)

> Thus when a family occupies a house, the value of that occupancy is derived from the artifact (house properties), from interactions facilitated (commuting, shopping, social interactions), and from supporting social structures (local government, schools, utilities). (p.28)

The fact that different locations offer different degrees of access need not necessarily lead to

conflict, since different people have different needs and preferences, but

> Despite the complementary nature of a diverse population, at some point, the access of one becomes blocked by the actions of another. In this basic competitive situation, politics begins. ... There are essentially two options open for those who wish to employ a location strategy to change their access within the urban complex. They can move or they can change the characteristics of the place they presently occupy. (p.29)

Similarly, those concerned to **maintain** their access will attempt to preserve the characteristics of their current location.

It should be noted that in Williams's account there are essentially two processes with which the study of urban politics should concern itself: 1) moving and 2) attempts to improve or maintain the characteristics of the locality. Because there are limits to the degree of effectiveness of individual strategies of location control, Williams focnses on collective ones, i.e. processes of coalition formation.

According to him:

> The commonest type of coalition is a security community, organized to protect a domain. (p.42)

Examples of this would include street gangs and neighbourhood associations. The strategies that such coalitions can pursue can be roughly defined as either defensive, offensive or purifying (p.4 3).In the case of defensive strategies, the objective is to prevent the incursion of elements which will transform the "neighbourhood". One of the classical means used to this effect is zoning:

> Zoning is an explicit political means of abridging economic market allocation of land among various uses. (p.32)

Offensive strategies, by contrast,

> [I]nvolve improvements and enhancements of the particular terrain, so that it becomes attractive to the right kind of people. This is a more difficult coalition to maintain, because it requires expenditures, establishment of clearer goals, and action. (p.43)

Purification, finally, involves attempts to root out the incompatible. Williams cites slum clearance and urban renewal as examples of this. (Ibid)

Williams views local government as often being a special kind of urban coalition -

particularly where a municipality exists alongside other municipal authorities within a metropolitan area. The coherence of the coalitional strategies followed in this context would depend on the homogeneity of the population of the municipality. Williams notes, however, that the homogeneity itself might be the product of a coalition policy "in which the municipality defends itself against unwelcome entrants, purifies its membership, and attracts the compatible newcomers" (p.45).

This theoretical framework is used to explain the extensive fragmentation of urban political control in the U.S.A.. In fact Williams is concerned to argue that there is a relationship between the fact of unequal distribution of benefits from urban existence and political decentralisation within metropolitan areas. (p.51) After reviewing various abortive attempts to achieve metropolitan level government in America he concludes that there is strong resistance to the centralisation of control over policy areas which are seen to be linked to social access - such as schools and zoning. Policy areas, such as transport networks, which are seen as neutral in this regard could be effectively co-ordinated at a metropolitan level without such opposition.[2]

This American model of urbanism - urban political decentralisation together with extensive mobility (urban sprawl) - has been praised in that it supposedly offers a wide choice of life styles and the resulting urban pattern is seen as expression of the preferences of American citizens. Williams takes a much dimmer view of the issue:

> While spatial specialization may seem to offer the possibility of providing a compatible community for every man, this is logically impossible, and the process of sorting out who gets the prize can get rough. The system does not guarantee that there will be a place for all, nor even a voice for all, in deciding what kinds of communities there will be from which to choose. (pp. 109-110)

Williams's account is inadequate for a number of reasons. Firstly, it seems to slip into spatial fetishism - i.e. it seems to attribute problems to spatial relations, when they should be sought in social relations instead. Secondly, the account is based on a competition rather than a conflict model of urban politics. Thirdly, the analysis is incomplete even within the parameters which it sets itself, because it doesn't sufficiently take the role of the national state into account. Finally, it doesn't seem to offer a way of defining **local** politics.

On the first point, Williams's analysis too easily lends itself to one which sees **spatial** relations as the chief factor in determining **social** access. So for example the interactions which are facilitated by the same property in a plush residential area would be different if one considered the resident owner of the property or her live in domestic worker.

This seems to be such an obvious point that it is surprising that Williams did not consider it. The reason for this seems to be that his focus is on processes of residential relocation - and in the United States this concern is intricately bound up with the nature of the residential property market.

However, even if the analysis is restricted to home owners within the same neighbourhood there might be different structures of social access - if, for example, the one belonged to an ethnic group which was formally or informally excluded from particular social networks. Obviously there are quite likely to be different states of accessibility for members within the same household - especially when they are differentiated by gender and age.[3]

A preoccupation with residential shifts also underlies the second problem identified above. Williams has been criticised for analysing urban politics in terms of competition rather than structured conflict (cf Pahl 1975, pp. 254-5). Fundamentally the focus in Williams's account is on individual decision-making around whether or where to move. Collective processes enter urban politics only where individual attempts to improve social access fail, but this politics of coalition formation is still a very diffuse kind of conflict and rarely, if ever, are two different groups brought into direct confrontation. Thus although Williams has said that the process of sorting out "who gets the prize can be rough", his analysis does not indicate this.

A particular weakness of this individualistic account is that it does not take into account the different resources that different groupings within the urban area are able to bring to bear on urban competition or conflict. Besides the obvious role of monetary wealth, political power also needs to be considered. Groupings that are politically powerful are able, for example, to call on the national or local state to remove other groups that are deemed to be in the way of "orderly urban development". Similarly, access to information and skills enable some to be in a better position to take advantage of new opportunities that open up.

The third problem in Williams's account is the inadequate consideration given to the national state. He seems to assume that the actions of the state do not have fundamental effects on urban spatial structure or on social access. This is clearly not so. In many countries the central state has been a key actor in determining the shape of urban areas. For example, the provision of social housing alters the way in which certain groupings are able to gain access to certain urban resources. Where there has been a relative lack of central state involvement, as perhaps in the case of the United States, this lack is a political fact which needs to be explained, and not simply taken for granted.

The final question which I want to raise, is how far does it provide an adequate definition of local politics? Williams seems to assume that locational strategies as a means of improving social access only become possible in cities:

> In sparsely populated areas, one cannot manipulate social access patterns by controlling place or space; at least, such control mechanisms have very minimum saliency. By contrast, in the large city, location becomes all important as an instrument of social access. (p.14)

What seems to underlie Williams's argument is the idea that access only becomes an issue if there is a certain level of specialisation of functions - and particularly if certain social functions are more important than others. In this situation the degree of access to the more important individuals and social institutions becomes an important consideration.

While this is undoubtedly true, it is uncertain whether questions of locational advantage are specific only to urban areas. In a society with an advanced division of labour access becomes an important issue even for rural people - for example access to markets for rural produce. Location also becomes an important issue at the **regional** level. For some households (especially professionals) and many companies, location strategies to improve access are even formulated in an international context. It is thus doubtful whether a distinctive notion of "local" politics can be distilled from the notion of "social access".

Cox: Externalities and locational conflict

Cox (1973, 1979) offers an account which is in many ways similar to Williams's. The similarity arises from the fact that he also investigates political processes from the perspective that individuals will try to maximise their utility within the urban area by choosing advantageous locations.

The starting point for Cox's analysis, however, is not specifically questions of spatial access to particular resources, but rather the effects which individuals have on each other. The key concept in this connection is that of "externality effects" (1973, p.2). An externality effect exists if a decision by an individnal to engage in a particular activity "spills over" to affect other individuals. An example of this would be the use of a river as a dump for industrial effluent, which imposes disutilities on users of the rivers downstream from the factory (p.2). This would be a case of a negative externality. Positive externalities, i.e. where the activity has beneficial effects on other individuals, are also possible.

Cox points out that the externalities produced by two individuals (or companies) can be either reciprocal or asymmetric (p.4). They are reciprocal if both produce positive (or negative) externalities for each other; they are asymmetric if there is a difference between the producer and the consumer of the external effect (1979, p.21). An example of a reciprocal externality would be the case where neighbours both beautify their properties - each one therefore creates the same type of externality for the other one. The case of the industrial effluent is an asymmetric externality.

Given that people will try to maximise their overall benefits and minimise their overall costs, it is to be expected that they will try to control the effects of externalities. Like Williams, Cox posits that people have two kinds of strategies open to them: either relocate - i.e. move closer to positive externalities or away from negative ones; or try to alter the environment by bargaining with those who contribute to or detract from its quality (1973, p.5). He also believes that on the whole relocational strategies are easier to employ than bargaining ones (p.7).

However, relocational strategies cannot solve all problems faced as a result of externality effects. A case in point would be that where one individual (or group) imposes negative externalities on another, but receives positive externalities in return. If the latter group relocates to reduce the negative externalities, the former group loses out, because it is deprived of the positive externalities.

> This is a little like the problems posed by middle-class movement within a metropolitan area. If the middle-class household stays in the central city the lower class gains from increased central-city tax revenues; the middle-class household loses, however, from exposure to crime and relatively poor schools. On the other hand, the middle-class shift to a suburban municipality imposes a loss on the remaining lower-class households in the form of a reduction in central-city tax revenue. (1973, p.6)

Clearly this is a situation in which somebody has to make a loss. Furthermore it is unlikely that this predicament can be resolved through private bargaining. It therefore calls for a collective, i.e. political, response. Politics thus arises as a result of the limitations of the private locational decision-making process.

Two kinds of political responses seem to result from the asymmetric distribution of externalities between rich and poor in Cox's example. On the one hand, the relatively rich suburban residents will attempt to erect barriers to keep poor residents out. A mechanism often employed to this effect is that of zoning (p.52-3). On the other, the central city will try to attract wealthier residents. In order to do so, however, they might have to offer concessions to compensate for the negative externalities which such residents will suffer. Such concessions can take the form of adjusting municipal taxation in such a way as to benefit higher income groups (p.60).

These strategies illustrate yet other points that Cox makes. The first is that once people are territorially organised there is the potential for inter-locality conflict. This arises, because territorially organised groups will try to attract those activities which provide positive externalities and keep out those which impose negative ones. In many cases this involves competition with other groups who are pursuing the same objectives:

> Each suburban community in a metropolitan area is engaged in an attempt to push new residential development off on other suburban communities. Neighborhood groups will support different traffic and highway improvement plans according to how they will affect the groups' particular turf; but what will leave their turf in peace and quiet

> may bring traffic, fumes, and congestion to the turfs of neighboring groups. (1979, pp.9-10)

Secondly, this competition puts certain groups in a relatively powerful position *vis-a-vis* the rest of the community. For example, the competition for capital investment between localities gives capital a relatively strong bargaining position about the kinds of labour and environmental policies it wants pursued (1979, pp.211ff). The threat of relocation with attendant job loss and reduction of tax revenue is a powerful bargaining resource[4].

Thirdly, the decisions of local government structures emerge as important factors in determining the outcomes of these different types of locational conflict. On the one hand, in the conflict **between** localities, the policies pursued by the respective municipal governments will help to determine which localities are more successful in attracting investment, for example. On the other hand, in conflict between neighbourhood groups **within** a locality, the policies of the municipal government can directly decide how the costs and benefits of externalities are distributed, for example which areas will be affected by road development.

The same impact that local government structures have on the locational process can be observed at higher government levels. Regional and national-level policies affect the distribution of locational advantages between local areas. They also affect the relative attractiveness of the region and nation in processes of inter-regional and international competition (1979, passim).

Cox's account is in many ways an improvement on Williams's. Firstly, the attention paid to the actions of the state fills an important lacuna in the analysis. Secondly, he is also more sensitive to the question of the relative strengths of the protagonists in the locational conflict (cf his analysis of the strengths of different actors in urban conflict, Cox 1973, pp.88-103).

Nevertheless a number of the weaknesses identified in Williams's account also apply to Cox's. Firstly, it seems to be guilty of spatial fetishism. As Cox himself later commented:

> Social relations - between developer and labor in the communal living space, for example - come to be seen as relations between areas; between city and suburb, between one suburb and another, and between redlined and non-redlined areas. (1981, p.448)

Secondly, and most importantly within the context of this thesis, it doesn't provide a way of characterising "local politics". Indeed, Cox's work itself shows how the same processes operate at all spatial levels (1979).

Pahl: Spatial structure, social inequality and urban managerialism

Where Cox and Williams see the state's role essentially as reflecting the interests of its territorial constituency[5], Pahl views the state as playing an independent role, manipulating spatial relations to benefit certain groups at the expense of others. This idea is expressed in the "urban managerialism" thesis. This rather conspiratorial view of urban politics yields in Pahl's later writings to a concern with the way in which spatial structures can either ameliorate or exacerbate social inequalities.

In an "early" article[6] Pahl outlines the main propositions in his argument as follows:

(a) There are fundamental **spatial** constraints on access to scarce urban resources and facilities. Such constraints are generally expressed in time/cost distance.

(b) There are fundamental **social** constraints on access to scarce urban facilities. These reflect the distribution of power in society and are illustrated by:
bureaucratic rules and procedures
social gatekeepers who help to distribute and control urban resources

(c) Populations in different localities differ in their access and opportunities to gain the scarce resources and facilities, holding their economic position or their position in the occupational structure constant. The situation which is structured out of (a) and (b) may be called a socio-spatial or socio-ecological system. Populations limited in this access to scarce urban resources and facilities are the **dependent** variable; those controlling access, the **managers** of the system, would be the independent variable.

(d) Conflict in the urban system is inevitable. The more the resource or facility is valued by the **total** population in a given locality, or the higher the value and the scarcer the supply in relation to demand, the greater the conflict.
(Pahl 1975, p.201)

A key focus for urban sociology therefore becomes the analysis of the actions of **urban managers**. Although it is not absolutely clear from Pahl's account, it seems that urban managers exercise two kinds of control - over the spatial distribution of resources as well as over social access to them. What is clear is that they are seen as the principal actors within

the urban system:

> [T]he controllers, be they planners or social workers, architects or education officers, estate agents or property developers, representing the market or the plan, private enterprise or the state all impose their goals and values on the lower participants in the urban system. (p.207, passage italicised in the original)

Because differential access to these scarce resources imposes real costs on people, Pahl's account is also an attempt to theorise how the urban system relates to social **inequalities**. He notes that people's position in the urban system need not be related to their position in the occupational structure - in other words, the inequalities generated in the urban structure are to some extent independent of other inequalities.

This theory of urban politics has been criticised on a number of fronts. On the one hand, the concept of urban managerialism has been attacked. On the other, the idea that spatial inequalities have effects independent of other inequalities has also been challenged. The latter debate will be considered in more detail in the section on "housing classes" below.

Pahl himself repudiated aspects of the urban managerialism thesis (cf. 1975, Chapter 13: "'Urban Managerialism' reconsidered"). The central point he makes is that in trying to champion the underdog, the thesis is in danger of focusing too much attention on the "middle dogs", while the "top dogs" get off scot-free (1977, p.51).

> It is understandably very easy for the researcher to view the situation through the eyes of disadvantaged local populations and to attribute more control and responsibility to the local official than, say, local employers or the national government. (1975, p.267)

In other words, the thesis is mistaken in viewing "urban managers" as the **independent** variable in the urban system - their actions are constrained by those of other powerful actors.

Furthermore, for the thesis to hold in its crude form, different urban managers within the same locality need to work together systematically to manipulate the urban structure with a view to reinforcing, reflecting or redressing social inequalities. Probably this control would be necessary across localities, as well, otherwise the power of the managers would not be as total as the thesis implies. As Pahl says of the thesis:

> It involves the **systematic** control of the **same** urban resources and facilities in **different** localities; it further implies the ineffectiveness of the elected councillors. It

> ignores the constraints of capitalism. (p.268)

These objections suggest that the crude thesis is not tenable. This does not mean that urban managerialism is not a proper subject for inquiry. Although urban managers do not play the sole determining role in the urban system, this does not mean that they do not play a significant role.

Pahl thus suggests in his later work that urban sociology should concern itself with the social processes by which scarce urban resources are distributed. Such **allocative structures**, he suggests, can either compensate for inequalities generated elsewhere (e.g. income inequalities), they can reflect them, or can even widen existing differentials (1975, pp.250ff). This expands the focus from urban managers to general societal processes, including, for example, the land market. Nevertheless the actions of "urban managers" is still of importance in understanding the functioning of these allocative structures.

This account, which can be called a "modified urban managerialism" allows for greater emphasis to be placed on the relations between "urban managers", the national government, capitalists and the local population. In fact, Pahl sees the central state playing an increasingly influential role in the urban system, but with "urban managers" still playing an important mediating role:

> It seems to me that one set of urban managers and technical experts must play crucial **mediating roles** both between the state and the private sector and between central state authority and the local population. Another set of private managers control access to capital and other resources. (1977, p.55)

This "modified urban managerialism" thesis is related to theories (popular at the time) which characterised the British state as **corporatist**. These accounts of the modern state observed that the state incorporated particular organised interests - both business and unions - into the decision-making process. The process of negotiation between these interests tended to be informal and beyond the control of the electoral process (cf Simmie 1981, pp.98ff).

Whether the corporatist thesis is accepted or not, the "modified urban managerialist" account directs attention to the role of local bureaucrats in decision-making, and more particularly on their role in mediating between different interests. This focus has come under attack,

particularly from Marxist sources. Two kinds of criticism are particularly prevalent:

1. The focus on the state, and in particular on bureaucrats, in isolation from a broader class analysis is seen as fundamentally mistaken.
2. The idea that the "scarcity" of urban resources introduces divisions independent of class divisions is denied. As a result the idea of local bureaucrats having sources of power independent of "class power" is also disputed.

Both of these points raise fundamental issues, which cannot be dealt with at this point. Some of the questions raised by the first point will be dealt with in Chapter 9. The issues raised by the second point will be examined in more detail below.

For the moment I wish to restrict myself to the question whether Pahl's account provides a way of delimiting a theoretical domain of local politics. In this connection it is important to look more closely at how he defines the spatial concepts with which he works:

> I tend to use the word 'city' as a short-hand for 'a given context or configuration of reward-distributing systems which have space as a significant component'. Thus housing and transportation are elements in my view of the city, family allowances and pension schemes are not. An urban resource or facility must have a spatial component. (1975, p.10)

As in the cases of Cox and Williams, however, it is doubtful if this delimits a unique domain of study. The word "region" could equally well fit the description of "a given context or configuration of reward-distributing systems with space as a significant component". Significantly, many conflicts have arisen over the unequal distribution of resources such as schools within a region or, indeed, between regions.

In practice Pahl seems to take the jurisdictional boundaries of local authorities as guideline for the definition of "cities". In an early article this is explicitly affirmed:

> Education, jobs and housing as scarce resources are all potential sources of conflict: access to such resources is systematically structured in a local context. Such contexts may be physically 'urban', 'rural', or a mixture of the two: the urban or spatial sociologist is interested in the areas in which decisions crucially affecting the life chances of those living there are made. The units for urban sociology are bureaucratically defined. (1975, p.203)

This definition makes sense in the context of Pahl's focus on the actions of local bureaucrats.

Nevertheless, this definition of the city does not square with the idea of the city as a "given context or configuration of reward-distributing systems with space as a significant component". As Williams and Cox note, the boundaries of local authorities can themselves be a major factor in determining the distribution of access within a metropolitan area. This is something that Pahl also recognises

> [D]efinition of the area of the locality itself is a matter of great political importance and conflict. (1975, p.204)

In a sense this points to a tension in Pahl's work: a concern with urban managers would lead to a conception of local politics as occurring within bureaucratically defined boundaries; whereas a broader concern with questions of access and allocative structures could not be so restricted.

Rex and Moore: Housing classes

Where Pahl focuses on access to "scarce urban resources" in general, Rex and Moore (1967) focus specifically on that of housing. In their classic study of Sparkbrook, a part of Birmingham, they focus on the processes whereby different groupings of people become concentrated in the "zone of transition". Rex sketches the central process as follows:

> There will, of course, be some deviants, romantics and intellectuals who actually prefer living in the inner zone, but the persistent outward movement which takes place justifies us in saying and positing as central to our model that suburban housing is a scarce and desired resource. Given that this is so, I suggest that the basic process underlying urban social interaction is competition for scarce and desired types of housing. In this process people are distinguished from one another by their strength in the housing market or, more generally, in the system of housing allocations." (1968, p.214)

At the top of the housing hierarchy are those that can afford to buy their own houses. Crucial factors here are income as well as eligibility for a mortgage. Beneath the owner-occupiers are council tenants. Here the bureaucratic rules of local authorities will determine who gains access and who doesn't. Those that do not qualify for either of these kinds of houses are forced to fend for themselves in other ways. In the Sparkbrook case the institution of lodging-

houses had grown up to cater for this market. These were old, large, previously middle-class houses now located in the "zone of transition" that were converted to rental accommodation. In these houses rooms were individually let and even basic facilities were often absent. The tenants were characteristically either immigrants or people seen as deviants who were consequently not eligible for other accommodation. The owners were themselves often immigrants who were ineligible for mortgages. As a result they took out short-term, high interest loans to secure these houses. In order to meet the repayments they had no option but to let rooms.

The Sparkbrook situation therefore led Rex and Moore to posit the existence of the following "housing classes": (1) outright owners of a whole house; (2) owners of a mortgaged whole house; (3) council tenants in (a) houses with a long life; (b) in a house awaiting demolition; (4) tenants of whole houses owned by a private landlord; (5) owners of houses bought with short-term loans who are compelled to let rooms to meet repayments; (6) tenants of rooms in a lodging-house. (p.274) They suggest furthermore that

> The six housing situations mentioned above take the order 1 - 6 in a scale of desirability according to the status value of British society. (p.275)

According to Rex and Moore

> Being a member of one or other of these classes is of first importance in determining a man's associations, his interests, his life-style, and his position in the urban social structure. (p.36)

The struggle between these classes is "the central process of the city as a social unit" (p.273).

Although Rex and Moore do not put forward their theory as an attempt to define the field of urban politics, the last sentence suggests that it can be read in this way. On this reading the field of local politics needs to be understood as the study of the struggle between different housing classes.

A number of criticisms have been made of Rex and Moore. I would like to consider the following questions, which have been posed in the literature: 1. Is there conflict between the groups that Rex and Moore have identified, and if so, what is its nature? 2. Do housing classes exist and if they do, do they correspond to the groups that Rex and Moore have

identified? 3. If housing classes exist, are they autonomous of classes as defined through work relations?

On the first question, it has been repeatedly pointed out that Rex and Moore's model relies on the existence of a unified value system within the population. If, for some reason, a suburban existence is not universally valued, then presumably there would not be any need for conflict about this kind of housing (Pahl 1975, p.243; Saunders 1979, p.72). Furthermore, as Pahl has suggested

> Indeed the conflict would seem to be more likely **within** one of these 'classes' rather than between it and another. This would more appropriately be termed market competition: thus those on local authority waiting-lists, for example, are competing with each other and not with those seeking with limited capital to own their own houses who may be in competition with those having more capital. (1975, p.243)

The problem that is highlighted by Pahl's criticism is that the nature of the conflict between the "classes" has not been spelled out. It could be presumed that there could be two kinds of "conflict" in Rex and Moore's model, firstly **market competition** between different groups for particular houses, and secondly **political conflict** about the operation of extra-economic mechanisms in the housing market.

Examples of the second kind of conflict would include campaigns by the working class for the provision of council housing; demands from middle class owner-occupiers for stricter zoning regulations to keep high density housing developments out of their area or to prevent the conversion of existing houses into lodging-houses; or pressure from people on council waiting lists for the exclusion of immigrants.

It seems that Rex and Moore had these kinds of conflicts in mind when they referred to "struggle" between "housing classes":

> It is likely, moreover, that those who have council houses or may get them soon will seek to defend the system of allocation which secures their privileges against all categories of potential competitors. Thus local politics usually involves a conflict between two kinds of vested interest and between those who have these interests and outsiders. (Rex 1968, p.215)

Nevertheless, it is not clear whether even such a conception of conflict is sustainable. For instance, it is not clear why there should necessarily be any conflict between owner-occupiers,

holders of mortgages and long-lease tenants of whole houses in a particular area. In fact these groups might be united around issues such as preventing certain kinds of commercial development in the area.

In situations where people choose to rent the idea of an inherent conflict with owner-occupiers becomes even less tenable. Conflict only seems to be likely where tenants do not have a choice about their accommodation. As Pahl has pointed out the key issue seems to be that of access to housing rather than the existing housing situation that an individual finds herself in (1975, p.244-5).

> The conflict will not be directed against those in another housing situation but rather on the means and criteria of access and those who determine and control them. (p.245)

This indicates that perhaps Rex and Moore have incorrectly identified the groups which engage in "housing struggle". The basis for their typology is the present housing situation of people, but this is likely to be reflective of people's status position, rather than constitutive of their power in the housing market.[7]

Pahl suggests that

> If the means of access become central to the model rather than housing situations then presumably the following housing classes emerge:
> 1. Large property-owners, public or private.
> 2. Smaller landlords (e.g. charitable trusts).
> 3a. Owners of capital sufficient to own their own homes and owning.
> 3b. Owners of capital sufficient to own their own homes and renting.
> 4. Those who must rent. (1975, p.245)

In fact, this model would probably have to be made a lot more complicated because other groups such as financial institutions and estate agents would become possible actors in the "housing struggle". They potentially control access to housing and can derive financial benefits from this control.

The third issue which has been raised repeatedly in the literature is the question whether "housing classes" indeed form a source of social division independent of the occupational structure. In so far as this debate relates centrally to questions about the nature of class and social stratification within contemporary society as a whole, it cannot be thoroughly covered here. The following points would, however, seem apposite.

Firstly, Saunders has demonstrated, convincingly to my mind, that there are potential economic (and other) benefits to be derived from home ownership (1979, pp.84ff). More to the point, because the home owner invests in the property market she has a vested interest in a rate of price inflation in this market greater than the rate of interest in the finance market. Even more pertinently, she has an interest that property values in her area rise at least as fast as property values generally. Clearly, therefore, people with different positions in the housing market have different interests.

Secondly, while this fact shows that one's position in the housing market can generate interests independent of one's position within the relations of production, this does not show to what extent such potential cleavages actually do run counter to class cleavages. On the one hand, class and income are some of the most important factors determining people's access to particular positions within the housing market (cf Sullivan 1989); on the other hand, for most working class home-owners the economic gains to be made from home-ownership would be marginal relative to their overall income, as sale of the house would have to be followed by the purchase of another one.

These points suggest that perhaps the significance of "housing classes" and their relationship to classes as defined at the work place, is not something which can be theorised in abstract, but something which needs to be concretely investigated.

Where does this leave the question of local politics? It seems that a tenable theory of "housing classes" needs to be based on the concept of access to housing. Consequently the study of local politics should focus on conflict around access to housing. This, however has a number of immediate consequences.

Firstly, conflict in the sense of **market competition** does not only take place between actors in the housing market. The housing market is embedded in a broader property market and other actors within that - such as industrialists, shop owners etc. - also have a significant impact on people's access to housing.

Secondly, **political conflict** about access to housing does not simply happen on a local terrain.

Lobbying of national governments about provision of state housing is only one example of this.

Thirdly, it is not clear how effectively "housing class" struggles can be delimited from other "class" struggles. Would a dispute between a union and factory management about company housing benefits be an example of a housing struggle? What if the negotiation was conducted between a national employer body and a national union? Income is one of the major determinants of access to housing, so could a straight wage negotiation not also be seen as a component of a broader housing struggle?

Fourthly, why should the focus rest exclusively on housing? It is clear that when people desire better accommodation it is not simply the physical qualities of the dwelling that are of concern. Rather, as Williams and Cox have pointed out, it is the broader access to social structures and the spatial variation in environmental quality that are at issue. In the final analysis it seems then that a concern with the politics of "housing classes" ends up broadening out into a more generalised focus on the politics of spatial inequalities in social access and environmental quality. Such a general concern with the politics of spatial and social inequality is undoubtedly a valid field of enquiry. It does not, however, seem to delimit a terrain congruent with that of **local** politics.

Conclusion: Access and allocative structures

A number of points emerge from the discussion above. In the first place, these studies have shown that the benefits and costs of urban living are unequally distributed and that political processes are implicated in the creation and/or maintenance of this inequality. Rex and Moore show how differences in power shape access to urban resources such as housing. Cox indicates that powerful territorial groups will ensure that negative externalities are borne by others. Williams points out that strong urban coalitions will try to protect preferential access to social structures.

These accounts also show that in trying to maximise the benefits and minimise the costs of

urban life, people can make use of different strategies. On the one hand they can use their strength in the housing market and whatever options for relocation that there are. On the other hand, they can make use of political pressure.

Different groupings have different degrees of power and different abilities to gain access, protect access, or prevent other people from gaining access to particular physical and social resources. The power relations between people and the social relations which end up allocating them to particular types of accommodation and particular types of access within the urban area clearly deserve to be studied. One has to agree with Pahl when he exhorts fellow urban sociologists:

> The articulation of power in society is hardly a new field of study: we would be in good company returning to it. (1975, p.259)

Nevertheless it does not seem that this delimits a specifically **urban** or **local** field of study. The politics of "spatial inequality" operates at all spatial scales - regionally, nationally and even internationally. The "influx control" that the United States operates against Mexicans is perhaps one of the clearest examples of this.

Notes:

1. Please note that **all** emphases appearing in quotations are those of the original author, except where this has been explicitly indicated to the contrary.

2. Williams calls the former **life style policies**, because they relate to the living pattern of people, while the latter he terms **system maintenance policies**, because they relate to the way in which the entire urban system "hangs together". It is interesting to note that the South African government is trying to move the pattern of urban government along this path as well, with metropolitan government, in the shape of Regional Services Councils being responsible for the latter and primary local authorities for the former. As Williams would have pointed out, this is a ploy to protect existing inequalities in social access within urban areas.

3. This is recognised tangentially by Williams. The way he deals with it is to characterise the household as a **socio-spatial unit**. He assumes that such a unit (other examples would be companies, congregations etc.) would locate itself in such a way that the overall accessibility of the unit is enhanced. This would depend both on the accessibility structures of the members of the socio-spatial unit, as well as the overall decision-making structure within the socio-spatial unit. The point here, however, is that different people, given the same spatial constraints, can still have different access to social structures.

4. Of course this assumes that capital is able to relocate. That this is not so in all cases is indicated by Cox and Mair (1988).

5. Although Cox envisages that there might be groups of different strength within this constituency.

6. "Urban social theory and research", published in 1969 in ***Environment and Planning***, republished as Chapter 10 in ***Whose City?*** (Pahl 1975).

7. Saunders (1979 p.74, 1981 p.147) claims that even from a Weberian perspective Rex and Moore's "housing classes" are not classes but status groups - i.e. they reflect the incumbent's status, rather than being a source of income.

2. Collective consumption, urban planning and urban movements

The work of Manuel Castells has been enormously influential in urban sociology. In many ways it is the most ambitious attempt to date to define in a coherent way the sub-discipline of urban sociology and urban politics. In this Chapter I will cover the work of the "early" Castells, as developed in ***The Urban Question*** and ***City, Class and Power*** as well as Dunleavy's application of it to Britain.

The structure of Castells's argument

Castells's concern in ***The Urban Question*** is to arrive at a theoretically adequate characterisation of "Urban Sociology". The starting point for this enterprise is a critique of previous attempts to define the field of "urban studies" (1976a, 1976b, 1977a). These earlier attempts are criticised not only because they do not adequately delineate the "urban", but because they end up espousing the "urban ideology".

To explain what this ideology is about, Castells points to the increasing reference to "urban" problems in popular discourse. According to Castells the popularity of this urban discourse is due to its imprecision: "it makes it possible to group together under this heading a whole mass of questions felt, but not understood, whose identification (as 'urban') makes them less disturbing - one can dismiss them as the natural misdeeds of the environment" (1977a, p.73). The "urban ideology" is therefore that ideology which interprets particular forms of social organisation as being a product of a particular environment (or particular spatial relations). Characteristically, the "urban ideology" will therefore interpret social problems as being the "natural" outcome of a particular environment.

Besides the critical thrust of ***The Urban Question***, there is also a constructive one. Castells aims to define the "urban" in absolutely rigorous terms, so that this "scientific" conception can serve as the basis for a proper, i.e. unideological, understanding of the "urban question".

In the rest of this Chapter this attempt to "theorise" urban processes will be critically analysed. The steps in the analysis follow the order of Castells's argument. They can be listed as follows:

1. Castells argues that "urban space" is equivalent to the space of the (collective) reproduction of labour power. "Urban" processes therefore need to be seen as processes related to collective consumption.
2. The ways in which the various levels of the social structure interact with "urban space" defines the "urban system". "Urban politics" is about the way in which the "urban system" is regulated or transformed.
3. This involves consideration of "urban planning" and "urban social movements".

The thrust of my argument is that the "theoretical" derivation that Castells presents does not achieve what he claims it does. In fact, it breaks down at every step. As such Castells's claim that "urban politics" is the politics of collective consumption is seriously undermined. I then consider whether there might be some other way in which one could justify equating the two. This leads on to a consideration of Dunleavy's work.

The attempt to theorise the "urban"

Central to Castells's project, is the attempt to theoretically delimit the "urban". This project is important to Castells because he claims that

> [O]ne will have to accept that all space is constructed and that, consequently, the theoretical non-delimitation of the space being dealt with ... amounts to accepting a culturally prescribed (and therefore ideological) segmentation. (1977a, p.234)

The starting point for Castells's analysis is the assumption that:

> To pose the question of the specificity of a space, and in particular urban space, is equivalent to conceiving of relations between the elements of the social structure within a unit defined in one of the instances of the social structure. (1977a, p.235)

This point is fundamental to his analysis so it is worthwhile to explore what he means.

What Castells seems to point to is the fact that relations between people are also always

spatial relations. So production, which is a social relation, also involves a number of spatial interactions, e.g. the transport of materials between the different stages of production. He seems to suggest that spatial units, such as "urban space" are meaningful for social analysis only to the extent to which they correspond to the space defined by a social process. The social process would specify the nature of the space. Analysing this space would involve tracing the way in which the different social processes (economic, political, ideological) interacted within it.

Having suggested that "urban space" could only be given a coherent meaning if a social process was found which demarcated this space, he proceeds to investigate which process might fit this bill. He argues that ideological processes do not, as there is no distinct urban culture. Political processes also do not, as there is a complete lack of correspondence between political boundaries and our intuitive notion of the "urban". He therefore concludes that the specificity of the "urban" has to be established at the economic level. (1977a, p.236)

Within this level, Castells is concerned to establish whether the "urban" is established through the whole labour process, or just one of its elements. He claims that the "city" is not a significant segmentation of the economic system as a whole. In particular, production seems to be organised much more on a "regional" rather than urban level. By contrast, he says, the "urban" seems to connote processes relating to labour power other than in their direct application to the production process (p.236).

> Urban space thus becomes space defined by a section of the labour force, delimited both by a job market and by the (relative) unity of its daily life. (ibid)

On the basis of this "theoretical delimitation" Castells advances the following hypothesis:

> [In] advanced capitalist societies, the process that structures space is that which concerns the simple and extended reproduction of labour power; the ensemble of the so-called urban practices connotes the articulation of the process with the social structure as a whole. (p.237)

Stripped of its formalistic language this amounts to the idea that:

> Urban organisation is not, then, a simple arrangement of spatial forms, but rather these forms are the expression of the process of collective treatment of the daily consumption patterns of households. (1978, p.16)

Because of the importance of this theorisation of the "urban" it is fair to ask whether the logic of Castells's own argument does indeed establish that urban space is the space of simple and extended reproduction of labour power. Reproduction of labour power refers to a large range of activities necessary to ensure the physical and intellectual capacities of the labour force and the inter-generational reproduction of people and skills. Some of these reproductive processes are very much personalised (such as procreation), whereas others are collectively organised. Clearly the space defined by some of these activities is very different to that of others. In what sense, for example, would the space of procreation be equivalent to "urban space"?

It is clear that Castells has the collective reproduction of labour power in mind.[1] Indeed, he suggests that the increasing socialisation of the process of reproduction of labour power is one of the key features of capitalism. As production is increasingly concentrated in urban areas, and therefore labour power is increasingly concentrated, it becomes progressively more necessary to socialise the process of reproduction. The development of mass transit systems is one example of this. Besides this, Castells suggests that socialisation is necessary in the interests of the profitability of capital. (See 1978, Chapters 2 and 3)

Clearly there are some important truths in this argument. Modern urban economies do depend on a variety of collective services for their effective functioning - e.g. the provision of roads and transport, water, electricity and rubbish disposal. The way these are provided is an important determinant of the shape of the city. Nevertheless, the equation of the "city" with the process of the collective reproduction of labour power is problematic. In the first instance, the process of collective reproduction of labour power is itself not a homogeneous process. Different components of it are organised quite differently across space - compare in this regard education, transportation, electricity and water supply. The space defined by the collective reproduction of labour power will therefore look quite different depending on which process one takes as reference.

Secondly, the case of education shows that there is no necessary connection between the provision of a collective service and any particular space: education can be organised either at a national, regional or local level. Indeed, as Saunders has noted, many collective consumption items - such as social security payments - are provided through national

agencies. (1981, p.211)

Thirdly, the concept of "collective" reproduction is itself problematic. Is this equivalent to provision by the state? This would have some quite interesting implications for the definition of the "urban". Would the privatisation of "collective" services, such as transportation, mean that the urban area ceased to exist, since now there would be no "collective" services to define it? If "collective" reproduction is not the same as state organised reproduction, what is it? The problem is that there is no necessary connection between the provision of any service and the organisational form through which this occurs - whether state, private, quasi-state corporation or utility company.

These arguments show that the identification of "urban space" with the process of the reproduction of labour power is not tenable.

Urban politics as the regulation or transformation of the urban system

With this conception of the "urban", Castells attempts to theorise what urban politics is about. To do this, he proceeds to define what he calls the "urban system":

> By urban system, I mean the specific articulation of the instances of a social structure within a (spatial) unit of the reproduction of labour power. (1977a, p.237)[2]

In short, the urban system is the way society "fits together" within urban areas - as demarcated by Castells.

Because Castells wishes to avoid the introduction of any "untheorised" parts into his account, he defines what the elements of this system are. They are the overall "levels" of the social formation (as identified by an Althusserian analysis) "specified" within urban space. So it includes the following components: Production, Consumption, Exchange, Administration and the Symbolic. The first three represent the intersection of the "urban" with the "economic system"; the other two represent the "specification" of the political and ideological systems within the "urban" respectively.

Castells gives examples of what these "elements" could concretely refer to, although he always insists that because they are purely theoretical elements they do not have immediate empirical reference (1977a, p.238). Examples of the first three elements would be respectively factories, housing and commuter traffic (i.e. the interchange between the sphere of production and reproduction). Administration would be exemplified by urban planning, i.e. the regulation of the interchange between Production, Consumption and Exchange; while certain architectural forms which communicate particular messages would be instances of the Symbolic.

These elements are further sub-divided. Again to avoid the introduction of extraneous and "untheorised" elements, Castells claims that the sub-divisions represent the "refraction" within the particular element of other elements, including itself and/or other instances of the social structure (1977a, p.238). The intricacies this involves need not detain us here, suffice it to say that at the end of this procedure Castells arrives at what he claims to be an exhaustive taxonomy of all the elements and sub-elements of the urban system.

In order to define the "places" that individuals within the urban system will occupy, he then differentiates between "levels" and "roles" within each sub-element. He gives as example of this the case of residential accommodation, which has as levels luxury dwellings, public housing, slums etc. and as roles, lodgers, tenants, co-owner, owner etc. The relationships between the different sub-elements, roles and levels among themselves and with the social structure as a whole define the conjuncture. (1976c, p.159-60; 1977a, p.240-2)

In terms of this abstract definition of the urban system concrete situations can be "coded", as being particular combinations of sub-elements etc. However, not every kind of combination is possible. The **functioning** of the urban system will be subject to certain general laws based on the general rules of the mode of production - e.g. that the production element will be dominant (1977a, p.241).

Castells defines **Urban Politics** as being about the regulation or transformation of this urban system. Its analysis is necessarily broader than the "urban" because the urban system is embedded in broader social relations. Indeed, he argues that the emergence of new "structural

rules" for the urban system will depend on the way in which the contradictions inherent in the urban system are related to broader contradictions.

These contradictions within the urban system are never defined, but at one stage Castells states that the occupation of contradictory places within the same (sub-)element of the urban system would constitute such a contradiction (cf. 1976c, p.168). The example he gives is the contradiction between tenant and owner within the "housing" sub-element of the Consumption element.

The way different people are assigned to different (contradictory) roles within the urban system and the way these places relate to positions defined within other instances of the social system, defines the "system of urban actors". It is the analysis of this system of urban actors and their actions that urban politics is concerned with.

Castells says that the field of urban politics has two sub-fields, viz. urban planning and urban social movements. He defines **urban planning** as

> the intervention of the political in the specific articulation of the political of the different instances of a social formation within a collective unit of reproduction of labour power with the aim of assuring its extended reproduction, of regulating the non-antagonistic contradictions, thus assuring the interests of the social class in the whole of the social formation and the reorganization of the urban system, in such a way as to assure the structural reproduction of the dominant mode of production. (1977a, p.263)

According to this definition, urban planning has three components:

1. To ensure the extended reproduction of labour power;
2. To regulate those contradictions that can be regulated - i.e. to prevent them from accumulating in such a way that they can become a danger to the continued existence of the system as a whole;
3. To reorganize the urban system in such a way that capitalist accumulation is ensured.

It needs to be noted that according to Castells urban planning is concerned both with "problems" or contradictions generated within the urban system, as well as with the relationship between the urban system and the social system as a whole. Furthermore urban

planning is seen as essentially an intervention on behalf of the further reproduction of the capitalism.

Urban social movements, by contrast, Castells defines as

> the system of practices resulting from the articulation of a conjuncture of the system of urban actors and other social practices, such that its development tends objectively towards the structural transformation of the urban system or towards a substantial change in the balance of forces within the political system as a whole. (1976c, p.155)

Key features of this definition are, firstly, that urban movements are defined "objectively". The nature of an urban movement is determined not by the consciousness of its participants but by its structural location. Secondly, urban movements are defined by the outcome of their actions. Movements which do not lead to the structural transformation of the urban system or a shift in the balance of political forces do not qualify as urban social movements. An implication of this definition is that urban social movements also pose a challenge to capitalism itself (cf 1978, p.36).

In summary, the logic of Castells's position can be represented as follows:

1. There is something that can be called the "urban system". It is defined by a spatial unit of the reproduction of labour power. Its elements and sub-elements consist of the way other social instances refract themselves within the urban arena. The relationship between these elements defines the conjuncture.
2. There are contradictions inherent in this urban system. Furthermore, because the urban system does not exist in isolation, these contradictions relate in various ways to broader societal contradictions.
3. The contradictions do not in themselves lead to the transformation of the urban system. This requires the intervention of actors. The analysis of the transformation of the urban system thus requires the analysis of these actors and their practices.
4. The actors involved in conflict about the transformation of the urban system are defined both by their contradictory locations within the urban system, as well as by their location within other social instances (e.g. their class location).
5. Urban political analysis is essentially concerned with the analysis of this system of urban actors and their practices.
6. Two kinds of practices are particularly important. On the one hand there is urban planning,

which is a practice designed to regulate the urban system in the interests of the perpetuation of the capitalist mode of production; and on the other there are urban social movements, which are practices tending to the transformation of the urban system and, indeed, to the transformation of capitalism itself.

There are many criticisms which could be offered in relation to this model of urban politics. I wish to restrict myself to asking the following two questions: 1. Is there such a thing as an "urban system"? 2. What is the nature of the contradictions in the "urban system"?

On the first question, the concept "urban system" clearly depends on its geographical delimitation. As was argued above, the concept of a "spatial unit of collective reproduction" does not delimit any particular space. Consequently Castells's enterprise starts off on a dubious footing. Besides this, however, the procedure by which he identifies the elements of this system fails by his own standards. Although he goes through a sequence of elaborate steps to ensure that none of the elements that he introduces are "untheorised", he then makes the completely arbitrary leap to the assertion that within each "sub-element" of the urban system there are different "levels" and "roles".

These are not innocent additions to his system. According to examples he himself gives, it is these roles which define the "places" within the urban system which are occupied by different urban actors - places such as "owner", "tenant", "lodger" and "council tenant". Where do these roles come from? They are certainly not "theorised" within his system.

Indeed, it is doubtful that such roles could be theorised **a priori**. Tenure relationships are remarkably complex and it seems unlikely that any abstract taxonomy could capture all existing ones - or possible future ones. This weakness is fatal to Castells's project, because it is precisely at this point that the abstract categories of his "urban system" need to connect to urban reality.

Castells's elaborate construction of the "urban system" seems a plausible representation of reality only because of the illicit smuggling in of such "untheorised", i.e. empirical, terms. This is a weakness it shares with the Althusserian project as a whole.

If the concept "urban system" is to have any use, it must be as an a **posteriori** "decoding" or analysis of relationships within an urban area. The elements and sub-elements of such an urban system, as well as the actors given within it, would need to be read off from reality, rather than imposed on it. Such an enterprise would be a potentially much more fruitful exercise.

The second question raises a related criticism. At no stage within the theoretical argument does Castells spell out what the nature of the contradictions within the urban area are. He does give an example of it in a discussion of the way urban social movements develop around particular contradictions. He argues that the power of the movement will depend on the number of contradictions it manages to accumulate. He goes on to say that this accumulation of contradictions occurs inter alia through the appropriation by actors of contradictory places within the same element of the urban system, social structure or social organisation (1976c, p.168). The example he gives at this stage is that of tenant and owner.

Now this does not clarify anything in particular. What makes "tenants" and "owners" occupy contradictory places? Surely there is more at stake than the simple fact that these are different "roles" within the same sub-element of the urban system. Would "council tenants" occupy a contradictory place relative to "owners"?

Again this is a critical weakness in Castells's account. If there is no **theoretical** way of determining what the contradictions within the urban system are, then there is no way of determining the "places" which different actors occupy in relation to them, nor will there be any way of theoretically determining what urban politics is about.

Urban planning, urban social movements

If Castells's abstract conception of urban politics is not tenable, could the content he gives to it at least serve to define the field? Clearly it is problematic to isolate the content from the overall justification that he gives to it. After all, why should one focus specifically on urban planning or urban social movements? In the absence of the theoretical framework, these

become simply arbitrary choices.

Nevertheless, there are also specific reasons why Castells's conception of urban planning and urban social movements do not satisfactorily demarcate a field of enquiry. As far as urban planning is concerned, the definition he presents is obviously dependent on a Poulantzian analysis of the state. The general problems with such a structuralist and functionalist reading of the state need not detain us here. In this specific case, however, the functionalist definition results in a conception of urban politics which is hard to distinguish from politics *tout court*.

Urban planning was defined by Castells as involving inter alia practices designed to ensure the extended reproduction of labour power. In view of the fact that many interventions designed to guarantee this - such as social welfare payments - emanate from national state bodies it is clear that "urban politics" as conceived by Castells is not an arena separate from "national politics". While such a conception might be tenable, as argued below, it does not accord with any intuitive idea of "urban politics".

The concept of urban social movements is one of the many theoretical innovations introduced by Castells. Nevertheless the way the concept has been defined again makes it difficult to extract a coherent notion of "urban politics" out of it.

Central to Castells's definition of urban social movements is their effect on the urban system or the balance of forces. This, as Pickvance has pointed out (1976, pp.198ff) raises a number of immediate problems. Firstly, what counts as a change in the urban system? Clearly what ought to be involved is some change in the fundamental logic that drives it, rather than a simple re-arrangement of the deck chairs. Similarly what would count as a decisive shift in the balance of forces?

Secondly, even if a change in the urban system were to be observed, how could one be sure that it was as a result of the actions of the urban movement in question, rather than as a result of a devious plot on the part of the state to co-opt members of the subordinate classes? This question would not be at issue if the change resulted in the wholesale destruction of the existing ruling classes and the introduction of socialism, but as the only changes that have

been introduced in the West have been reforms within the capitalist system, one is forced to try to distinguish which reforms have actually been won from below, and which have been conceded from above. The alternative would be to conclude that perhaps there have not been any urban social movements anywhere in the world. In either case this is a very shaky foundation on which to establish the field of urban politics.

The politics of collective consumption

Implicit in Castells's abstract definition of urban politics is the idea that urban politics is in some way coterminous with the politics of collective consumption. A number of authors (e.g. Dunleavy, 1980) have adopted this as their working definition of urban politics.

In this connection I wish to briefly explore two issues: 1. What is the justification for the identification of urban politics with the politics of collective consumption? 2. Is a definition of urban politics on the basis of the politics of collective consumption tenable?

As far as the first issue is concerned, Castells's justification is based in the first instance on his theoretical delimitation of the "urban" in terms of collective consumption. Besides this abstract argument, Castells seems to have another reason. He has the intuition that

> [T]he transformation of the social and political role of 'urban' problems expresses above all the deepening of the contradictions in the collective-consumption sector. (Castells 1978, p.38)

This is based on the idea that "problems" commonly seen as being due to "urban areas" are actually created within the sphere of collective consumption. Problems as diverse as pollution, shortages of housing, urban redevelopment and inadequacies of transport he sees as breakdowns in the reproduction of labour power. These problems are, however, generally viewed as being somehow inherent in city life. This belief that "cities" are responsible for a variety of social ills Castells calls the "urban ideology". He claims that this ideology obscures the origins of these problems in the **capitalist** organisation of life and space.

More particularly, Castells claims that there is inherent in late capitalist society a pressure for

the state to intervene much more directly in the reproduction of labour power.

> [T]he state becomes, through its arrangement of space, the real manager of everyday life. (1977b, p.64)

> Urban organisation is not, then, a simple arrangement of spatial forms, but rather these forms are the expression of the process of collective treatment of the daily consumption patterns of households. (1978, p.16)

The argument seems to be that the increasingly collective organisation of various aspects of the reproduction of labour power gives a coherence to the lived experience of urban life. It is this unity which lies at the base of the "urban ideology". It is because the provision and organisation of housing, transport, the urban environment of parks, entertainment centres etc. are increasingly interlinked that the different problems occurring within each of these components are seen as being part of a broader "urban" problem.

Castells seems to see the interlinkage of these different processes as leading to an essentially unified package of processes of reproduction. This package leads to a new model of urbanism which he calls "Monopolville" (cf. 1978, pp.32ff).

At one level this account seems plausible. It certainly seems possible that the collective provision of services could lead to a certain unification of lived experiences leading in turn to a differentiation of space as subjectively experienced. There are, however, at least three weaknesses in this account. Firstly, as was argued above, there is in fact no single "urban" space defined by state intervention. To the extent that different services are provided by different agencies in different spaces the monopolistic universe of "Monopolville" does not exist.

Secondly, to the extent to which the argument revolves around people's consciousness - their lived experience of urban life, the argument is not demonstrated, it is only asserted. It is quite possible that certain categories of people might experience urban life in much more private ways than others. This would be true at the one extreme of high income professionals who are not reliant on "collective consumption" items for their reproduction. At the other extreme it might be true for certain marginal categories of people who are excluded from these items - such as some of the aged or immigrant groupings. Rex and Moore's arguments have shown,

if nothing else, that the experience of "collective consumption" is a highly differentiated one.

Thirdly, Castells's intuition that "urban problems" in advanced capitalist countries are ultimately reducible to problems in consumption, is probably false. Important "urban" problems such as the concentration of the unemployed and "marginal" people in inner-city locations and the de-industrialisation of these areas are not consumption related.

Dunleavy: "Urban politics" as possibly non-local politics

The reasons given by Castells for equating urban politics with the politics of collective consumption do not seem to hold up. Dunleavy's justification is a much more pragmatic one:

> Castells' content definition of the urban field (and its partial acceptance by other writers) has particularly opened up a fruitful seam of empirical work dealing with the displacement of urban issues and problems from the local to the regional or national level, and with the interaction of the different institutional levels of the state apparatus and other organisations (particularly quasi-non-governmental bodies and business enterprises). (1980, p.50)

Besides his agreement with Castells's argument that collective consumption processes lie at the heart of everyday conceptions of "the urban" in advanced capitalist societies, he argues that

> Such a definition also captures the most valuable work carried out by approaches adopting spatial or institutional definitions of the urban field. (p.50)

I do not wish to contest the empirical fruitfulness of a focus on collective consumption processes, however, I have serious doubts about whether such a focus can serve as an adequate foundation for a study of "urban politics". In fact Dunleavy's work itself serves to indicate some of the major reasons why.

Firstly, as Dunleavy stresses

> A content definition of the urban field also entails a conception of urban political analysis which examines decision processes at any relevant institutional level. (p.51)

Because items of collective consumption are not necessarily provided through "local"

institutions, political conflicts around their provision need not be local. Furthermore, even where collective consumption is organised locally, the politics of collective consumption need not be local.

In his analysis of the politics of collective consumption in Britain, Dunleavy devotes an entire Chapter to "Non-local Sources of Urban Policy Change" (pp.98-133). Indeed he notes that

> Urban policy change in contemporary Britain has predominantly been national in scale. Within broad limits the decentralised authorities implementing policies have moved in step with a precision that cries out for explanation. (p.98).

He traces a variety of mechanisms by which national influence impacts on local level decisions. The first of these is the influence of central government departments, although Dunleavy is of the opinion that their influence is exaggerated (p.98ff). Other sources of influence are public corporations, such as British Rail or the regional water authorities (p.103).

A particularly interesting mechanism is what Dunleavy calls the "national local government system". This term refers to the fact that "Local authorities do not make decisions about most aspects of policy in isolation" (p.105). According to Dunleavy:

> At a political level, the national local government system finds powerful organisational expression in the local authority associations, and their relations with central departments, ministers, MPs, interest groups, the national party organisations and public service unions. (p.105)

Other "non-local sources of urban policy change", according to Dunleavy are professional bodies (e.g. planners' organisations) and the corporate economy.

The non-correspondence between the space in which a service is organised and the space in which politics involving it occurs needs to be noted. One of the reasons for this is that "local" interests who feel aggrieved at the provision/non-provision of a particular service, but who are not strong enough to enforce their views locally, can resort to lobbying "external" forces, particularly the national state, to intervene on their behalf.[3] South African examples of this would be the Chambers of Commerce of Boksburg and Carletonville, who applied for Supreme Court orders in 1990 to force their respective town councils to rescind decisions to segregate facilities. The business communities of these two towns had been hit by crippling

boycotts by Black consumers in protest against the town council decisions.

Conversely, "external" interests might be affected by the operation/non-operation of services in a particular area. This can lead to "external" intervention in a local area. The South African National Management System was, for example, designed to prevent local breakdowns in service provision from giving rise to political instability.

Secondly, the notion of "collective consumption" as used by Castells is quite loose. Dunleavy provides a much tighter definition (cf pp.52-3), in which it is specified that the term will refer only to consumption of services which are collectively organised and managed and where the criteria for access are non-market ones (or where the service is partly paid out of taxes). According to this definition, however, many political conflicts which one would be inclined to call "urban political conflicts" turn out not to be "urban politics" after all. A conflict about the commercial redevelopment of an area would be a paradigmatic case.

In summary, the discnssion on Castells has shown that there is no compelling **theoretical** reason for defining urban politics in terms of the politics of collective consumption. If one adopts the pragmatic approach of Dunleavy, however, and simply stipulates that urban politics is the politics of collective consumption, then any reference to particular **spatial** areas ("cities") becomes a contingent and not a necessary one. Furthermore in this case many processes which intuitively ought to belong to "urban politics" become defined out of it. In the light of this, why make the equation between the "politics of collective consumption" and "urban politics"?

As Castells and Dunleavy have capably demonstrated, the field of collective consumption processes is a field worthy of study. It seems unlikely, however, that they have succeeded in giving a theoretical basis to the study of "urban politics".

Conclusion: An appreciation of Castells

Despite the many failings of Castells's early work, it still remains one of the most remarkable achievements in the urban studies literature. In the first instance he is one of the few writers who saw clearly that categories such as "urban" and "urban sociology" had to be given more than just an intuitive content (cf 1976a, 1976b, 1977a). The rigour with which he tackled this task - albeit that this occurred within the now discredited Althusserian framework - is impressive.

Secondly, his critique of the "urban ideology" and of writers within the "urban sociology" tradition is consistently incisive. His attempt to uncover the social processes lying underneath supposedly "natural" spatial processes was an inspiration to a whole generation of critical urban sociologists.

Thirdly, his theoretical and empirical work on collective consumption and urban social movements helped to establish these firmly as important areas of analysis within the literature. Although these areas are not sufficient to establish the foundations for the study of urban politics, collective consumption processes and urban movements clearly are key components of it.

Notes:

1. Significantly in the "Afterword" to ***The Urban Question*** he says that the urban is defined in terms of the collective reproduction of labour power (1977, p.439), whereas the word "collective" is missing in the section dealing with "The theoretical delimitation of the urban" (see p.236ff).

2. In "Theoretical propositions for an experimental study of urban social movements", Castells defines the urban system as consisting of the relations between elements of the economic system within a unit of collective consumption (1976c, p.153). He says: "The fact that we are concerned only with the economic system follows from the definition of the urban as having an economic referent: the territorial area of a sub-unit of labour power" (Ibid). Although there must be some significance to the broader definition given in ***The Urban Question*** this is

nowhere elucidated.

3. It is obviously also possible to lobby **other** states. The internationalisation of the South African conflict is a good example of this.

3. Dissidence, urban movements and urban meaning

The idea that urban conflict is a specially innovative, transformative and dissident kind of politics is what unites the two works reviewed in this Chapter. On the one hand, I will be concerned with Fischer's idea that the urban area is specifically the site of conflict between different sub-cultures. On the other I will be trying to make sense of Castells's later theory that a conflict over "urban meaning" lies at the centre of the development of urban social movements and urban conflict.

While their points of departure are radically different they both see urban conflict as having the capacity to affect social relations more generally. In a sense they do not give an account of urban politics, but of the role of urban politics within overall politics.

Fischer: The clash of sub-cultures

Fischer sets out, not to provide an account of urban politics, but to give an overview of the "urban experience" (1976). A key concern in this enterprise is to determine whether the urban context affects the character of this experience and the character of social relations more generally.

An important question in this regard is clearly how an "urban context" is defined. Fischer opts for a minimalist definition, in order not to beg any question. He defines "urban" simply in terms of the population size of a settlement, i.e.

> the greater the number of people residing in a place, the more urban it is and the more urban are the experiences of its residents. Thus, urbanism is a **continuum**, a matter of degree. (1976, p.7)

He argues that urbanism does, indeed, have important effects on social relations. The concept he uses to show how this occurs is that of "critical mass". Briefly, the idea is that to sustain a minimal level of activity in a given field requires a certain number of people. In particular

he holds this to be true for sub-cultures. So, a mere handful of individuals of Jewish faith would find it difficult to maintain certain cultural practices outside their immediate family context. If, however, there were several hundred Jews, this might be sufficient to support specialised institutions, such as a Synagogue, or perhaps even an ethnic newspaper. These institutions would strengthen the sub-culture.

A greater concentration of people, i.e. urbanism, doesn't merely facilitate the emergence of various sub-cultures, it also intensifies them. According to Fischer, the interaction of sub-cultures can be threatening to the members involved. It is this ~contrast and recoil that intensify and help to define urban subcultures" (1976, p.38).

It is not only ethnic sub-cultures that are made viable through the operation of "critical mass". Deviant sub-cultures of various types are also spawned and intensified in this manner. Some of these sub=cultures will be pathbreakers in different ways such as lifestyle or ideas. Intellectual and cultural innovators, e.g. academics and artists, also need the urban context, i.e. a minimum "critical mass" of like minded individuals to thrive.

Because of the friction of the interaction between such innovators or deviants and other residents of urban areas, these residents are generally more unconventional than their cousins of less urban places. Fischer adduces some evidence from American attitude surveys to show that urbanites are, indeed, more unorthodox in their views (cf p.192ff).

Urban politics, according to this model, is essentially about the way in which sub-cultures get formed and interact. While these are not specifically urban phenomena, the mechanism of "critical mass" ensures that they are accentuated within urban areas.

This account has the virtue of simplicity. This is, however, also its major drawback. It tries to explain too much with essentially just three concepts: "urban", "sub-culture" and "critical mass".

In particular, what the account leaves out is how sub-cultural formation actually occurs. The achievement of a certain "critical mass" might be a **precondition** for this, but is it also

sufficient? Surely the mere possibility of forming a sub-culture will not guarantee that this happens.

Any analysis of sub-culture formation will have to take into account the context within which this happens. For example, a large prison, an army camp and a town might all have the same population. The former two are, however, environments in which the formation of particular sub-cultures is actively discouraged. This of course does not completely prevent their emergence, but most probably the number of sub-cultures within the town will be substantially greater.[1]

However, it is not simply the type of settlement that is at issue. It is conceivable that in different societies sub-cultural formation could be either promoted or impeded. The level of tolerance of deviance is, after all, not a constant across societies. It is also not simply tolerance that is at issue. Different social mixes allow for the emergence of different kinds of sub-cultures. This means that even within the same society there will be differences in the development of sub-cultures in different "cities".

In summary, Fischer's idea that urban politics is about sub-culture formation and interaction is an intriguing one. However, his account does not demonstrate that the "urban context" and the phenomenon of "critical mass" are sufficient to explain these. In the absence of a convincing explanation of the link between the "urban" and these processes, it is not possible to define urban politics in terms of them.

Castells: The struggle over urban meaning

In ***The City and the Grassroots*** Castells adopts an approach which differs markedly from that of ***The Urban Question***. As he himself puts it:

> The product of our research is not a formalized framework of abstract categories that should now be combined in different ways to code empirical situations, thus changing their labels without adding any new knowledge. ... [I]nstead of a general trans-historical theory of the city, we have presented theorized histories of the production of urban meaning. (1983, P.335)

The much more historical approach is evident, for example, in the definition of the city:

> Cities, like all social reality, are historical products, not only in their physical materiality but in their cultural meaning, in the role they play in the social organization, and in peoples' lives. The basic dimension in urban change is the conflictive debate between social classes and historical actors over the meaning of urban, the significance of spatial forms in the social structure, and the content, hierarchy, and destiny of cities in relationship to the entire social structure. A city (and each type of city) is what a historical society decides the city (and each city) will be. Urban is the social meaning assigned to a particular spatial form by a historically defined society. (p.302)

This should not be read in a subjectivist way, however:

> [T]he historical definition of urban is not a mental representation of a spatial form, but the assignment of a structural task to this form in accordance with the conflictive social dynamics of history. (p.302)

Urban meaning, then, is how cities are defined in and by different societies. These definitions in turn determine the **functions** which cities are expected to carry out:

> For instance, if cities are defined as colonial centres, the use of military force and territorial control will be their basic function. If they are defined as capitalist machines, they will subdivide their functions (and sometimes specialize them in different cities) between the extraction of surplus value in the factory, the reproduction of labour power, the extraction of profit in urbanization (through real estate), the organization of circulation of capital in the financial institutions, the exchange of commodities in the commercial system, and the management of all other operations in the directional centres of capitalist business. (p.303)

Finally, urban meaning and urban functions will together determine **urban form**, i.e. the way these processes express themselves spatially.

> For instance, if the city is defined as a religious centre, and if the ideological control by the priests over the peasant population is the function to be accomplished, permanence and stature, mystery, distance, and yet protection and a hint of accessibility will be crucial elements in the buildings and in their spatial patterning in the urban landscape. Few architects believe that the skyscrapers in downtown America only concentrate the paperwork of giant corporations: they symbolize the power of money over the city through technology and self-confidence and are the cathedrals of the period of rising corporate capitalism. (p.303)

Castells claims that cities are shaped by three different, though inter-related processes:

> 1. Conflicts over the definition of urban meaning
> 2. Conflicts over the adequate performance of urban functions. These conflicts can arise both from different interests and values, within the same accepted framework, or from different approaches about how to perform a shared goal or urban function.

3. Conflicts over the adequate symbolic expression of urban meaning and (or) functions. (pp.303-4)

Castells calls **urban social change** the "redefinition of urban meaning", whereas **urban planning** is the "negotiated adaptation of urban functions to a shared urban meaning". **Urban design** is the "symbolic attempt to express an accepted urban meaning in certain urban forms" (p.304).

Although this is not Castells's concern, the three types of conflicts can be used to define the field of urban politics. It is important to note some of the features of such a view of urban politics. In the first instance, it is a **historical** conception. Urban meaning is historically contingent, therefore so is the conflict about it. This is an attractive feature of the theory, because it means that urban politics is not reified into a trans-historical reality - identical for all places at all times. Secondly, the types of conflict constitute different levels within a **hierarchy**. Conflict about urban meaning is clearly the most fundamental type of urban conflict, with the other types subsidiary. Such a conception allows one to take into account different levels and types of conflict within one broad umbrella theory.

Despite these noteworthy features, there are serious problems in using Castells's account as the basis for a theoretical definition of urban politics. In particular, the account invites the following questions: 1. What is a city? 2. What is urban meaning?

Castells's laissez faire definition of a city as whatever a society decides it is, neatly sidesteps the problem of whether there is anything essentially similar about different kinds of "urban areas". Such a definition is particularly suitable in integrating medieval cities into an overall conception of "urban politics". If medieval societies decided that a settlement of 1000 people was a city then, indeed, it was a city. Nevertheless in the case of medieval cities this is easy. "City" status was something decidable. It was a status conferred by the ruler and was enshrined in a city charter. In other kinds of societies this is not so easy. What is a "city" in contemporary America? Who decides this? Is it important to decide this?

If certain societies do not make clear-cut distinctions between "cities" and other places, then Castells's project collapses. "Urban meaning" is then not something which attaches only to

particular kinds of places, i.e. cities, but perhaps to any number of other places as well. The "urban" in urban meaning would cease to have a referent.

The concept "urban meaning" is equally elusive. According to Castells, urban meaning is the "assignment of a structural task" to the spatial form, i.e. cities, in question. Again this is a more straightforward conception for medieval cities. Their tasks and powers were juridically laid down. What are the structural tasks of contemporary cities?

Indeed, the idea of structural tasks only makes sense if there are clear distinctions between cities and other types of places: Place X is a city, therefore it must be the site for collective reproduction of labour power etc., etc. What happens if we're not sure whether X is a city or not?

Implicit in the concept of "urban meaning" is the idea that in any given society there must be a clear sense what it is to be a city. To some extent people do operate with such loose ideas. People do argue along the lines "This is a city, so it must have an art gallery" or a symphony orchestra. Nevertheless it is doubtful that thee is a clear sense about the tasks which a city is expected to perform.

To be fair to Castells, he would probably argue that he is not talking about mental pictures, but about tasks which cities actually do perform. So, if factory owners turn cities into sites of production that is what they are - irrespective of people's conceptions of them. What is at issue is that social functions become allocated to particular places as a result of "the conflictive social dynamic of history".

Nevertheless it is almost certain that if "cities" could in some way be distinguished from other places, that cities would not all perform the same tasks. Some cities are manufacturing centres, some commercial and banking centres, others administrative or military ones. Tasks such as "reproduction of labour power" are performed by non-"cities" as well. In short, it is highly unlikely that there are any "structural tasks" assigned to all "cities" and exclusively to "cities".

Perhaps Castells's account could be rescued by talking about tasks allocated to specific cities. So New York's urban meaning would be that of headquarters of global corporations, London's that of banking capital of Europe and so on.

While this strategy would be faithful to the intention behind the concept "urban meaning", it would again void it of any "urban" referent. After all, it is not only urban areas that have specific tasks assigned to them in the overall spatial division of labour. Bantustans in South Africa have particular meanings as labour reserves and spaces of social control. Conflicts about these roles are just as prevalent as struggles over "urban meaning".

Furthermore, conflict about the specific role that a particular place plays, is in some cases to be as likely to be international or national in scope as local. The attempt to "rescue" New York from its debt crisis involved high-level national politicking in the U.S.A. (cf Shutt, 1982).

In summary, there does not seem to be any basis for assigning a unified "urban meaning " to all "cities" within contemporary capitalist societies[2]. It would make sense to disaggregate this concept and to talk about the "meaning" of particular places. In order to ground the concept of "urban politics", one would then require some basis for distinguishing "cities" from other places so that urban politics could be restricted to conflict about the meaning of these "urban" places. Even in that case, however, it is likely that conflict would be broader in scope than merely the "urban" terrain.

Castells: Social change and urban movements

Having defined "urban meaning", and given the distinction between urban social change, urban planning and urban design, Castells's major interest is to understand how urban social change occurs. He posits that a new urban meaning can be produced by one of four processes, "all of them conflictive and in opposition to one or more historical actors":

> 1. The dominant class in a given society, having the institutional power to restructure social forms (and thus cities) according to its interests and valnes, changes the existing

> meaning. We call this urban renewal (for cities) and regional restructuring (for the territory as a whole). ...
> 2. A dominated class accomplishes a partial or total revolution and changes the meaning of the city. ...
> 3. A social movement develops its own meaning over a given space in contradiction to the structurally dominant meaning ...
> 4. A social mobilization (not necessarily based on a particular social class) imposes a new urban meaning in contradiction to the institutionalized urban meaning and against the interests of the dominant class. It is in this case that we use the concept of urban social movement (pp.304-5).

The differences between the last three processes should perhaps be clarified further. The second case is that where a revolutionary or political change in the society as a whole results in changing the meaning of the city. The third case seems to be that where the dominant meaning of the city is left intact, hut subordinate groupings invest a given space with their own meaning. This would be, as it were, a change in the interstices within the dominant framework. The fourth case is that where a change in urban meaning occurs without this being preceded by a change in the overall societal balance of forces - though, presumably it could in turn lead to such a change. What distinguishes the fourth case, therefore, is that is the only process which involves a collective, conscious attempt to transform urban meaning qua urban meaning.

Because of the significance attached to urban social movements, Castells tries to investigate under what conditions these would arise. He notes that

> Urban protest movements, in our societies and in our epochs, seem to develop around three major themes:
> 1. Demands focused on **collective consumption**, that is, goods and services directly or indirectly provided by the state.
> 2. Defense of **cultural identity** associated with and organized around a specific **territory**.
> 3. **Political mobilization** in relationship to the state, particularly emphasizing the role of **local government**. (p.xviii)

These three axes of urban mobilisation Castells labels city, community and power. The first type of mobilisation has as its implicit goal the pursuit of the city as use-value as opposed to the notion of urban living and services as commodity (p.319). The second aims for the establishment of community,

> In other words, the defense of communication between people, autonomously defined social meaning, and face-to-face interaction, against the monopoly of messages by the

> media, the predominance of one-way information flows, and the standardization of culture on the basis of increasingly heteronomous sources for the neighbourhood residents. (p.319)

The third involves the search for "increasing power for local government, neighbourhood decentralization, and urban self-management" (p.320).

Castells's hypothesis is that a true urban social movement can only come into existence if it manages to combine these three axes (pp.322-3). Furthermore

> while urban social movements must be connected to the political system to at least partially achieve its [sic] goals, they must be organizationally and ideologically autonomous of any political party. (p.322).

This question of independence is important to Castells, because he conceptualises urban social movements as essentially **extra-institutional**. He believes that fundamental change is possible only if it comes from outside the existing institutional arrangements. As he puts it:

> In fact the crucial theoretical element to be emphasized here is the distinction of levels in the social organization between social movements and the political system. the political system is aimed at the state, is dependent upon the state, and is a part of the state. Therefore to some extent it institutionalizes some forms of social domination and accepts the rules of bargaining within such forms. At the other end of the scale, social movements exist, develop, and relate to civil society, and are not necessarily limited to, or bound by, the rules of the game and the institutionalization of dominant values and norms. This is why social movements are the sources of social innovation while political parties or coalitions are the instruments of social bargaining. (p.294)

To what extent can a theory of local politics be built on this conception of urban social movements? In such a theory, urban politics in contemporary society would be seen as being based on the three key axes of collective consumption, communal identity, and political decentralisation. The task of urban political analysis would be to investigate how mobilisation around these axes intersects with the institutional system and in what situations the right combination of ingredients exist to generate an urban social movement.

As before, it is not certain that this delimits a peculiarly "urban" kind of politics. Mobilisations around "collective consumption", in the generic sense of demands for state services, can occur in urban or rural contexts. Similarly, mobilisations around communal identity and political decentralisation are not uniquely "urban" phenomena. In South Africa,

the demands by certain "black spot"[3] communities for upgrading, social services, protection of their existing communities and more local decision-making power would seem to be paradigmatic cases of the combination of all of the three dimensions. Yet these hardly represent the makings of "urban" social movements.

Furthermore the criteria also do not distinguish between "local" and "regional" kinds of politics. Many regional movements throughout the world combine the three axes - e.g. demands for better facilities in the region, demands for the protection of the communal identity of the region and political decentralisation. The Basque separatist movement would probably fit this broad description as well as the Madrid Citizen's Movement that Castells analyses in detail.

Conclusion: Urban politics, community organisation and dissidence

Despite the vast differences between Fischer and Castells, there are some common threads which can be teased out. In different ways they both place the question of community at the centre of urban political analysis - Fischer in the idea that sub-cultures are the key feature of urban life and the central driving force of urban politics; Castells in the emphasis on community as one of the organising axes for urban movements. Indeed, one way of reading Castells would be as proponent of the idea that one of the major tasks of urban social movements is to constitute the residents of a city as a community.[4]

The work of both theorists poses the question of the processes by which such communities become constituted. In Fischer's work this arises as the problem how sub-cultures come into existence. In Castells this is the question how urban social movements arise out of the dynamics of "city, community and power". Significantly, this also is the weakest point in their accounts.

Finally, as noted at the outset, both accounts pose the question of the relationship between urban politics and social change. Both see urban space as the space of dissidence. In Fischer this is explicit. In Castells it is always close to the surface. In his discussion of the Madrid

Citizen Movement he suggests that the broader process of democratisation in Spain was predicated on its success (cf endnote 138, p.421).

The identification of urban movements with dissidence goes further than this, however. Castells suggests that in the face of the retreat of democratic socialist ideals (and he was writing in 1982) urban movements represent the hope for a better society:

> So, faced with an overpowered labour movement, an omnipresent one-way communication system indifferent to cultural identities, an all-powerful centralized state loosely governed by unreliable political parties, a structural economic crisis, cultural uncertainty, and the likelihood of nuclear war, people go home. Most withdraw individually, but the crucial, active minority, anxious to retaliate, organize themselves on their local turf. ... So when people find themselves unable to control the world, they simply shrink the world to the size of their community. (pp.330-1)

These movements are not capable of changing the world:

> When they try to impose their programme, they become a counter-society, and collapse under the combined pressure of multinational capital, a mass media system, and the bureaucratic state.
> Urban movements do, however produce a new historical meaning - in the twilight zone of pretending to build within the walls of a local community a new society they know to be unattainable. And they do so by nurturing the embryos of tomorrow's social movements within the local Utopias that urban movements have constructed in order never to surrender to barbarism. (p331)

Notes:

1. This incidentally also demonstrates a weakness in Fischer's definition of the "urban". It is unable to differentiate between contexts such as the prison, army or labour camp and "cities".

2. As an aside, it might be noted that Castells's idea that there is such a unified urban meaning must be a relic of his structuralist past.

3. "Black spots" are rural black communities who have title to their land, but who are facing expropriation because of the state's attempt to consolidate "homeland" boundaries.

4. There is a strong millenarian element, very reminiscent of Marx, in some of Castells's writings. The concluding paragraph of ***The City and the Grassroots*** reads:

> Our hope and our bet is that, notwithstanding the threatening storms of the current historical conflicts, humankind is on the edge of mastering its own future, and therefore of designing its good city. At last, citizens will make cities. (1983, p.336)

4. Location, land use and urban planning

Several theorists have pointed to the role that the land market plays in urban development and urban politics. In these theories attention is paid particularly to processes involving land use changes, land speculation and rent extraction. Conflict abont these processes and the attempts to regulate this through urban planning are seen as central in urban politics.

Scott: The urban land nexus

Perhaps the most systematic attempt to build a theory on the category of urban land has been that by Scott (1980). He develops the concept of the "urban land nexus", which may be seen as "a structured assemblage of *dense polarized differential locational advantages* through which the broad social and property relations of capitalism are intermediated" (p.4).

The starting point for Scott's analysis is the capitalist mode of production as:

> [T]he notion of the urban land nexus is highly derivative: it represents a sort of by-product of a prior theoretical analysis of the structure and meaning of capitalist society generally. (p.3)

In trying to explore the underlying structure of capitalist economies, Scott follows the neo-Ricardian input-output analysis. Into this system of equations, he introduces transport costs. By assuming that all produce is sold through a central market, he shows that the land use pattern that results will be the classic von Thünen concentric zone pattern.

Land rent emerges in this model as the result of the competitive bidding by different entrepreneurs for advantageous locations. In this way, the advantages of lower transport costs are eventually taxed away in the form of higher rents.

Scott shows how this model can be used to describe land use changes. In particular he shows that there is a tendency for intensive land use change to occur towards the centre of each land use zone (cf pp.42ff). In this kind of change, more capital or labour inputs are used to boost

overall production, while keeping space usage the same. In other words, input and output per unit of space increases. Extensive land use change, by contrast tends to occur towards the periphery of the land use zone (pp.47ff).

This analysis is then complemented by an examination of the locational logic of companies and households. As far as the former is concerned, the central hypothesis that Scott advances is:

> As urban industrial firms adopt increasingly capital-intensive production technologies so (with branch of production held constant) they tend to locate further and further away from the centre of the city. (p.101)

The reasons he advances for this, is that on the one hand land prices near the centre of the city are very high, whereas wage rates are relatively low. To the extent to which companies can free themselves from their reliance on labour, they can therefore take advantage of the relatively cheaper land prices in the suburbs. By contrast, labour-intensive industries are actually compelled to search out central locations, in order to minimise their wage bills.

On the question of residential location, Scott notes the well-known tendency that urban population density decreases with distance from the centre of the city. Unlike neoclassical urban economic theory, however, which views this pattern as the result of the

> indifference of the consumer as between (a) high accessibility to the city centre combined with reduced living space and (b) low accessibility combined with expanded living space (p.117)

Scott asserts that

> the choices are ... quite certainly not created subjectively, but are given by the innate logic of the urban system within the capitalist mode of production. (p.118)

This logic is that which dictates that intensive land uses tend to occur towards the city centre and extensive land use towards the periphery.

However, residential space is also characterised by its differentiation into neighbourhoods and communities. Scott explains this as the outcome of the reproduction processes specific to capitalist society (p.120).

> Urban neighbourhoods, as such, function as foci of socialization and reproduction in three quite distinctive senses: (1) they help to underpin the rearing and nurturing of

> children in socially functional ways; (2) they facilitate the development of active networks of social and ideological relationships among groups of individuals with similar life experiences and life expectations; and (3) they signal and in turn partly determine a particular level of social status. ...
> In each of these ways, neighbourhoods ease the process of socialization, enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of reproduction, and help to sustain the exchange value of different categories of labour. In view of these positive uses of urban neighbourhoods, it is scarcely surprising that various social groups tend to form distinctive geographical entities in the urban land nexus in a struggle - that is always more or less imperfect, however - to secure for themselves an exclusive stretch of territory and hence to generate a maximum possible realization of those positive uses. (pp.125,126)

The decisions made by companies and households make up the first moment of the urban land nexus. Scott is concerned to demonstrate that private decision making, left to itself, inevitably leads to all sorts of contradictions. Some of these breakdowns can be listed as follows: (1) externalities (spill over) effects; (2) land development bottlenecks; (3) the free rider problem; (4) the slow convertibility of land uses; (5) the timing and choice of land use; (6) the temporal myopia of private locational activity.

On the first issue, Scott notes:

> Because firms (and households) that propagate externalities across urban space are by definition absolved from taking them into account in their private calculations of costs and benefits, they themselves are liable to function at levels that are quite suboptimal in social terms. If they generate positive externalities (for example, crowds of shoppers that overflow into local retail stores) then they are likely to be less active than they would be if all social benefits were somehow or other accounted for in the decisionmaking process. If they generate negative externalities (for example, smoke or noise) then they are likely to be considerably more active than they would be if all social disbenefits were somehow or other accounted for in the decisionmaking process. (p.148)

The second problem arises from the fact that landownership in capitalist societies is typically fragmented and dispersed. This means that particularly larger scale redevelopments become time-consuming and costly, because the developer first has to assemble the required tracts of land. This can be particularly problematic if some landowners refuse to sell at all, or hold out for windfall gains (p.155).

The free rider problem is simply that certain improvements in the urban landscape will not

be made by private individuals or consortia, just because everybody will stand to benefit, irrespective of whether they contributed to the improvement or not. The other three problems are, firstly, that conversion of land use takes time, and so if inefficiencies develop in the land use structure, they tend to become locked into the landscape; secondly, that private development decisions cannot take into account any externalities that might flow from them, they are likely to occur at socially suboptimal times; thirdly, that private development decisions do not take developments in the longer term into account. With regard to the last point, Scott suggests that in certain cases locational decisions which are sub-optimal in the short run might be more efficient in the long run and vice versa.

Scott suggests that these kind of problems necessitate a collective intervention, i.e. urban planning.

> In a word, urban planning constitutes a decisionmaking calculus that seeks to mitigate the deleterious social effects and failures contingent upon the behavioural peculiarities of firms and households in urban space, and to steer urban society forward into collectively rational choices consistent with capitalist social and property relations. (pp.170-1)

State intervention is the second moment of the urban land nexus. In various ways it restructures the system of locational advantages. The clearest example of this would be the state's intervention in the transport network of cities. Nevertheless, Scott is at pains to insist that state intervention cannot resolve the inherent contradictions in the urban land nexus. This is because the fundamental driving force behind land use change is still private decision making. In particular

> Capital as a whole has always fundamentally opposed and sought to abridge the institution of planning while at the same time disconsolately conceding its social inevitability. In other words, planning is hemmed in by the prior structures and imperatives of capitalist society, and its power to resolve the problems of the urban land nexus is permanently and of necessity shackled. (p.188)

The interaction between private and public decision making is the third moment. This drives the overall development of the urban land nexus forward. One example that Scott provides of this interaction is that of the intensification of land uses at central locations, in particular the CBD. As a result of the resultant congestion, the state intervenes and invests large amounts of money in infrastructure in and around the CBD. This immediately increases the

advantages of a central location and triggers off a new round of land-use intensification, which in turn calls forth yet more state intervention, and so on. (pp.172-3)

> In this way (and notwithstanding the pervasiveness of planning in contemporary cities) the urban land nexus moves forward through time in a pattern of historical development that is ungoverned, and, effectively, ungovernable. (p.190)

The structure of Scott's argument can be crudely summarised as follows:

1. The structure of commodity producing economies is such that in the presence of transport costs it sets up a sytem of polarised differential locational advantages. In this system there will be a tendency for a continual intensification of land use towards the centre, with extensive land use changes towards the periphery.
2. Capitalism as a social system requires the reproduction of labour power in specific ways.
3. The locational logic of companies and households in capitalism can be largely explained with reference to (1) and (2).
4. Private locational decisions, however, inherently lead to certain breakdowns in the overall land use system. These breakdowns can impair the profitability of companies and the reproduction of labour power.
5. Urban planning needs to be understood as a response to these crisis tendencies.
6. The interaction of private and public decision making itself unleashes certain dynamics in the development of the urban land use system.

In Scott's account the only reference to politics is in the form of urban planning. In this respect his account shares the failings of other structuralist theories, viz. that the focus is on institutions and structures, rather than on actors and practices. Nevettheless it can be seen as a theory of "urban politics" in that it tries to determine what is distinctive about the state's intervention in the urban arena. Scott locates this specificity in the fact that it is an intervention designed to address breakdowns in land-contingent processes.

There are numerous problems with Scott's account. Perhaps the most fundamental one is the structuralist and functionalist orientation of the work. He conceptualises urban planning as the capitalist system's response to breakdowns in the land use system - yet there is no attempt to provide a mechanism by which this response is elicited. Similarly, there is no convincing analysis of how the reproduction processes required by the capitalist system become translated

into urban communities.

Furthermore, like other *a priori* constructions, Scott's model doesn't deal very well with the intrusion of contingent factors. One example of this would be the case of the relationship between company structure and location. In Scott's conception this is a relatively straightforward situation - the degree of capital intensity, the extent of transport costs and labour costs will determine location. Essentially this is a deterministic conception. The work of Massey on "spatial structures of production" (cf 1984, but also 1978, 1979), however, has drawn attention to the fact that there are many different ways in which companies can respond to the system of differential locational advantages. One of the ways is to restructure the organisation of the company itself and to hive different parts of it to locate in different areas (and parts of the city). Furthermore, as Massey notes:

> The evolution of different kinds of spatial structure, their establishment, maintenance and eventual collapse and change, are not simply determined by the characteristics of the labour process, the requirements of accumulation, the stages of the mode of production, or even the demands of capital. None of these things in themselves 'result in' specific spatial forms. Spatial structures are established, reinforced, combated and changed through political and economic strategies and battles on the part of managers, workers and political representatives. (Massey 1984, p.85)

Besides the fact that Scott's conception of the locational process is essentially unidimensional, it is this sense of the contestedness of locational processes which is also missing. In a country like South Africa where the political manipulation of the spatial structure is obvious, it is very difficult to conceive of urban planning as simply a response to breakdowns in the logic of private locational decisions. Urban planning is seen to be a tool to achieve certain political objectives - which are not simply congruent with the requirements of the capitalist mode of production.

Finally, it is not clear that Scott has isolated a peculiarly "local" or "urban" phenomenon. Obviously there is a system of "polarised differential locational advantages" operating within local areas. But "locational advantages" also operate at a regional level. Indeed, nothing in Scott's model depends on the "local" nature of the locational processes described. Most of the key "irrationalities" of private locational decisions, notably spillover effects and land development bottlenecks operate on a regional level just as much as within the urban context.

In this regard the rationale for "regional planning" could be seen as arising out of the need to control these breakdowns.

Lojkine: Urbanisation and capitalist development

The starting point for Lojkine's analysis (1976), is the development of capitalism as analysed by Marx. According to Marx, capitalism has the in-built tendency to continuously revolutionise its means of production. Part of this process is to increase both the **technical division of labour** within the workshop, as well as the **social division of labour**[1]. Lojkine argues that these same processes lead to the concentration of means of production and the general conditions of production (infrastructure, means of consumption) in cities. He tries to explain this by means of Marx's concept of co-operation.

Co-operation, as analysed by Marx (1976, Chs.13,14) allows for an increase in productivity even if there is no change in the techniques of production:

> Even without an alteration in the method of work, the simultaneous employment of a large number of workers produces a revolution in the objective conditions of the labour process. (Marx 1976, p.441)

Essentially this occurs because co-operation allows for a reduction in overhead expenditures, and for bigger tasks to be tackled. The juxtaposition of different phases of the production process also permits them to be performed more quickly and effectively.

Lojkine extends this concept from the workshop to society as a whole. Co-operation and the **detail division of labour** within the workshop are a means of increasing the productivity of the labour process within the workshop. By contrast, the **social division of labour** and the concentration of population, instruments of production and capital in the city are a means of increasing the productivity of labour within society as a whole. Lojkine claims that

> [The city appears] as the direct effect of the need to reduce indirect costs of production, and costs of circulation and consumption in order to speed up the rate of rotation of capital and thus increase the period during which capital was used productively. (p.127)

The major distinguishing marks between co-operation within the workshop and co-operation within society is that in the former it implies concerted planning, whereas in the latter it is marked by anarchy since it is the outcome of competition between independent commodity producers (Lojkine 1976, p.125). Lojkine says that this shows the contradictory character of urban agglomeration:

> An analysis of developed capitalist cooperation thus leads necessarily to the opposition between the *technical* necessity of socialization and the *social* necessity of competition. (pp.126-7)

This contradiction is the ultimate rationale for state intervention in Lojkine's analysis. More specifically, Lojkine discusses three contradictions which show how capitalist relations impose limits on any rational, socialised planning of urban development.

Firstly, he says that there are limits to the financing of means of communication and collective means of consumption (pp.128ff). These limits are: 1. urban infrastructure plays the same role within the city as machinery plays within the workshop. Investment in urban expenditure therefore has the effect of increasing the overall organic composition of social capital and thus enhancing the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. 2. many of the items of urban infrastructure are such that they cannot be profitably provided by private enterprise. The reasons for this are that the initial expenditures are too great and that the turnover period of the investment is too long; demand is too uncertain; and that many items cannot easily be provided in commodity form because their use values are collective in nature (e.g. street lighting).

Secondly, there are limits deriving from the anarchic competition between agents who use or transform urban space (pp.133ff). Essentially the point here is the same as that made by Scott - i.e. that individual locational decisions can lead to outcomes which are socially sub-optimal

Thirdly, there are obstacles arising out of the private ownership of land and the extraction of ground rent (pp.135ff). Lojkine lists two kinds of problems here. The first one is that of the fragmentation of ownership, which impedes rational planning of land use. The second one is that the appropriation of rent leads to the characteristic distribution of land values in capitalist cities, viz. high values towards the centre and low values towards the periphery. This has led

to the segregation of urban areas, with housing becoming separated from other land uses, and working class areas being located increasingly in the periphery (cf Lojkine 1977, p.152)[2].

These contradictions necessitate the intervention of the state. Firstly, the state takes over the financing of significant parts of urban infrastructure. Secondly, through urban planning, the state tries to co-ordinate various aspects of urban development. Thirdly, through financial intervention, limited expropriation and limited attempts at land collectivisation it tries to overcome the fragmentation of land. At the same time, Lojkine holds that these interventious are not capable of resolving these contradictions (1976, pp.143ff).

In essence, Lojkine sees the city as the collective workshop of the capitalist class[3]. However, the benefits of this concentration of means of production, infrastructure and consumption (e.g. in the form of agglomeration economies) is undermined by the nature of private, competitive decision making in capitalism. State intervention becomes necessary to address the resultant problems, although it cannot succeed in resolving them. In short, urban politics is about the attempt to reconcile the opposition between the "technical necessity for socialization" and the "social necessity for competition".

Many of the criticism made of Scott, could be directly applied to Lojkine as well. Firstly, the entire account is riddled with functionalist arguments - e.g. the development of cities is explained in terms of the benefits of co-operation for productivity; and the intervention of the state is explained by the need to resolve particular contradictions.

Secondly, Lojkine's understanding of locational processes is also too simplistic. Clearly there are important economic benefits to be derived from locating close to other producers. Besides the easier access to suppliers and markets, the spatial concentration of industries and labour also allows the emergence of specialised services - technical, financial etc.[4] Nevertheless, the benefits of "co-operation" that Lojkine makes so much of, nowadays do not always require spatial proximity. With electronic link-ups it is possible for people in different locations to work on the same project at the same time. The work of Massey on spatial structures of production which has already been referred to, makes this clear.

The reduction of transport costs also means that many of the benefits of an "urban" location - such as access to specialist services - are available throughout an entire region. This together with the fact that many production processes are now organised on a supra-local level, suggests that "cities" are no longer the primary spatial category through which production is organised. Consequently the idea of cities as collective workshops seems unconvincing.

Lamarche, Harvey: rent, residential change and urban politics

The concept of rent clearly plays an important role in theories of land use change. In Scott's system, for example, it is differential rent which leads to the sorting of land uses into zones. Nevertheless Marxists have on the whole not seen rent as a fundamental category. It is seen as a redistribution of surplus value between capitalist and landowner (even if this is mediated via the wages of the worker). Its existence is seen to be entirely predicated on the production of that surplus value at the point of production in the first place. Even in Scott's account (which does not rely on the labour theory of value) rent is a derivative category - it is determined as a result of the variation of transport costs across urban space.

Because rent has been seen as a deduction from surplus value, Marxists have been uncertain of the importance of conflicts around rent extraction. Even where these have been between workers and landlords, the ultimate victors have been seen to be the employers, who are thus able to keep wages down.

These interpretations pose the question why capitalists have not seen fit to simply abolish rent, e.g. by having all land controlled by the state. Lamarche (1976) seeks to answer this question by investigating the rationale of rent in capitalism. In his answer he points to phenomena addressed also by Scott and Lojkine, viz. that the efficient circulation of capital requires an efficient usage of space. He suggests that this leads to the emergence of a specialised fraction of capital, viz. **property capital** whose sole function is the planning and equipping of space in order to increase the efficiency of productive, commercial, financial and administrative activities (p.90ff).

It is because it contributes to a reduction in the time and labour involved in circulation

> that property capital, like the other specialized capitals, is entitled to share in the surplus-value created by productive capital (p.99).

According to Lamarche, property capital realises its profits in the form of two kinds of rent. Differential rent I is a function of the advantages offered by the site of the property (p.100). It is therefore a function of factors such as accessibility and positive spillover effects from adjoining land uses. Differential rent II is based on advantages contained within the property itself (p.101)[5]. In this case the developer will try to actively create positive spillover effects and agglomeration economies. Examples of this would be big shopping complex developments where the developers try to juxtapose residential space, office accommodation and particular kinds of commercial uses.

> [T]he more property capital becomes concentrated and extends its control over urban space, the more it is in a position to itself create the conditions of its own profitability, that is to say, to plan the organization of its property so that the nature and activities of the tenants of a given site are more mutually advantageous and, hence, maximise its profits. (p.103)

Lamarche also discusses speculation. This occurs if the potential value of the site (i.e. the possibility of extracting differential rent I) exceeds the value of the current use to which it is put. In this situation the present owner of the property is able to sell the property at a premium. These speculative gains accrue to the owner not due to any positive contributions made, but simply due to the fact that he or she is the owner and therefore has the right to withhold the property from the market. The profits that can be realised as a result of this power to withhold land Lamarche calls absolute rent.

Speculation has particular consequences for the way urban development proceeds. Lamarche argues that it is responsible for the episodic nature of urban redevelopment. When an area becomes "ripe" for land use change, the present owners are not motivated to immediately change the land use. Indeed, the longer they can hold on, while other developments proceed in the vicinity, the higher the possible speculative gains. Any income derived from the present land use (e.g. rents on accommodation) in the meantime is simply an additional bonus. If the present land use is accommodation and the potential future one is office block development, there will be also no incentive to maintain existing buildings. Consequently urban redevelopment is generally preceded by extensive urban decay.

Harvey (1985b, Chapter 3) also investigates processes of residential change from the standpoint of absolute rent. He equates absolute rent with class monopoly rent. This arises when there is a class of owners who have monopoly control over certain kinds of accommodation and are only willing to release this space if they receive a certain minimum return.

The segmentation of the housing market provides the required restriction of supply that underpins class monopoly rent. It is because people are trapped in particular submarkets that they are obliged to pay this rent to the landlord class. Harvey mentions two mechanisms by which this segmentation is maintained. The first of these is zoning (p.68) and the second is the way in which the major financial institutions underwrite or block housing finance in particular areas (pp.69ff; cf also Harvey 1977). The way this channelling of investment finance occurs can also lead to the reshuffling of the submarkets. In West Baltimore, for example, the lending policies of these institutions made it difficult for individual homeowners to secure mortgages, yet speculators had no problem in obtaining finance. These speculators then resold the properties under a Federal Housing Administration programme to poorer, largely Black people. The result was the "blow-out" of the existing middle income White population and the creation of a new submarket. Large speculative gains were made in the process (1977 pp.132ff).

Unlike neoclassical accounts which try to explain the segmentation of residential space as the outcome of consumer choice, Harvey is therefore concerned to argue that

> By structuring and restructuring the choices open to people, by creating distinctive decision environments, the urbanization process forces new kinds of choice independently of spontaneously arising predilections. (1985b, p.80)

The reasons why financial institutions act in ways to impose these choices is explained not merely by the desire to extract class monopoly rents, but by the overall imperatives of capitalist accumulation.

Their actions are seen as bolstering a particular model of urbanisation, viz. that characterising the United States since the 1940s - suburban sprawl linked to single family dwellings and private motor transport. This model is seen as having been particularly effective in boosting

consumerism, and so contributing to economic growth and stability (cf 1977).

Harvey presents a model in which land use change is essentially determined by finance capital. Finance capital, in its quest for economic growth promotes a particular kind of urbanisation. It segments residential space and in the process creates communities:

> in producing new modes of consumption and new social wants and needs, the urbanization process concomitantly produces new distributive groupings or consumption classes, which may crystallize into distinctive communities within the overall urban structure. (1985b, p.81)

At the same time in its search for speculative profits and in its quest to maintain the suburhanisation drive it disrupts communities.

Politics does not play any overt role in either Lamarche's or Harvey's account of the urban process. In Lamarche the state's urban planning machinery is seen as completely subservieut to the interests of property capital:

> Let us say for the time being that planning by the political instances is real in as much as it forms part of the logic of property capitalism. The development plans drawn up by municipal planning departments can only be realized if they are subordinated to the interests of the developers. (p.103)

Similarly in Harvey's conception the state appears as really an appendage of finance capital.

Conflict does arise in their accounts - but only as reaction to the disruptive effects of the processes of land use and neighbourhood change. These kinds of conflict are clearly endemic in modern capitalist societies. They can also be highly explosive. Nevertheless their status within the theories presented by Lamarche and Harvey is not clear. Nowhere in their accounts is there any indication that such conflicts could actually derail the logic of the capitalist urban process.

Urban politics seems therefore to be largely epiphenomenal - the froth generated by the operation of an autonomous logic of capital accumulation within urban areas. The study of urban politics would in this case seem to be a fairly pointless undertaking, unless as an exercise in demystification, i.e. to reveal the "real" logic underlying the surface conflicts.

Conclusion: The limits to structuralism

The contributions reviewed in this section are similar in many respects. They all seek to explain urban dynamics in terms of the logic of capital. They adopt a functionalist approach to the explanation of state actions. They explain how the logic of the capitalist urban process leads to conflict.

The key weakness of all these accounts is their inability to theorise the significance of this conflict. Having started from structuralist starting points, how does one accommodate human practices?

Notes:

1. The distinction between detail and social division of labour is essentialy an empirical and contingent one. The former refers to the division of labour within a workshop or factory. Its distinguishing feature is that the relations between the different parts of the division of labour will be consciously planned and regulated by the management. The social division of labour is the division of production into a number of autonomous production units which exchange their products through the market. The one type of division of labour might become transformed into the other one - either when a number of formerly autonomous production units come under centralised control, or when a formerly integrated production process is parcelled out to independent workshops.

2. This situation is the reverse of the American one, where the poorer neighbourhoods are generally located near the city centre.

3. Clearly cities also exist in non-capitalist societies. Lojkine says that this is due to the fact that cities are the result of a division of labour within society (and not within the productive unit). A social division of labour is, however, not peculiar to capitalism. This also explains the apparent autonomy of urban phenomena. (p.124)

4. For a discussion of these agglomeration economies, see Friedmann p.29.

5. Harvey (1985b, Chapter 4) also provides a discussion of the concepts Differential Rent I and II. These concepts are ultimately derived from Marx's analysis of rent, although Marx only discussed rent as applied to agriculture. Lamarche and Harvey both adapt these concepts to the urban context. On the whole I find Lamarche's treatment clearer.

5. Uneven development, political economy and class

Duncan and Goodwin (1988) have argued that the concept of uneven development has to be central to an understanding of the place and role of the "local state". In this they draw on the work of the school of Marxist geographers, in particular that influenced by Harvey. In this section I intend to review those contributions which in some way utilise the concept uneven development in their account of urban politics. The status of the concept "uneven development" itself is, however, something that cannot be evaluated here in any kind of detail.

Harvey: The geopolitics of capitalism

The starting point for Harvey's analysis is the capitalist "accumulation process". In "The Urban Process under Capitalism: A Framework for Analysis" (1985b, pp.1-31)[1], he develops the idea that there are three circuits of capital. The **primary circuit** is the one concerned with the production of commodities. It is in this circuit that absolute and relative surplus value is produced. Harvey believes that there is a fundamental tendency towards overaccumulation in capitalist production. This crisis of overproduction can manifest itself in a number of ways - overproduction of commodities; falling rates of profit; surplus capital, i.e. capital that cannot be profitably invested; and surplus labour. According to Harvey, one of the ways in which this crisis can be alleviated, is by switching some of the excess funds into the secondary circuit.

The **secondary circuit** consists of investment in goods which are required as aids for production and consumption, but which are not themselves direct inputs. These are: fixed capital items used directly in production (machinery); the built environment for production (e.g. factory buildings, transportation networks for transporting raw materials); consumer durables (e.g. stoves and washing machines), and the built environment for consumption (e.g.

housing, sidewalks).

Finally, the **tertiary circuit** consists of investments in science and technology on the one hand; and various social expenditures on the other. In different ways these are all concerned with making labour more productive and compliant.

Harvey believes that there is a tendency for capitalists to underinvest in the secondary and tertiary circuits. So, although these circuits can absorb some of the excess capital generated in the primary circuit, it is very difficult for individual capitalists to switch investment flows to do this:

> The barriers to individual switching of capital are particularly acute with respect to the built environment, where investments tend to be large-scale and long-lasting, often difficult to price in the ordinary way, and in many cases open to collective use by all individual capitalists. Indeed, individual capitalists left to themselves will tend to undersupply their own collective needs for production precisely because of such barriers. Individual capitalists tend to overaccumulate in the primary circuit and to underinvest in the secondary circuit. (1985b, p.7)

As a result, the state and financial institutions play a crucial role in mediating capital flows between the primary and secondary circuits. The way in which this occurs has the effect of integrating the development of the built environment into the overall rhythms of the capital accumulation process. Harvey produces some evidence that major economic crises are preceded by speculative building booms (cf pp.15ff). In his opinion this is due to desperate attempts on the part of capitalists to get rid of the surplus capital which has built up in the primary circuit. This displacement into the secondary circuit is, however, only a temporary solution. At some stage the secondary circuit will have absorbed as much capital as it can, and at that stage the crisis will re-emerge - this time on a larger scale, because it will now encompass also the secondary circuit.

While on the one hand the development of the built environment becomes dependent on the global accumulation process, the built environment functions in particular ways to facilitate that accumulation process. Harvey argues that the built environment can be regarded as the collective fixed capital of all capitalists. In the same way that the fixed capital (machinery) employed within the production process determines the productivity and efficiency of

production, so too does the built environment.

Perhaps the clearest example of this is the case of transportation networks. The efficiency of these will determine the speed with which commodities can circulate and hence the profitability of companies. However, it is not only the speed of circulation which is at issue, but also its geographical reach - it is only with the advent of global communications systems that the accumulation process itself became global.

While the transportation systems enable space-time barriers to be overcome, Harvey points out that they also introduce new barriers. These arise, because these infrastructures represent an investment which cannot easily be written off. This point can, perhaps, be understood best by analogy with fixed capital employed in production.

If a capitalist has invested in a particular machine, and newer, more productive technology is introduced before the presently used machinery is fully amortized, she is faced with a dilemma. Introducing the new technology will mean a loss on the value of currently employed equipment; failure to do so means falling behind in capitalist competition.

Harvey argues that the built environment for production poses similar dilemmas - except in this case not for individual capitalists, but groups of capitalists organised through the local state. The productive infrastructure of a given place helps to determine the competitiveness of industries located there. New developments, for example in transportation technology, will pose the question whether the existing infrastructure should be remodelled, or kept intact.

> Capitalist development has therefore to negotiate a knife- edge path between preserving the exchange values of past capital investments in the built environment and destroying the value of these investments in order to open up fresh room for accumulation. Under capitalism there is, then, a perpetual struggle in which capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to have to destroy it, usually in the course of a crisis, at a subsequent point in time. (Harvey 1985b, p.25)

The implication of these kind of decisions are fairly important for the future development of any place. "Competitive" localities will tend to attract new industries - thus helping to share out the tax burden of past investments and also improving the employment prospects of its

residents - while "uncompetitive" ones will tend to stagnate or slide into an economic depression, with loss of jobs etc.[2]

This competitive pressure is the basis for the formation of regional or local "pro-growth" coalitions (cf Harvey 1985b, Chapter 6; 1985c). These coalitions tend to be multi-class in nature, because it is in the interests of all residents of a place, and not merely its capitalists, to protect current investments in physical and social infrastructures[3].

According to Harvey, these class coalitions arise not merely to defend infrastructural investment. They also play a specific role in managing the crisis tendencies inherent in capitalism. As noted above, Harvey believes there is an immanent tendency in capitalism towards overaccumulation. There are two ways in which this tendency can be combated. The first is temporal displacement - this involves, for example, ploughing excess productive capacity into infrastructural development through deficit financing. The problem with this solution, is that while it manages to get rid of current excess production, somebody at some stage has to pick up the tab for it.

The second strategy is spatial displacement. This would involve, for example, the export of surplus capital to another region. This strategy also has its limits. If it is to absorb significant amounts of capital, the less developed region will have to be allowed to develop a substantial economic capacity - but this would turn it into a potential competitor.

Urban class coalitions thus perform a fundamental geopolitical role within the overall development of capitalism. On the one hand, as "pro-growth" coalitions, they create the infrastructural framework necessary for capital accumulation. This type of investment can also be a temporal "fix" for the crisis tendencies in capitalism. On the other hand, through competition with other coalitions (e.g. trade wars, competition for investment) and in their search for spatial strategies to resolve the problem of overaccumulation (e.g. through geopolitical expansionism, export) they drive the global accumulation process.

Urban politics, however, is not simply about the competitive position of a particular urban economy vis-a-vis the rest. It is also about protecting what Harvey calls the "structured

coherence" of a place.

The concept of structured coherence is used by Harvey to explain the unique character of each location (cf 1985b, Chapter 6; 1985c). The starting point for Harvey's analysis is the fact that there are definite spatial constraints on the exchange of labour power. A fundamental limiting factor is the length of the working day. As a result labour markets are spatially bounded. Different labour markets will have different qualities and mixes of skills.
Locational decisions by capitalists will involve considerations not only of the level of infrastructural provision at a particular place, but also the qualities of its labour market. A favourable location can be as much a source of excess profits as technological advances[4].

While relocation can be quite profitable to individual capitalists, this is an option which is generally not open to all capitalists. In the first place, there are significant costs attached to relocation - not least having to write off the investments which a company has made in the physical and social infrastructure of a particular area. Secondly, many capitalists are locked into production processes in which they are dependent on other companies - suppliers, sub-contractors etc. In this situation an individual move is difficult.

In view of these constraints, Harvey suggests that capitalists are constantly tempted to establish controls over the speed of technological and spatial change. At one level this is to ensure the security of the investment. No capitalist is willing to invest large amounts if this investment will be made technologically or locationally obsolete within a short period. The larger and the more long-term the investment, the more this holds. Therefore there are pressures on capitalists to try to control technological or locational innovation.[5]

Another reason why some capitalists are tempted to control locational change, is that if they are favourably located, this is a competitive advantage. So, for example, if a company is tapping into a labour market with particular attributes (e.g. specialised skills), it will be tempted to keep competitors out.[6]

To the extent to which particular capitalists develop a relatively stable position within a particular urban labour market, the elements for the "structured coherence" that Harvey talks

about, are given. Roughly speaking, a particular combination of technological mixes and attributes of the labour force come to define a particular character for the area - including particular models of consumption, standards of living, social relations, attitudes to working etc. (1985b, p.140). Urban areas, therefore, become differentiated not only due to different mixes of activities and qualities of labour power, but also by their overall "way of life".

The concept of "structured coherence" can perhaps be understood best with reference to the "spatial division of labour" (cf Massey 1978, 1979, 1984). As Massey notes:

> The term is introduced in order to make a point. The normal assumption is that any economic activity will respond to geographical inequality in the conditions of production, in such a way as to maximise profits. While this is correct, it is also trivial. What it ignores is the variation in the way in which different forms of economic activity incorporate or use the fact of spatial inequality *in order to* maximise profits. This manner of response to geographical unevenness will vary both between sectors and, for any given sector, with changing conditions of production. ... Moreover, if it is the case that different industries will use spatial variation in different ways, it is also true that these different modes of use will subsequently produce/contribute to different forms of geographical inequality. (1979, p.234)

As an example of a "spatial division of labour", Massey gives that associated with the shift to part process production processes. In this different parts of the production process, within one company, are located in different locations:

> One use by capitals of such spatial differentiation is increasingly based on the geographical separation of control and R&D functions from those direct processes of production still requiring skilled labourers and of these in turn from mass-production and assembly work requiring only semi-skilled labour-power. ... This third stage of production is increasingly located in areas where semi-skilled workers are not only available (since they are everywhere), but where wages are low, and where there is no tradition - at least among these workers - of militancy. ... the 'second-stage' of production is typically located in the old centres of skilled work - primarily nineteenth century industrial towns and cities ... Finally, the central metropolitan regions (such as London, Paris) are typified by the presence of control functions, research, design and development, and by the significant presence of managerial and technical strata (it is this presence, rather than the absence of manual work, which is distinctive). (1978, pp.117-8)

The way Massey envisages the process whereby a spatial division of labour is established and transformed, is as a series of "rounds" of investment. In each period, the existing geographical distribution of infrastructure, qualities of labour markets etc., will determine where different

types of new investment will be concentrated. This new investment is then like a new layer of sediment deposited on the existing surface.

> The combination of successive layers will produce effects which themselves vary over space, contributing to a new form and geographical distribution of inequality in the conditions of production, as a basis for the next round of investment. ... [T]he social and economic structure of a given local area will be a complex result of the combination of that area's succession of roles within the series of wider, national and international, spatial divisions of labour. (1978, p.116)

The "structured coherence" that Harvey talks about, can be seen as the way in which a particular mix of infrastructure, economic activities, qualities of labour power and social structure define the uniqueness of a place within the broader spatial division of labour. This position is, however, not static, as both Harvey and Massey point out.

Urban class coalitions are therefore formed not only around questions of inter-locality conflict, but about questions related to protecting or improving the particular "structured coherence" obtained within a particular area (p.148). Such coalitions are, however, inherently unstable, because there are always different possibilities about how this can be done. These different options imply different distributions of costs and benefits to groupings within the urban area. A strategy to expand manufacturing might be based on keeping social costs and wages low; while one which attempts to attract commercial and tourist establishments might have to discourage heavy industry.

According to Harvey, this nature of urban coalitions explains the fluid character of urban politics. To some extent urban politics can be seen as experimental - trying to develop new models of consumption and production which will keep the diverse components of urban coalitions together. This experimentation is in itself an important contribution of the urban process to the global process of accumulation (pp.157-8).

The various strands of Harvey's argument can perhaps be summarised as follows:

1. In capitalism, the development of the built environment follows the overall rhythms of the capital accumulation process. In particular, shifts in investment flows into and out of the built environment are crucial.

2. The built environment itself, however, plays a vital role in the accumulation process. As

collective fixed capital, it determines the productivity of capital and its speed of circulation.

3. People with an investment in the social and physical infrastructure of an area clearly have an interest in protecting the value of their investment.

4. The nature of investments in a particular place and the characteristics of its labour market are the basis for giving a "structured coherence" to a place, i.e. defining what makes it unique within the overall spatial division of labour. This "structured coherence" embraces most social relations.

5. The desire by capitalists together with other people resident in a particular place to protect its infrastructure and "way of life", or indeed to enhance it, is the objective basis for the formation of urban class coalitions.

6. These urban coalitions play a fundamental role in capitalism, because they can attempt to displace contradictions within the accumulation process as it occurs in their area, either onto other spaces or onto future generations. Conflicts between such urban coalitions are crucial in setting the parameters for the global process of capital accumulation.

7. Struggles about the terms on which a class coalition becomes created will in turn help to define what kind of "structured coherence" is created.

Urban politics, then, is essentially about three things: protecting and redefining the production and consumption pattern of a given locality; inter-locality conflict; and regulating the accumulation process within an urban economy. Fundamental to everything, however, is the global accumulation process. Harvey says that even the uniqueness of a particular place

> has to be seen as historically and geographically contingent. The combinations, arrived at through voluntaristic and autonomous struggles, are in the end contingent upon processes of capital accumulation and the circulation of associated revenues in space and time. (1985b, p.159)

This single-minded focus on the accumulation process has the virtue of bringing out some of the global constraints on developments within particular areas. Furthermore Harvey's analysis has made a signal contribution to Marxist theory by demonstrating the important temporal and spatial dimensions to processes such as capital accumulation.[7]

At the same time this preoccupation is also the most critical failing of Harvey's account. Capital accumulation ends up explaining absolutely everything. Autonomous human

intervention seems to be admitted only in so far as it provides the experimentation in consumption and production styles on which the capital accumulation process feeds.

The problem goes deeper than a latent functionalism, however. Central to Harvey's account of the capital accumulation process is the classic Marxist Labour Theory of Value. This theory is, however, now widely held to be untenable (cf Steedman 1981, Cohen 1981). The collapse of the labour theory of value takes out a number of central struts in Harvey's analysis. Chief among these is the idea that there is an inherent tendency towards overaccumulation in capitalism.[8] Without this thesis, the idea that there is a need to search for a "spatial fix" to capitalism's internal contradictions lacks support.

What compounds these problems, is that Harvey's use of Marxian economics is somewhat idiosyncratic. In particular, his conception of different "circuits" of capital is unorthodox. In classic Marxian economic theory what distinguishes commodity production from other kinds of production is that it is production for the market. In this sense Harvey's "secondary circuit" is just as much commodity production as the "primary circuit" - it doesn't matter that the commodities produced in the "secondary circuit" are used as inputs in "primary" commodity production.[9] The distinction that Harvey wishes to make between these kinds of production, would be known in classic Marxian theory as a distinction between different **Departments** of commodity production.

By contrast, Harvey's "tertiary circuit" would not be a circuit of capital accumulation at all. Rather, it would be an example of the division of surplus value between different actors (capitalists and state), after it has been extracted at the point of production.

This all makes Harvey's account of the processes of capital flows into and out of various "circuits" and the crises associated with this highly problematic. Even if it is true that investment flows into the built environment can be observed to follow particular patterns, this observation cannot be explained with reference to crises in a broader abstract accumulation process and attempts to switch funds from one circuit to another. Furthermore, in the absence of a convincing explanation about how and why capital shifts geographically and from one "circuit" to another, the lack of human agency in Harvey's analysis becomes an even greater

problem.

Despite these problems, there are many elements of Harvey's account which remain of interest. Perhaps Harvey's most lasting contribution to the field of urban politics is the idea that urban politics is about protecting or transforming the position that the urban area occupies within the overall spatial division of labour. There can be two components to this: on the one hand, transforming the nature of the urban area itself, in order to make it more competitive. This can be done either by improving its infrastructure or its social relations and qualities (e.g. labour discipline, skills). On the other hand, the relative power of the area against others can be altered through extra-economic pressure. Examples of this would be the use of political power to benefit the area (e.g. through extra state expenditure in the area).

While this is undoubtedly a fruitful angle from which to analyse the activities of particular urban coalitions and pressure groups, it is not clear that it defines a peculiarly "urban" type of politics. Very similar processes are at play in inter-regional and indeed in international competition. Harvey himself would admit this - after all his article "The Geopolitics of Capitalism" (1985c) is explicitly about inter-regional competition.

The way that Harvey anchors these processes to "urban" areas is via the concept of the urban labour market. It is because particular labour markets are distinctive that there are differences between urban areas. Furthermore, it is because jobs can be substituted more readily within a given labour market, that job conditions and performance criteria will tend to become standardised within it. This in turn is a basis for the area's "structured coherence".

The concept of a local labour market is, however, problematic, as pointed out by Peck (1989). In the first place, travel-to-work patterns tend to intersect and overlap. Local labour markets are therefore difficult to demarcate empirically. More specifically,

> different social and labour market groups exhibit quite different commuting behaviour. ... Specifically, such travel-to-work areas do not adequately reflect the labour market experiences of groups such as women and professional workers. (Peck 1989, p.43)

Peck also argues that the pervasive feature of labour market segmentation means that the idea of a local labour market is conceptually incoherent:

> the labour market is a sharply differentiated structure within which the process of job competition is marked by profound discontinuities. Many groups of workers residing in the same travel-to-work area simply do not compete with one another for local jobs. (p.54)

The problem is the assumption that two individuals residing in the same area are also automatically part of the same labour market. Mere spatial proximity to a job however does not entail that one is eligible for it, either in terms of formal qualifications or possession of the correct attributes (e.g. skin colour, religion, language).

The implications of this are twofold. Firstly, the idea that job conditions become standardised within an urban area is tenable only if all jobs belong to the same labour market. This, however, would be the exception rather than the rule. Furthermore as different labour markets will have different geographical extensions, the standardisation of conditions would occur across different spaces. For example, the conditions of certain professionals might become standardised regionally or even nationally, while that of particular types of unskilled casual labour might vary even within a metropolitan area. This, however, undermines Harvey's contention about the emergence of a "structured coherence" within urban areas.

The fact that urban labour markets are not necessarily internally cohesive, as well as the fact that they are not necessarily discrete from each other, leads to the second implication, viz. the idea of unified urban areas in conflict with each other also lacks support. It should be observed that the crucial mechanism or "glue" that holds urban coalitions together is local government. Local government boundaries do not, however, correspond to "urban areas" in the way that Harvey envisages these.[10]

In short, it seems that the contention that urban regions are the fundamental "geopolitical units" in the "uneven geographical development of capitalism" (1985b, p.155ff) is in need of several qualifications. In fact, it remains to be shown that urban regions are "units" of any kind of description.

In conclusion, Harvey's work is very suggestive in that it draws attention to broader processes within which urban regions are embedded. It doesn't seem, however, that his account offers a way of grounding a distinctive field of "urban" or "local" politics.

Duncan and Goodwin: The local state and uneven development

The point of departure for Duncan and Goodwin's analysis (1988; cf also 1982) is the crisis in central-local relations in Britain under the Thatcher government. However,

> In order to analyse the origins of the crisis one must show why specifically *local* state institutions developed in the first place. Furthermore, if - as we argue - local state institutions find their rationale in the fact that societies and nation-states have developed unevenly, so that there are specifically subnational or local variations in social structures and social relations, then we also need to seek the origins of this local specificity. (1988, p.xiv)

In their explanation of this local specificity Duncan and Goodwin develop their argument in a number of stages (cf 1988, Chapter 2). Firstly, they try to ascertain what difference spatial variation makes to social processes. Their conclusion is that "while spatial patterns are not causative in a generative sense these contingent effects can be crucial to how events and changes actually occur in practice" (p.46). This means that the investigation of spatial variation is vital in analysing social processes.

Secondly, they argue that the analysis of spatial variation is particularly important in the case of capitalist societies:

> Local variation is then built into the very nature of societies and their social mechanisms. This is particularly true of capitalism, for uneven development is a structurally based feature of its economic and social functioning, and in a capitalist world this will be the prime determinant of geographies at every scale, local as well as global. (p.61)

Their account of this "uneven development" is based on the work of Harvey (1985c) and Smith (1984), and essentially runs along the lines outlined in the previous section.

> The upshot of all this is that capital is constantly invested in creating environments - the productive, infrastructural and reproductive facilities (factories, roads and houses for example) necessary to produce surplus value and expand the basis of successful capitalism. But equally, capital is continually withdrawn from its built environment so that it can move elsewhere and take advantage of conditions now allowing higher profit rates. The created environment is then a mosaic at every stage of development - parts are being built, others are at every stage of devalorization (where its value gradually decays), and some elements are abandoned remnants of fixed capital now rendered valueless. (pp.63-4)

The state enters this picture essentially as the manager of this process of uneven development. According to Duncan and Goodwin "state institutions play a major role in people's attempts to organise and control uneven development" (pp.71-2). Furthermore this is where the "local state" comes in:

> State systems need to be developed at a local, subnational level if dominant groups are to confront fully the problems of the uneven development of societies and of nature. If this subnational response is to make any sense, then this local level must have some sort of autonomy in implementing policy or even in formulating it. The precise way of providing water-supply in South Wales or managing labour reproduction in the old Durham coalfield cannot be wholly reduced to national guide-lines and procedures. At the very least these must be adapted if local conditions are to be taken adequately into account. But this local autonomy will, by the same token, become a hostage to fortune. The uneven development of societies also means that class structures and other social relations are constituted spatially, sometimes in rather specific ways. Social groups and interests dominant locally may well be different from those dominant nationally or internationally and which make national and supernational state policy. (pp.72-3)

Uneven development therefore explains why central - local tensions seem to be a recurring phenomenon. Local states with some degree of autonomy are required to manage the process of uneven development. At the same time these local states come to reflect this uneven development themselves. This is particularly likely where local state institutions are elected structures. As a result they can serve as obstacles to central government. Furthermore, since the nature of spatial variation is itself subject to continuous change as a result of "uneven development", it is likely that central - local relations will have to be periodically restructured.

Where Duncan and Goodwin go beyond Harvey, is that they recognise that the analysis of spatial variation has to go beyond a purely economic analysis. In a section pregnant with possibilities - which are, however, not adequately realised - they introduce the idea that beside a "spatial division of labour" there might also be a "spatial division of the state" and "spatial divisions of civil society" (cf pp.73-6). They also suggest that perhaps there could be a "spatial division of imagined community", i.e. "people's own beliefs in locality even where actual local social interactions are unimportant" (p.75).

These concepts are then used to throw light on a variety of empirical research about local politics in Great Britain. This discussion shows some of the complexities in the relations

between the "spatial division of labour", the "spatial division of civil society" and how these impact on the "spatial division of the state", i.e. the local state.

> The basic point that emerges is that the effects of spatially distinct patterns of production will always be combined with, and mediated through, spatially distinct social practices arising in local civil society and sustained culturally through an 'imagined community'. (p.77)

What kind of theory of local politics can be distilled from Duncan and Goodwin's account? It is clear that their main focus is not to present any theory of the local state *per se*. Rather, they develop a theory of the relationship between national and local state.

What their account suggests, in fact, is that it is not possible to develop an abstract theory of the local state. An abstract theory could not say much more than "local state institutions find their rationale in the fact that societies and nation-states have developed unevenly" (p.xiv)[11]. Concrete investigations of local state activities would need to pay due attention to both national level political processes as well as local level pressures. It is in the analysis of the latter that concepts such as the "spatial division of labour" and the "spatial division of civil society" would become important. These explain why different "local areas" are different from each other and why therefore local state initiatives also differ from area to area.

Unfortunately, however, these concepts are only inadequately developed by Duncan and Goodwin. For example, the concept "spatial division of civil society" is explained as follows:

> The concept starts from the observation that in capitalist societies there is a diverse realm of social practices outside the realm of relations of capitalist production and also outside the realm of the state form. But this civil society is highly differentiated and the differentiation is constituted spatially. (p.75)

Unfortunately this explanation does not throw any more light on the matter. As the concept is introduced by analogy with the concept "spatial division of labour" one is tempted to think that the "spatial division of civil society" is about a non-random, i.e. structured, spatial distribution of social practices. It seems, however, that all that Duncan and Goodwin intend with the concept, is to draw attention to the fact that social practices do differ across space. But if one is talking about a purely contingent variation, why not simply call it the "spatial variation in civil society"?[12]

Similar points apply to the "spatial division of imagined community". Differences in local state policies, in so far as they are responses to variations in the "spatial division of civil society" or the "spatial division of imagined community" must therefore also be seen as essentially contingent. The analysis of such contingent variations would be of critical importance in any empirical analysis, but it doesn't provide a basis for theoretical reflection.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Duncan and Goodwin do see themselves as presenting a theory of the local state. In an earlier paper they state:

> Our essential aim is to develop an abstract account of the local state in capitalist society, which can then be used in the analysis of real situations. A successful theory should be able to relate historical differences and changes to those social processes crucial in causing such specific situations. And, if these crucial processes are different for national and subnational state institutions, then we can talk about a 'theory of the local state'. (1982, p.159)

Fundamentally, however, they consider the last condition to be met if it can be shown that "local social transactions take place in local state institutions, specific to local areas and autonomous from those taking place in the national state" (1982, p.159). What this leads to, however, is a theory that shows that local politics differs from area to area, i.e. that it is not simply "national politics" written small. It might even show that local politics necessarily varies across space. It doesn't show, however, whether there is anything distinctive about "local politics". It proves that the "local" is indispensable to political analysis, but it doesn't indicate what the "local" is about (if, indeed, it is about anything at all) - and concepts such as "the spatial division of civil society" and "the spatial division of imagined community" do not clarify this issue.

Duncan and Goodwin's contribution should perhaps be best interpreted as a methodological one - how the actions of the "local state" ought to be analysed, rather than as a theory of what the "local state" is about. Indeed, the local state emerges not so much as a thing in itself, but in the intersection of national politics and locally distinct social relations[13]. This is a perspective to which I wish to return.

Cooke and Urry: Class and local politics

Cooke's analysis of what gave South Wales its regional specificity (Cooke 1985) is a useful supplement to the kinds of arguments advanced by Duncan and Goodwin. In brief, Cooke shows how a particularly strong working class movement emerged as a result of the combination of a number of factors: the nature of the productive base (coal and steel); the labour process; the nature of the capitalist class; the influence of specific social relations, such as particular gender relations, the nature of the transition from "rural" to "urban", questions of language and religion and peculiarities of the Welsh markets in coal and steel; and the influence of specific institutions, in particular trade unions, health associations and educational institutions. According to Cooke, the practices of the working class, and in particular the institutions it created, were crucial in reproducing a sense of a relatively cohesive region.

Cooke's analysis is a useful antidote to those accounts which tend to see "uneven development" as the result of the inexorable logic of capital. It stresses that the working class is not simply a passive tool in the hands of bigger forces.

Nevertheless, Cooke's conclusions are to some extent contested by Urry (1981, 1983, 1985; for a critique of Urry cf Harris, 1983). Urry's central argument is that the mobility of multinational companies and their power to play off localities against each other, has undermined the salience of regions. It has also had the effect of fragmenting the working class between localities.

Furthermore, Urry suggests that working class organisation itself has the tendency to split along local lines:

> One important reason for this stems from the tremendous problems faced by labour in its attempts to sustain collective action (see Offe and Wiesenthal, 1980). Broadly speaking capital, which has far less need to organize collectively, faces considerably fewer difficulties in sustaining collective action; while labour faces major problems in maintaining the absolutely essential forms of collective organizations. One way of generating an identity which can deflate the conventional instrumental costs of membership of labour organizations, is through developing and sustaining the distinctiveness of place, of the forms of work and skill of the workers resident within that place. (1983, p.125)

Urry is not concerned to develop a theory of local politics. Nevertheless, it is possible to read this comment as saying that local areas (and perhaps this should be broadened to include other subnational spaces) are the spaces of working class organisation.[14] Capital, by contrast, is seen to be organised more at national and international level.

This raises issues of considerable interest. There is clearly no reason why different classes should not be organised in spatially different ways. Indeed, it seems logical to presume that certain capitalist interests (notably finance) are organised internationally much better than other interests.

Nevertheless, it is not clear that the "local" or indeed the "regional" arena is particularly stamped by the working class. This might be true of certain areas, but it would probably not be a valid generalisation.

Where the work by Cooke and Urry becomes significant for political analysis is in that it draws attention to the way in which the different spatial organisation of classes potentially impacts on local politics.

Conclusion: Uneven development and local political analysis

The contribution of the uneven development literature to the study of local politics is perhaps chiefly in the way it draws attention to the interconnection between national processes and "local" ones. A key component in the development of this relationship is the investment process and so the concept of the "spatial division of labour" is clearly crucial.

However, the works of Duncan and Goodwin, Cooke and Urry in different ways stress the importance of the spatial variation in civil society. This, however, in turn raises the question how the "local" should be interpreted. How are the different spatial scales constituted? Cooke's and Urry's contribution suggest that the structuring of class and class practices are important factors.

At the end, we are not left with a theory of local politics, but with the analysis of a set of

relationships: between "local" civil society, "local" class actors and "local" state; between residents of one "local" area and other areas; between "local" state and central state; between residents of the area and the international capitalist investor community; and so on.

Notes:

1. This article was first published in the **International Journal of Urban and Regional Research** in 1978.

2. Smith (1984) argues that the way capitalism develops there will be a "see-saw" of investment - funds first flowing into an area only to be withdrawn from it at a later stage.

3. Cox and Mair (1988) also provide an account of the processes through which local pro-growth coalitions are formed. Central to their idea is the concept of **local dependence**, i.e. the idea that certain actors (such as capitalist firms, people) are dependent on the maintenance of certain social relations within a particular territory. The concept signals the fact that not all actors are able to follow a relocation strategy, and that therefore it is vitally important for some of them to engage in collective strategies to maintain the viability of their area, attract investment etc.

4. See Friedmann 1966 for an analysis of the role of location in economic development.

5. The patenting laws are examples of controls over use of technology. Tariff barriers are examples of control over location. Harvey makes the point that there may be trade-offs between control over technology or location: Companies which are highly competitive in the technological field (e.g. the computer industry) may try to establish some stability by establishing control over certain (geographical) markets. On the other hand, companies which are only weakly competitive technologically, may be highly competitive in local markets (e.g. builders) (Harvey 1985b, p.138).

6. Such attempts to "freeze" location and technology are, however, very vulnerable to disruption. In the first place, competing companies are constantly tempted to innovate technologically and locationally, to attain the excess profits that can be derived in this way. Secondly, Harvey argues that spatial fixity can also weaken the bargaining position of capitalists vis-a-vis the working class (1985b, p.138). The more a company becomes tied to a particular labour market, the more leverage can be exercised by the workers of that area. These considerations show that capitalists cannot afford to become too settled in or dependent on any location - especially since the more entrenched a company becomes in a particular location, the greater the cost to it from relocation.

7. In "Money, Time, Space, and the City" (1985a, Chapter 1), Harvey tries to indicate the importance of space and time for the analysis of concepts such as money and capital.

8. The collapse of the LTV of course does not show that there is no tendency towards overaccumulation. It does, however, imply that the idea that capitalism is characterised by a tendency towards overaccumulation needs to be argued for, and not simply invoked as given from the classical Marxian texts.

9. Incidentally, it also doesn't make a difference if the state pays for this kind of production. If, however, the state were to develop its own building industry and put in infrastructure in a non-commodified way, then the picture would be different. In this case, however, one would not be talking about circulation of capital any more. Capital, in classic Marxian terms, is by definition money deployed to generate more money (ultimately via commodity production).

10. This does not dispute the fact that one local government structure, for example the core city, can take on a lead role for the metropolitan area as a whole. Nevertheless, intra-metropolitan conflict between different areas about the growth path of the metropolitan area as a whole is just as common.

11. Note that this formulation is functionalist. Indeed, a central pre-occupation of Duncan and Goodwin's work is to answer the question:

> why have local state institutions which incorporate an electoral and democratic element emerged at all? Why, as it were, raise the whole problem of local government in the first place? (1982, p.169)

In other words, they seek to find a reason why local government is necessary in capitalist societies - i.e. the question they ask in itself suggests a functionalist answer.

12. Urry (1985, pp.39ff) also discusses the "spatial structuring of civil society". He provides a number of dimensions which influence whether a local civil society will emerge as a coherent "community".

13. One of the theoretical points made by Duncan and Goodwin is that the state should not be analysed as a thing but as a relation. Their account of the local state as presented in their 1982 article is developed from this perspective. I have not commented on this contribution here, because it properly belongs to the analysis of the state. It does not in itself lead to a theory of local politics or the local state.

14. His view of cities also suggests such an interpretation:

> Cities are less and less integrated into the production and reproduction of capital - these linkages take place across the urban boundary. Cities are more and more centrally significant as locations within which wage-labour is produced. (1983, pp.124-5)

This position is quite similar to Castells's idea that cities are the site of reproduction of labour-power.

6. Power, community and local state

Besides the approaches reviewed so far, there is an extensive literature which does not seek to develop a theory about a specifically "local" or "urban" politics. Rather these studies use the local arena to draw conclusions about the structure of or processes within the society as a whole. In these studies cities function as **locus** rather than as **focus** of the analysis.

Dahl, Polsby: The study of community power

The question that motivates the work of Dahl and Polsby is that posed in the title of Dahl's seminal study: Who governs? Their study of New Haven, Connecticut, is to some extent a response to the tradition of community power studies which claimed to find the existence of a local power elite which controlled major decisions within the community[1].

Polsby (1980) critically reviews this literature. In particular, he tests if the evidence produced in these studies actually supports five propositions commonly made in the stratification literature, viz.: 1. The upper class rules in local community life; 2. Political and civic leaders are subordinate to the upper class; 3. A single "power elite" rules in the community; 4. The upper-class power elite rules in its own interests; 5. Social conflict takes place between the upper and lower classes (pp.8-10). His conclusions are that not only does the evidence provided not support these contentions, but that there is actually evidence in the studies to support the opposite assertions.

He goes on to test the stratification theory against evidence from the New Haven study. In this study decision making processes were investigated in three issue-areas, viz. nominations to political office, urban redevelopment and public education (cf Dahl, 1961). This evidence indicated that while most decisions were the preserve of a relatively small group (the "political stratum") this did not constitute a power elite. In the first place the economic and social elite were not represented strongly in this group. Secondly it was not an inherently

closed group - recruitment into it was based on political interest and involvement. Thirdly the stratum was not a cohesive one. In fact different factions within it constantly vied for power. As elections, particularly for the position of Mayor, were important in determining who would ultimately wield power, these factions were concerned not to alienate public opinion. In this sense the rulers could only rule with the consent of the majority of the population.

Another important characteristic highlighted by Dahl and Polsby was the specialisation of decision making into issue areas. They found that with the exception of the Mayor virtually no other key decision maker had great influence outside his specific issue area. This also served to limit the power of any group of decision makers. Dahl suggests that at different stages there were different configurations of ruling coalitions in New Haven. The model that operated before the advent of Mayor Lee's victory in 1953 was that of "independent sovereignties that managed to avoid severe conflict by tacit agreement on spheres of influence" (p.190). Under Lee's leadership, this model was transformed to that of an executive-centred coalition.

> In this pattern, only the Mayor was a member of all the major coalitions, and in each of them he was one of the two or three men of highest influence. (p.200)

Dahl suggests that other patterns of leadership are also possible. For example, political competition between the Democratic Party and the Republicans in New Haven resembles that of "rival sovereignties fighting it out". Two other models would be that of "covert integration by Economic Notables" (the "power elite" thesis) and a "coalition of chieftains" (cf pp.184 ff).

Dahl and Polsby suggest that the significance of their work is that it draws attention to the way in which different resources are used in politics. Indeed, Dahl suggests that the main question that he seeks to answer is

> In a political system where nearly every adult may vote but where knowledge, wealth, social position, access to officials, and other resources are unequally distributed, who actually governs? (p.1)

His answer is that the effect of these inequalities is noncumulative, i.e. there is no one group or "power elite" which has such a control over political resources that it can control all or even most of the major decisions that are made within the community (p.228).

Polsby suggests that the following, among others, are resources which can be used as sources of power: 1. Money and credit; 2. Control over jobs; 3. Control over the information of others; 4. Social standing; 5. Knowledge and expertness; 6. Popularity, esteem, charisma; 7. Legality, constitutionality, officiality, legitimacy; 8. Ethnic solidarity; 9. The right to vote; 10. Time; 11. Personal (human) energy. (pp.119-120)

Besides the fact that there are different resources available, these can also be deployed with differing degrees of skill.

> The elaboration of the ways in which resources are employed enables the pluralist researcher to pay attention to what practical politicians customarily see as the heart of their own craft: the processes of bargaining, negotiation, salesmanship and brokerage, and of leadership in mobilizing resources of all kinds. (Polsby, p.120).

Clearly the conclusions reached by Dahl and Polsby are not designed to be applicable only to New Haven. Rather they are supposed to exemplify processes which might be at work in other communities as well. Chiefly, however, their work makes a number of methodological points about how "community power" ought to be investigated.

It is these methodological assumptions which have mainly come under attack. A key debate has been the question whether it is legitimate to restrict the investigation of power to an analysis of overt decision making. Several theorists have suggested that political **inactivity** can be as significant as political actions (cf Saunders 1979, Chapter 1). In the pluralist account of Dahl and Polsby political quiescence is taken as a sign of consent. However, what if it is a sign that the quiescent group simply does not have the power or confidence to make its views felt? Indeed, Dahl himself seems to countenance this possibility when he suggests that a certain **threshold** of resources is required below which it is difficult to wield political influence (p.238). He suggests that groups which are poor in resources can compensate for this by combining their resources. However, collective action raises major problems of its own, which means that it is not necessarily available to disadvantaged groups[2].

A related debate centres on the fact that the pluralist account equates interests with revealed preferences. If people choose to follow a particular action, it is assumed to be in their interest and if they do not actively pursue particular goals, it is assumed that they do not have an

interest in them. As Polsby notes a strict application of this principle would imply that statements such as "He acted against his interests" or "He was unaware of his best interests" would be nonsense (p.226). Polsby himself does not wish to be so rigid and so he tries to find ways of accommodating such statements while keeping the overall pluralist thrust intact. Saunders (1979, pp.45 ff) argues that interests can in many instances be determined objectively, i.e. independently of preferences. This, however, means that it becomes legitimate to enquire why groups whose interests are infringed do not act to promote their interests[3].

The implication of this is that studies of community power should not only look at overt exercise of power, but also at whether there are any subordinate groups whose interests are being violated. If such groups are passive this would need to be explained. It should be noted that such an approach would not necessarily reinstate the "power elite" thesis. The fact that certain groups might be excluded from the political process, does not prove that one cohesive group dominates.

In the context of this thesis another feature of Dahl's and Polsby's work needs to be highlighted. Nowhere in their accounts is any attempt made to define the category of "community". In practice, the "community" is assumed to be coterminous with the area of jurisdiction of the New Haven local authority. This means that power relations between residents of the surrounding suburbs and New Haven itself is something that falls outside the ambit of the study. That these relations are not in themselves trivial ones is suggested by the fact that many of New Haven's "Economic Notables" are resident in these areas (cf Dahl, pp.76-77). One would like to know whether this spatial structure has any implications for the distribution of power (as the work of Williams would suggest, for example).

Cockburn: The local state

The approach of Cockburn is diametrically opposed to that of Dahl and Polsby. Her central concern is to demonstrate that

> local councils don't spring from some ancient right of self-government but are, and under capitalism have always been, an aspect of national government which in turn

> is a part of the state. (p.2)[4]

Indeed, as indicated by its sub-title, the main thesis of her work is that local government is about the management of people, in the overall interests of capitalist reproduction.

Her discussion focuses on two developments in the policies of the Lambeth Borough Council. On the one hand, the introduction of corporate management and planning practices; and on the other, community participation programmes. On the former, she traces the internal reorganisation of local government in Lambeth. This was partly the result of a restructuring of local government in Britain as a whole. Its purpose was to make local government more effective by the introduction of business management techniques. Its effect was the "tightening of control in the hands of top officers and political power-holders" (p.33). Cockburn produces evidence to show that as a result, Labour Party backbenchers in the Council felt alienated from the decision making process.

On the question of community participation programmes, Cockburn suggests that various pressures on the local government induced the adoption of "the community approach". Indeed, she suggests that in some sense it was the other side of the corporate management coin: whereas the former involved an internal restructuring of the local state, the latter implied the restructuring the relationship between the local state and the "outside" (p.96, p.101).

Cockburn interprets the adoption of various community participation schemes essentially as attempts at controlling the client population:

> Lambeth is not very different from other urban areas in experiencing shifts in economic circumstances, changes in working class demands. So the state too seeks to 'bend the customer to its needs', the needs of government.
> Whereas the firm tries to reduce market uncertainty by controlling demand, by intelligent advertising and judicious product-design, the state uses participatory democracy and 'the community approach'. The applications may be different but the causes are similar and so are the means: *both are phases of corporate decision-making*. (pp.97-8)

She admits that "community work does bring with it new situations and new opportunities for working class gain" but "it also sometimes leads working class groups into incorporation and impotence" (p.112).

Cockburn does not provide convincing evidence that community participation functions in this way. In fact, her discussion of the fortunes of Lambeth's neighbourhood councils would even suggest otherwise (pp.139-157). The neighbourhood councils initially had direct access to the Lambeth Borough Council via a special sub-committee. This, however, led to problems, because these neighbourhood councils started criticising the functioning of the Lambeth Council:

> The neighbourhood councils pointed over and again to the two main weaknesses in the council's management system: planning and housing. To those councillors able to take a high-level view of community development it was possible to see that this was exactly the function that, if it were to serve the local state well, it would perform. It would show up the weak spots in the management system in such a way that the overall system might correct them - even offering some of the means. But, being human (notwithstanding the suspicions of some NCs), the Directors of these two particular departments and some others that were shown up by the debates on the sub-committee, were not prone to take this olympian and detached view of the good of the whole system. They felt personally threatened. (pp.148-9)

As a result the special sub-committee was scrapped, and the link to the neighbourhood councils was maintained instead through paid community development officers seconded to them, and through their ward councillors. Cockburn asserts that this example shows that

> The management gains offered by the community approach at any level of intensity bring with them costs and dangers for the local state. (p.153)

However, her own discussion would suggest that the dangers were perhaps less to the **local state** than to the officials within it and to some of its councillors - who felt their ward role undermined.

This unexpected intrusion of the human factor significantly weakens the thrust of Cockburn's argument, which views the role of the local state as structurally determined. At various points she is at pains to show that even if radical members are elected to the council they cannot really affect its operation (pp.168 ff), and if by some major fluke an entire council happens to become controlled by radicals, as happened at Clay Cross, this will only be a temporary aberration (p.50). Why then did the personal feelings of the Lambeth officials seemingly manage to override what seemed to be in the best interests of the system as a whole?

If the exercise in community participation was a management exercise at all, it needs to be asked - management by whom and for what purpose? Cockburn makes it clear that the

Lambeth officials had never seen neighbourhood councils as "theirs" (p.148). If anything, the officials seem to have been opposed to them, because they impeded efficient management (p.149). The origin of the idea clearly belonged with the Labour councillors. But if the initially rather woolly implementation of this idea is anything to go by (cf p.140) it seems that there was not a very coherent strategy behind it. This set of circumstances would suggest that the introduction of the neighbourhood councils had less to do with the technical demands of urban management than with the attempts of local Labour councillors to increase their grassroots legitimacy.

Even if it could be argued that community participation was management (perhaps of conflict or discontent) in some form or another, it is not clear that it was management in the interests of capital. This is true more generally of the functioning of the local state. While Cockburn continuously asserts that the local state is the handmaiden of capital this is nowhere demonstrated -unless something akin to the following argument is accepted as a "demonstration": Capitalism requires the reproduction of the labour force and the reproduction of capitalist relations. It also requires class conflict to be attenuated. The local state provides the services required to "reproduce the labour force". It also introduces "participation" to give workers a sense that they have a stake in the political system. Ergo it acts in the interests of capital - provided of course that it does not tamper with capitalist social relations in the process.

The problem with the functionalist logic of this position, is that it can be used to explain a wide diversity of policies - both the smashing of squatter groups or their incorporation into the political system. Indeed almost any policy short of revolution could be interpreted as a sophisticated exercise in the co-option of the working class. Even fairly hefty conflict can be seen to be good, as it can make the system more responsive and effective (cf p.120). Unfortunately the structuralist paradigm does not help us to distinguish between helpful jolts to the system and terminally destructive ones.

The chief weakness of structuralist/functionalist explanations is that they do not help to explain particular human interventions and the specifics of policies.[5] There are some references in passing in Cockburn's work to particular political debates. For instance it is

clear that different members of the Labour caucus had different suggestions about what should happen to the neighbourhood councils (pp.150-1). We do not, however, get a proper sense why one option was adopted and the others rejected. An explanation of this would require an investigation of the intentions of the different political actors, the perceived costs and benefits of the different options, and the relative power positions of the respective actors. These concerns are, however, excluded almost by definition from the structuralist agenda.

Saunders, Simmie: Local corporatism

Simmie (1981) and Saunders (1979) also investigate the operations of local government, in their cases the Oxford and Croydon councils respectively. Their findings are similar in many respects. In Simmie's phrase, they show the existence of an "imperfect pluralism" (Simmie, p.5) in the political arena.

Simmie's contention is that the degree of organisation is the key to the outcomes of local government decisions. In particular he shows this in the case of development planning and development control. The former is concerned with the overall objectives and framework of planning. He argues that

> Generally speaking, in order to exercise significant power over planning objectives, the main prerequisite was permanent, formal organisation together with command over resources and some incorporation into the decision-making processes of either local and/or central government. (p.293)
>
> Not only were the larger organisations more effective at insinuating positively favourable objectives into the Development Plan, but also they were the most effective at vetoing or circumventing proposals which might have harmed their interests. (p.295)

Development control, on the other hand, is concerned with the approval of actual development projects, to ensure that they comply with the objectives of the plan. Simmie's judgement in this case is that

> powerful interest groups acquire property rights via the development control process without undue modification whether or not they comply closely with the provisions of the Development Plan. (p.250)

He also investigates the outcome of actual development projects. He concludes that

development did not benefit all groups equally. Again it was the larger organisations which tended to benefit at the expense of the disorganised sections of the community.

The Oxford case study is held by Simmie to exemplify processes at work within modern societies more generally - the move towards corporatist forms of decision-making. He defines corporatism as:

> a politico-economic system characterised by the exercise of power through functionally differentiated organisations seeking to achieve compromises in economically and politically approved actions which are as favourable to their particular interests as possible and which are often legitimated by their incorporation in the objectives of the state. ... Corporatism therefore represents an important development in the location and use of power. It represents a shift away from market and electoral power towards oligopolistic, functionally differentiated and hierarchically structured organisations. (p.105)

Large organisations exercise power both because they have the necessary access to influence the overall value framework within which decisions are made (e.g. the Development Plan) as well as the resources to fight the particular conflicts which occur within the confines of this overall framework (e.g. over development control).

Simmie's case study, however, also indicates the diversity of these organisations, which included traditional landowning interests (the Oxford colleges), business interests, middle-class groups and labour (p.285). He also found that on many issues the bureaucracy had a fair degree of autonomy (pp.165 ff). Furthermore the relative power position of different groups was not static. During the period that he studied Oxford, there was a growth of local resident groups to oppose aspects of urban redevelopment. Nevertheless even within these "greatest power is exercised by middle-class groups and least by the poor" (p.286).

This situation of "imperfect pluralism" is echoed by Saunders' discussion of the operation of the Croydon council. He shows how different groupings were incorporated into the decision-making process. Where his analysis differs from Simmie's, is that he detects the operation of a dominant "political elite" within the council (1979, p.224). The way in which external groups were incorporated into policy debate depended on the extent to which their interests were congruent with those of the political elite, and to which they were prepared to play according to the "rules of the game". "Responsible" local groups were listened to, while those

which resorted to public demonstrations were generally viewed more unsympathetically (p.232).

> Political responsibility and political consensus are thus seen as two sides of the same coin. (p.266)

These circumstances posed a dilemma for organisations that tried to represent the interests of the subordinate groups. If they adopted unconventional methods they were not going to be listened to by the council. However,

> The more 'responsible' the group, the more effectively has the council been able to burden it with consultations and suffocate it with concern. (p.284)

In the process, the interests of the middle-class ratepayers against the working class and the poor remained intact. As Saunders notes, the major concern of the political elite was to maintain low rates, to restrict social expenditures while maintaining their expenditure on productive infrastructure (e.g. ring roads).

The picture Saunders paints is that of interest groups, i.e. business, middle-class residents associations, representatives of Labour (in the shape of the Labour Party) being drawn into decision-making processes, but on the terms of the political elite. Corporatist decision-making therefore occurs under the overall leadership of the state[6].

In his discussion of corporatism, Saunders suggests that an adequate theory of the state would need to make a distinction between corporate and non-corporate (or pluralist) sectors of state policy-making[7]. The former he intimates is concerned with production, whereas the latter is concerned mainly with consumption. Whereas in the former the state plays an increasingly directive role in consultation with business and organised labour, in the latter it can afford to remain more external to different social and political forces and open to influence by the most powerful of them (pp.178-9).[8]

The dualism implicit in Saunders' account of the corporatist state is developed further in ***Social Theory and the Urban Question***. In this work he suggests that these different sectors of state decision-making become located at different levels of the state:

> In general, however, it may be suggested that social consumption policies are the characteristic responsibility of local government, and that in most advanced capitalist

> countries there has been a long-term tendency for social investment functions to be transferred from local to regional or national levels of administration. (1981, p.265)

The idea that different sections of the state, and indeed different levels of government, could be more or less responsive to outside pressure is an interesting one. It is not clear, however, whether Saunders' dualistic account is tenable. In the first instance, production and consumption are not that easily separable. Water reticulation, road networks and electricity provision all have dual functions. Secondly, many social consumption policies are clearly worked out nationally - education, health and housing come readily to mind. Indeed, the kind of national lobbying characteristic of corporatist decision-making applies to a marked extent in the case of housing, with the building industry in many countries being particularly well organised at national level. Furthermore, many local governments are still actively involved in industrial promotion and in the provision of industrial infrastructure.

It seems doubtful then, that there is a such a clear tendency for state policy-making on production and consumption to be located at different spatial levels of government and to be characterised by markedly different styles of decision-making[9]. The close relationship between production and consumption would in itself lead one to suspect that it could not be otherwise. For instance, industrial strategies based on high technology require state intervention in education besides the provision of infrastructure. Furthermore Keynesian economics has been based on the insight that promotion of production also depends on effective demand. In this light the building sector has been used at various times to stimulate the economy.

Saunders' analysis of state decision-making in the policy area of production is based on the managerialist idea that the state is playing an increasingly independent and directive role. In Saunders' own work it is not very clear how this independence is to be explained, and what motivates the state bureaucrats in their policy-making (for a critique along these lines see Harrington, 1983). Paradoxically, Simmie's analysis of the bureaucracy tends to bend the stick in the opposite direction. While he asserts that bureaucrats have some autonomy in decision-making, the practical example he gives of this is that of the aesthetics of planning (cf p.165). While the visual appearance of a town is clearly of some importance, it seems remarkable that

Simmie couldn't provide evidence that the influence of the bureaucracy extends beyond this surface veneer.

Conclusion: Local politics and the study of power

The contributions reviewed in this chapter exemplify something of the diversity of approaches that have been adopted in the study of local politics. What is common to the accounts, however, is the idea that cities are "marvellous laboratories in which to observe and analyse the changing forms of domination" (Elliott and McCrone, 1982 p.28). With the exception of Cockburn, the works discussed here should clearly be seen as contributions to the analysis of power and the state more generally, rather than simple case studies.

In order to analyse these power relations these studies investigate how different groups relate to local government. The fact that these studies come up with such vastly different conclusions is partly explicable by the fact that they operate with different conceptions of power and how power ought to be measured.

Dahl and Polsby define power in terms of the capacity to initiate or frustrate policies. The analysis of power therefore consists in tracing who was involved in which particular bits of policy-making.

Cockburn seems to operate with a structuralist conception of power. Power is inherent in the way social structures work. As long as capitalist social relations remain, capitalists will have power over workers. Therefore, if the actions of the local state ("community participation", corporate planning) do not serve to undermine capitalist social relations they actually serve to entrench the power of the capitalists.

Simmie argues that "the analysis of the outcomes of the use of power is the most effective form of political analysis" (p.21). He therefore looks at what actually happened in the processes of development planning and development control and what interests were served by the outcomes of these processes. Saunders also tackles the question of power from the

point of view of whose interests are served by local government intervention.

Notes:

1. Examples would be F. Hunter (1953), ***Community Power Structure***, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; R.S. Lynd and H.M. Lynd (1929), ***Middletown***, New York: Harcourt, Brace; and R.S. Lynd and H.M. Lynd (1937), ***Middletown in Transition***, New York: Harcourt, Brace.

2. The problems attached to collective action are too numerous to be explored in this thesis. The free rider problem is a particularly intractable one in this context. Dahl's suggestion that the vote is a resource which is available to disadvantaged groups and which compensates for their lack of other resources, only works in the case of organised groups. Politicians will only trade their support if they can be assured of a block vote. However, some of the most marginalised groups are precisely those which have difficulty in becoming organised.

3. Or indeed, why they do not perceive what their interests are. This latter possibility introduces a number of very tricky complications, however. Both fascists and communists have used arguments of what they consider to be in people's "real interests" to perpetrate all kinds of atrocities.

4. It is somewhat paradoxical that the author who was responsible for popularising the concept "local state" should intend that concept to refer to the fact that local government is not an autonomous entity, but an integral part of the "state".

5. There are some weaknesses which are, however, particular to Cockburn's brand of functionalism. Chief among these is the lack of a sense of the contradictoriness of state policies. She recognises that working class people are faced with contradictions:

> We need the family, capitalism needs it too: the two uses of the family are incompatible. We need services: capitalism needs us serviced. We need jobs: capital needs the work done. (p.184)

However, there are also contradictions for "capital". Capital might want properly educated and healthy workers but it might not want to pay higher taxes. It might want stable families in decent accommodation, but it might not want any interference with the land market. In short, state intervention introduces costs for capital - both in monetary terms and in its undermining of the privatistic logic of the market.

6. Clearly the "state" cannot simply be equated with the "political elite", i.e. the dominant grouping within the Council. Nevertheless the point is that the political input of groupings "outside" the state occurred on the terms of a grouping "within" the state.

7. Simmie incidentally makes a related point:

> A satisfactory definition of corporatism must include the possibility of theorising not only the power relationships between functionally differentiated large economic and political units but also the relationships between such organisations and small

> producers or consumers. (p.105)

Whereas the larger organisations are incorporated in various ways into state policy-making, the smaller elements constitute "a pluralistic system of interest representation" (p.105). The crucial difference between this conception and Saunders' dualism is, however, the fact that Saunders suggests that certain state functions are themselves characterised by pluralist interest representation. In Simmie this pluralism operates outside the centre of state power.

8. Harrington (1983) quotes from another paper by Saunders which elaborates this conception as follows:

> I would suggest that different theoretical perspectives are useful for analysing different functions of the state and in particular, that the productive function can be explained in terms of a managerialist perspective while the consumption function is better explained through an instrumentalist perspective. (Saunders in Harrington, p.203)

The key idea is that on production related issues the major source of state policy is internal to the state, whereas on consumption issues state policy reflects the interests of whichever group happens to be dominant.

9. Warde (1990) criticises Saunders for separating a concern with consumption from considerations of production.

7. The literature in comparative perspective

It does not seem that the approaches reviewed above satisfactorily delimit the field of local politics. The difficulties faced in this task are hardly surprising. Any account of local politics simulatenously works with **spatial** and **social** categories. There are therefore at least three axes along which such accounts can differ:

1. In terms of their definition of the **spatial** category, i.e. in terms of their account of what "local areas" are and how they should be analysed.
2. In how they interpret the meaning of the **social** category, i.e. what "politics" is and how it should be analysed.
3. In their interpretation of the **relationship** between the social and the spatial category.

The definition of the spatial framework

There seem to be two major types of approaches to the way "local areas" have been defined in the literature. On the one hand, the "local" has been seen as coterminous with the boundaries of a particular local authority. This approach has been adopted by writers as diverse in orientation as Dahl, Cockburn and Simmie. The urban managerialist approach of Pahl also takes administrative boundaries as its main frame of reference.

On the other hand, various theories try to identify the spatial framework in terms of particular social processes. The best examples of this are Castells's attempt to define "urban space" as the space of collective consumption and Harvey's identification of "urban space" with the daily labour market. Implicit in Scott's discussion of the "urban land nexus" is also the notion that "urban space" is equivalent to the space of the urban land market.

However, some authors, such as Williams and Cox, operate with a rather ill-defined spatial framework. It is clear that they see the scope of "urban politics" as extending beyond the

limits of a particular municipality (indeed they are concerned to integrate the restriction of access to suburban locations into their theory) but beyond the fact that the arena is that of "metropolitan space" it is not clarified how this space is delimited[1].

On the whole, it cannot be said that the way the spatial framework for the study of local politics has been set, is at all theoretically satisfactory. Clearly, the mere appeal to an undefined notion of "metropolitan" or "urban" area is least satisfactory. The use of administrative boundaries makes sense within the context of the case study approach, but is also unsatisfactory from a theoretical point of view. Such an approach furthermore rules out any investigation of why the boundaries came to be drawn where they currently are, and what, if any, the political significance of these divisions are. Finally, as was argued in the previous chapters, the various processes that supposedly delimit the "local" or the "urban" do not in fact do so successfully.

The nature of the political

There are a number of issues on which the literature diverges. Perhaps the most fundamental line of division is over the question whether political analysis should be concerned primarily with the investigation of **structures** or **actors**.

Authors such as Scott, Lamarche, Cockburn and the early Castells clearly see the primary focus as being on structures. In their accounts the state is seen as being concerned with the regulation of societal contradictions. The task of political analysis is therefore to lay bare what these contradictions are, because the events in the political arena will be determined by these forces - more so than by what particular actors happen to think and feel at a particular point in time.

By contrast, the focus in the work of Dahl, Williams, Pahl and Fischer is on conflict between various political **actors**. Within this broad framework, however, there are again significant differences, centring on the way in which the actors are conceived. A broad line of division here is between those theorists who see these actors as being essentially **individuals** (Dahl,

Williams) and those who conceive of them as being groups of individuals (Simmie, Fischer).

Among the latter there are again various ways in which the groups are conceptualised. Simmie sees them as organisations; Fischer as sub-cultures; and Rex and Moore as housing classes.

Finally, there are also significant differences between theorists as to what is to count as political action. At one extreme, in Williams's account physical relocation can be seen as an urban political act ("voting with one's feet"). At the other extreme, Dahl's investigation of local power restrict its concern to the decision-making processes of local government and nominations to political office.

Some of the accounts analysed try to balance a concern for structures with some consideration for the need to take account of actors. In the early Castells this took the form of analysing both urban planning as well as urban social movements. Unfortunately the two parts of the analysis did not really connect. As argued in previous chapters, a structuralist theory cannot accommodate the irruption of contingency that is introduced with struggle between actors.

Harvey's account is interesting from this perspective, because in it the contingent conflict between actors is precisely what governs the development of the structure. Inter-locality conflict is what drives the way global capitalism unfolds. Nevertheless it is clear that it is precisely because of this relationship that the structure is pre-eminent over actors. It might be important to the residents of a particular city whether its pro-growth coalition succeeds in attracting industry or not, but it is immaterial from the point of view of the system as a whole. Harvey still works with a model in which the process of "capital circulation" is primary. Where it decides to circulate to might not be determined, but that it will circulate in particular ways is.

The relationship between political analysis and local areas

The question of how political analysis relates to local areas is really the key issue in trying to define what the field of local political analysis is about. In many of the studies in this field this relationship has, however, been left completely unclear. Take, for example, the "local power" studies. In these the operation of local government structures are analysed. But what are "local government structures"? Are they simply government structures that operate in a spatially restricted area? In which case what defines the area in which the operation of government should be analysed? In "local power" studies this space has been defined by the area of jurisdiction of local government, which gets us back to the starting point. If we assume that local government is a special form of government (i.e. distinguished from central government along some axis other than simply its spatial scale of operation) we could then legitimately analyse this form of government within its characteristic area of jurisdiction. Unfortunately none of the "local power" studies indicate what, if anything, is peculiar to local government. As a result we have the circular definition where local government is government within local areas, and local areas are those spaces over which local government has jurisdiction.

The more general problem raised by this example is that any attempt to theoretically delimit the field of local political analysis has to do one of two things: either it has to define "local areas" independently of the political processes to be studied or it has to find some particular political processes which operate in a spatially restricted way. It would of course also be possible to do a bit of both.

This suggests that there would be four possible ways of approaching the study of local politics: 1. Define "local areas" and investigate political processes occurring within them; 2. define "local areas" and show that there are distinctive types of political processes occurring within them; 3. define a particular type of political process and show that it operates within spatially restricted boundaries which roughly coincide with our intuitive notion of "local areas"; 4. define a particular political process and show that it generates spatially defined "local areas", and show further that these in turn give rise to distinctive kinds of political processes. In the first model no necessary relationship between the spatial framework

and its social content is posited. In the second it is assumed that there is a relationship, and that the political process is dependent on the space in question. The third model also assumes a relationship, except that the dependence is reversed, with the spatial framework being determined by the political content. The final case is that of a "dialectical" interaction between space and politics.

There are no examples of the first approach in our literature. Case studies of "local power" conducted at metropolitan level (if this was defined in some way) would, however, fit the bill.

The work of Scott, Fischer, Williams and Pahl would fall broadly into the second category - although none of them satisfactorily define the spatial context. Scott sees urban plannings as dependent on the system of polarised differential locational advantages characteristic of urban areas; Fischer sees sub-cultures as being sustained and intensified due to the relative concentration of people; and Williams and Pahl see problems of differential access as peculiar to cities.

The early Castells exemplifies the third kind of position. He sees local areas as defined by the processes of the provision of collective consumption items.

Finally Harvey would represent the fourth model. He sees local areas as simultaneously being defined by processes of uneven development and competition between places, but the processes of coalition formation which this leads to in turn drive these processes forward.

As is evident from the discussion in the preceding chapters, none of these attempts has succeeded. The major problem in all cases is that the spatial framework has not been satisfactorily demarcated. As a result we have a series of very interesting issues for political analysis - the way in which differential spatial access to resources affects different social groups; the process of provision of collective consumption items; the process by which dissent becomes organised; conflict over land use; inter-locality competition; and the way in which government responds to different interest groups - but none of these serves to define the field of **local** political analysis.

The remainder of this thesis will attempt to explore further the obstacles in the way of developing a coherent concept of local politics. In order to do this, it will be necessary to consider in more detail the three axes around which such a concept would have to be constructed - the locality, politics and the relationship between them.

Notes:

1. Williams's definition of "urbanism", for example, doesn't really clarify things:
   > It is preferable to see urbanism as one of man's principal social inventions analogous to bureaucracies and markets. Each of these can be understood as complex forms of organization, which have proved useful for realizing a variety of goals or values. (p.3)

Part II

Making sense of local politics

8. What are localities?

Approaches to the definition of localities

There are a number of ways in which localities or cities[1] can be defined. On the one hand this can be done with reference to their **external** characteristics and on the other, with regard to their **social content**.

Examples of the former would be definitions in terms of the size or density of such settlements. As noted above, Fischer opts for such an approach. He says that it has the virtue of not begging any questions, i.e. it is still an open question whether urbanism is associated with particular social processes. Furthermore he says that urbanism should be seen as a matter of degree, and not as an all-or-nothing category.

Most writers have been unhappy with such minimal definitions. Firstly because any cut-off points (e.g. "urban areas are settlements with more than 4000 people") are essentially arbitrary. Secondly because criteria such as size and density fail to distinguish settlements such as penal colonies and mining compounds from "cities".

Consequently attempts have been made to characterise cities in terms of their social content. Several types of such definitions exist - definitions in terms of the qualities of the social interactions, institutions, social processes and functions of cities[2].

Wirth's description of urbanism would be the clearest example of a definition of cities according to the qualities of social interactions (Wirth, 1938)[3]. Cities are seen to be places where human relationships are segmentalised (p.12), where secondary contacts dominate over primary contacts (p.12), where a spirit of competition, aggrandisement and mutual exploitation is fostered (p.15), where depersonalisation occurs (p.17), and where kinship bonds, neighbourhood relations and the family are weakened (p.21). Essentially it is a state of *anomie* (p.13). These conclusions have been vigorously challenged (cf Fischer passim;

Castells 1977a, Chapter 5; Saunders 1981, Chapter 3). Empirical evidence suggests that these "urban" social characteristics can be found in rural areas as well, and that many "rural" or traditional social relations survive quite strongly in cities.

Institutional definitions characterise settlements as being cities according to whether they possess certain institutions or not. The classic example of this is Weber's discussion of "The City" (Weber, 1958):

> To constitute a full urban community a settlement must display a relative predominance of trade-commercial relations with the settlement as a whole displaying the following features: 1. a fortification; 2. a market; 3. a court of its own and at least partially autonomous law; 4. a related form of association; and 5. at least partial autonomy and autocephaly, thus also an administration by authorities in the election of whom the burghers participated. (pp.80-81)

The problem with such a comprehensive definition is that it rules out most "cities". Indeed Weber himself acknowledges this:

> An urban "community", in the full meaning of the word, appears as a general phenomenon only in the Occident. Exceptions occasionally were to be found in the Near East (in Syria, Phoenicia, and Mesopotamia) but only occasionally and in rudiments. (p.80)

Contemporary "cities" would also be excluded from this definition, because they lack the autonomy stipulated by Weber.

Castells's attempt to define urban areas as the space of reproduction is an example of a social process definition of cities. Another example would be Harvey's characterisation of a city as being a "unity of job and consumption opportunities" (1985b, p.140). Common to these approaches is the attempt to isolate a social process which gives coherence to a particular kind of space - in the one case collective consumption and in the other the standardisation of job conditions through the local labour market[4].

The fourth kind of approach would try to define urban areas according to the function that they are deemed to perform within the social structure as a whole[5]. An example would be Lojkine's idea that the city is a device to increase the circulation rate of capital.

None of these approaches successfully defines the "urban" or indeed the "local". The general problem with the definitions is that they are either too inclusive, i.e. they are also applicable

to contexts we would not normally call "urban", or they are too restrictive, i.e. they exclude contexts that one would normally want to consider as "urban".

These approaches are all essentialist accounts of urbanism. Their aim is to capture the essence of what being a "city" is all about. Could any other essentialist account succeed where the previous definitions have failed? The record is not very encouraging on that score. One of the reasons why I suspect that there are no theoretically adequate, i.e. non-arbitrary ways, of defining urban areas, is that the category straddles a vast array of cases. Is it realistic to assume that Gabarone, Oxford, New York and Bombay all share some common characteristic? Why should one expect modern cities to share a particular attribute with medieval ones?

But if one abandons the idea that the categories "city" and "locality" are definable, where does that leave one? These notions are so integral to our understanding of the world around us that it seems hard to do without them.

Spatial variation and place concepts

The reason why notions such as "locality" are so crucial is that the national space is clearly not homogeneous and variations within it are of pervasive significance. Such variations are of many kinds: economic activity, levels of infrastructure and service provision, population density, social composition, class structure, cultural practices and so on. As the literature on uneven development points out, these differences are not all accidental. What happens at one point in space is in many instances dependent on how that point relates to other points in space.

I would like to argue that the function of place concepts ("London", "Witwatersrand", "Zululand" etc.)[6] is to enable us to talk about these phenomena, i.e. the way in which points in space differ from each other and relate to each other. The set of place concepts can be seen as a conceptual grid which tries to capture the underlying spatial variation, rather than corresponding to a set of real "things". When we label different points in space as being

different "places" we are, in a sense, drawing attention to the fact that they differ on some significant dimension - economic, social, political etc. A particularly important axis along which "places" are often differentiated is according to their "ownership" by particular groups of people.

Usually a place concept will encapsulate a number of different dimensions. This means that there is a certain amount of fuzziness in the meaning of the particular place concept. This fuzziness also arises from the fact that many of the axes along which places differ from each other vary in rather continuous ways. The economic influence of a city, for example, whether in labour or product markets, does not have a well-defined boundary. Instead it weakens with distance from the city until it fizzles out. Finally, the patterns of spatial variation also change with time.

For many decision-making purposes, however, hard boundaries have to be drawn. Local authorities and public companies only supply services in particular areas. Zoning regulations apply only to specific spaces. Financial companies will provide home loans in certain areas and redline other districts. Governments will provide decentralisation incentives in some areas and not others. Local authority regulations apply only to areas over which they have jurisdiction.

These discontinuities significantly affect the life-chances and way of life of people in different areas. Consequently there is always likely to be political conflict over where these boundaries are drawn. Place concepts will play a vital role in these kinds of conflicts. Different interest groups will conflict over the "correct" definition of the spaces in which certain regulations should apply or particular services be delivered etc. A contemporary example of such a debate is that over whether "Johannesburg" and "Soweto" should be regarded as separate localities or two parts of essentially one locality.

Political boundaries, because they are so closely linked to service provision, taxation levels, regulations and questions of political representation, can in turn be important factors in determining a sense of place and community. This close link between political structures and particular spaces, also means that place concepts become involved in political conflict in a

different sense. Groupings that conflict over the overall nature of a society's political structure will generally also appeal to different kinds of place concepts.

South African examples of this would be firstly the government's introduction of "homelands". The ultra right-wing's appeal to the idea of a "Boerestaat" would be another example. An interesting localised case is the renaming of sections of Pietermaritzburg townships that came under control of the "comrades"[7] as "Moscow", "Tanzania" and "Lusaka". These concepts are not mere demarcations of areas - they are also programmatic announcements that particular social and political relations will be established within them.

In summary, place concepts are social constructs which are used as devices to enable us to talk about differences between particular points in space. Because such concepts have an inherent tendency to be fuzzy, they are subject to conflicting interpretations and redefinition. Conflict about political relations adds its own dynamic. To the extent to which these relations become institutionalised in stable political structures, these can lend a coherence to particular place concepts. Because such political boundaries do not correspond to a well-defined entity, they are also subject to redefinition.

Localities

In the account given above, the fundamental concept is that of spatial variation. Places (i.e. the spatial entities that place concepts refer to) are not well-defined kinds of entities[8]. Consequently any attempt to define the essence of a particular place, let alone a whole category of places such as "cities" and "localities", is not likely to succeed.

Nevertheless one undoubtedly does differentiate between types of places - "localities", "regions", "cities" and "villages". Is there any way of making such distinctions in any coherent way?

Clearly the concept "locality" connotes a relatively restricted space. More particularly, it also suggests familiarity. I would argue that "local spaces" are the spaces of everyday life

(cf Thrift 1983). They are the spaces in which people work, visit, shop, raise their children, eat and entertain. This implies that the sense of "local space" will in general vary from person to person, and from one social group to another. An appeal to a particular notion of locality will be meaningful to the extent to which it manages to encapsulate something of the everyday life-experiences of a significant group of people. The "locality" in a sense stands for something of the way of life that occurs in the "local spaces" that make it up.

Because there are potentially vastly different ways of life and "local spaces" that all co-exist within broadly the same physical space, there can also be mutually competing senses of locality. For the ghetto population, the ghetto might be the most relevant "locality", whereas for the middle-classes it might be the city as a whole. The segmentation of most people's "local spaces" into spaces associated with work, living and shopping also facilitates the emergence of such competing senses of locality.

Cities

The spatial differentiation which is captured by the concept of "cities" is clearly based on the uneven distribution of population and infrastructure within the national space, i.e. cities are places characterised by a relative concentration of people and infrastructure within the national space. Furthermore, the type of activities that are carried out - predominantly agricultural in "rural" areas and predominantly non-agricultural in "urban" ones - is another basis of differentiation.

As the literature points out, spatial concentration has a number of effects. Firstly, as Cox has shown, there are **externalities**, whether positive or negative. Positive externalities occur where the juxtaposition of two particular land uses has beneficial effects for one or both of them, and contrariwise in the case of negative externalities. Because the intensity of externality effects is often a function of distance, they are likely to be more of a feature of urban life, where people and activities are relatively concentrated. Secondly there are **threshold** effects, as Fischer has pointed out. Many activities will be more viable in urban areas because they rely on a certain number of participants or customers to sustain them, and with the relative

concentration of people these thresholds are more likely to be met in cities than in smaller places.

The result of extemalities and threshold effects is that conditions inside "cities" will differ in many respects from those obtaining elsewhere. For a start, cities will generally have a wider range of services and more dynamic economies. They will also have greater problems in waste disposal, noise and air pollution[9]. These differences in turn add further dimensions on which cities can be differentiated from smaller places. To complicate the picture further, human beings respond in varying ways to these differences. Some groups are attracted by the opportunities on offer and migrate to the city, others are put off by the costs and flee to small-holdings or villages in the commuter belt. These responses can help to differentiate space even further. The central point is simply that spatial unevenness and the responses by various groups to it, create a dynamic which potentially generates yet further spatial unevenness.

Could a suitably modified account along these lines be used to define "cities"? Not really. While the differences between "cities" and other places are real, they cannot be used to demarcate discrete spaces as "urban". The variation in question is not sharply discontinuous.

The major problem with essentialist accounts (cf especially Castells, 1977a) is that they operate with an idea of a city as spatial **units**, where a more appropriate image would be that of a field surrounding a **node** or **pole**[10] within a polarised spatial surface. This image captures the idea that there is no discrete cut-off point at which the "city" stops and the "rural" area starts. It also suggests that the primary task for urban analysis is not to understand what defines the "urban", but rather what forces lead to the polarisation of the spatial surface - i.e. which processes generate spatial unevenness.

The processes leading to spatial differentiation are, however, complex. As the literature on uneven development makes clear, economic processes are central ones among them. However, political decisions and cultural practices also have a major impact. This complexity highlights yet again why it is unlikely that the meaning of "urban" can be established along just one dimension.

This conception relieves us of the need to view "cities" as having the same meaning in all contexts. What is common to them is that they all represent nodes within a polarised national landscape. The forces which gave rise to this differentiation might however be different from society to society[1]. "Cities" instead of sharing a common essence can be viewed rather as sharing a Wittgensteinian family resemblance.

Localities and cities

How do the two concepts "city" and "locality" as defined here, relate to each other? In the first instance it is clear that there is no necessary connection between them. Many "localities" would not be cities, or would not even be set within an urban context. Similarly, many "cities" would not be localities either - particularly the metropolitan agglomerations. Nevertheless, there are some relationships between them. For instance, the urban context is likely to affect the ways of life that occur within it. So the "city" is one of the factors that can give coherence to the "locality".

The discussion so far has indicated that political factors are of some importance in the definition of localities, but also in influencing the way in which space becomes polarised. Furthermore it has been suggested that place concepts play an important part in political conflict. The relationship between localities, cities and politics will be explored further below. First, though, I want to make some general observations about the study of politics.

Notes:

1. I will finally make an attempt to separate these concepts later in this chapter.

2. Fischer (1976) classifies definitions of the "urban" as being demographic, institutional, cultural or behavioural (p.26). Demographic definitions would characterise cities in terms of criteria such as size or population density; institutional definitions require "cities" to have a particular institution (or set of institutions); cultural definitions believe that "urban" life is distinguished by particular cultural features, e.g. literacy; and behavioural definitions assert that city life is characterised by particular forms of behaviour and qualities of human

interactions (p.26). He doesn't talk about functional or social process definitions. I have assimilated his "cultural" category into my "social process" category.

3. In fact Wirth also adopts a minimal definition of cities:

> For sociological purposes a city may be defined as a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals. (p.8)

From this characterisation of cities he derives his description of urbanism. Nevertheless, it is clear that urbanism "as a way of life" is not simply confined to cities:

> It should be recognized, however, that in the social world institutions and practices may be accepted and continued for reasons other than those that originally brought them into existence, and that accordingly the urban mode of life may be perpetuated under conditions quite foreign to those necessary for its origins. (p.9)

Consequently urban places, i.e. places characterised by urbanism as a way of life, need not be cities. Whether it would be possible for cities (under exceptional circumstances) not to be urban places is unclear from Wirth's account.

4. Clearly there is only a fine line separating these approaches from the "institutional" definitions.

5. Again there is an area of overlap with social process definitions. Castells's account of collective consumption could conceivably be classified under this category as well. Not all social process definitions need be functional ones, however. For instance there could conceivably be processes which map out certain spaces, without these processes being "functions" of society as a whole. Social process definitions would be essentially "internal" definitions - i.e. definitions of localities in terms of what happens inside them - whereas functional definitions would be "external" ones - i.e. in terms of how localities are integrated into the social structure as a whole.

6. The term "place concept" is used for the moment to refer to any concept which names a particular space with the suggestion that there is some internal coherence to that space.

7. A term loosely used in South African parlance to refer to radicalised Black youth.

8. Clearly, however, they are not completely arbitrary concepts either. For the concepts to have any use in enabling us to talk about spatial variation, there must a core of shared meanings. Thus while there might be debate about whether the concept "Pietermaritzburg" includes the "African" township of "Imbali", there would be general agreement that the Central Business District would be part of "Pietermaritzburg". (Presumably there would also be agreement that "Durban" is not part of Pietermaritzburg!) It is this concept of an (admittedly undefinable) core of shared meanings surrounded by a penumbra of contested ones, which I have tried to capture with the idea of fuzziness.

9. There is no intention to suggest here that spatial proximity on its own leads to these positive and negative effects. The effects depend on the nature of the objects that are brought together. This will be further elucidated later.

10. The "pole" can be seen as corresponding to the CBD of the city. This conception can, perhaps, also help to explain the "fuzziness" of place concepts. The "pole" would represent the "core" meaning of the place concept; the "field" surrounding it corresponding to the

remainder.

11. This would be true particularly if one compares "cities" at different stages of industrial development.

9. Political analysis and spatial relations

In order to make sense of the concept "local politics", it is necessary to consider for a moment the nature of "politics". The points made in this chapter are designed to achieve two objectives: Firstly, to criticise a number of assumptions about politics current in certain strands of Marxist theorising[1]; and secondly, to argue that political processes are pervasively spatial and should be theorised as such.

My discussion will be organised around four themes - the sources of political conflict, political agents, the state, and the trajectory of political conflict.

Sources of political conflict[2]

Orthodox Marxist theories see exploitation as the major source of political conflict in capitalist societies. In these accounts, exploitation is seen as being a forced transfer of labour from worker to capitalist. This transfer is the result of the different ways in which capitalists and workers relate to the means of production - capitalists own the means of production, while workers own only their labour power which they sell to a capitalist.

There are a number of problems with this conception of exploitation (for a fuller discussion see Elster 1985, Chapter 4). One of the most important is that this account is based on the Labour Theory of Value, which has been largely discredited. Roemer (1982) develops the concept in ways which do not rely on this theory. In his interpretation

> Being exploited means, fundamentally, working more hours than are needed to produce the goods one consumes. (Elster 1985, p.167)

Roemer's account, however, has the consequence that exploitation is no longer defined only by ownership of the means of production. He distinguishes for example between "capitalist exploitation" which is based on ownership of alienable assets; "status exploitation" which is based on occupying key positions in the state bureaucracy; and "socialist exploitation" which

is based on differences in skill levels (1982, Chapters 7 and 8).

I would argue that the bases on which labour transfers can be effected go beyond the categories that Roemer mentions. Any power relation could potentially serve as the basis for exploitation.[3] In the context of this thesis, it should be noted that particular **place definitions** can be used as basis for such an exploitation relation. Stalinism in the U.S.S.R. seems to be a case in point. Gouldner (1980) has argued that a defining characteristic of Stalinism was that it was a type of internal colonialism:

> What had been brought into being was an urban-centered power elite that had set out to dominate a largely rural society to which they related as an alien colonial power; it was an internal colonialism mobilizing its state power against colonial tributaries in rural territories.
> Here, internal colonialism refers to the use of the state power by one section of society (the Control Center) to impose unfavorable rates of exchange on another part of the same society (e.g. the Subordinate Remotes), each being ecologically differentiated from the other. (p.216)

The "unfavourable rates of exchange" imposed on the Russian peasantry in the interests of the urban working class would be a paradigmatic case of a labour transfer, i.e. exploitation, on the Roemer model.[4]

Spatial relations serve as bases for conflict in yet other ways. As the literature on spatial inequality (Chapter 1) makes clear, many facilities are unevenly distributed and many human activities generate positive or negative externalities. Industries generate pollution, shops attract people into the area. Again these are unevenly distributed. Conflict about who should benefit from the positive externalities and who should bear the costs of the negative ones, is a pervasive feature of urban life. The work by Cox and Scott on the location process illustrates this.

Inter-locality conflict for investment funds of the type described by Harvey and Cox would exemplify similar processes, operating at a supra-local level. Industries have to locate in particular places, and the ways in which they do this again bring costs and benefits to different groups of people.

An important source of conflict, as both Scott and Harvey point out, is the dynamic nature

of the investment process. The fact that the structure of locational advantages continuously changes brings with it the prospect of rapid localised change. At the urban level, this happens for example when an area is redeveloped. Regionally, it happens when industry disinvests in an area and moves elsewhere. The conflict that arises in these cases is the result of the fact that people are generally more bound to localities than capital is. The disruption of communities is a very real cost, but one which is not directly measurable in material terms.

In summary, the following points have been made in this section:

1. Exploitation is a major source of political conflict - although not the only one.
2. Exploitation is based not only around the issue of ownership of the means of production; and
3. Spatial relations can serve as a basis for the establishment or maintenance of exploitative relations.
4. Political conflict can be generated around the issues of the spatial distribution of social costs and benefits and over spill-over effects.

Political agents

The idea that it is possible *a priori* to assert that exploitation is the most important social "contradiction" has its parallel in the idea that classes (as defined by relation to the means of production) are necessarily the major political actors. The idea of potentially multiple bases for social conflict therefore has its corollary in the idea of potentially multiple ways of constituting political actors. Political identities are not pregiven, they have to be constructed, as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) point out.

There are reasons, however, for believing that "classes" (as conceived in orthodox Marxism) are not likely candidates for being political actors. Firstly, there are enormous problems associated with collective action when one considers entities of the order of classes (cf Elster 1985, pp.349ff; Greaves 1988, Chapter 7). The free rider problem becomes particularly acute in this case. Classes are such large entities that the impact of one individual on the outcome of a class mobilisation can be only slight. At the same time, all members of a class

presumably benefit from its success. Furthermore if one assumes that there are significant costs attached to participating in such mobilisations - particularly if they fail - it is clearly in everyone's interest to be a free rider.

Secondly, individuals' and groups within classes often also have the option of following sectional strategies. In the case of individuals in subordinate classes, this would be to try to secure individual promotion out of one's class. In the case of groups, particularly those differentiated in some way from other groups, it is to try to achieve sectional privileges. Exclusionary strategies based on race, gender, language, religion within the labour market would be examples of this. Such strategies often in effect amount to introducing another exploitation relation into the societal equation. Faced with the difficulties of securing advances for the class as a whole such strategies of redefining the contours of the class map must seem attractive.

These problems indicate that apparent commonality of interest is not of itself sufficient to ensure political action around it. On the one hand it is always possible to redefine interests so that the commonality disappears, and on the other there are substantial problems associated with the genesis of political action itself. The latter issue requires a few more comments.

Among the preconditions for political action are certain informational requirements. The individuals sharing a common interest have to understand that their individual concerns are in fact collective ones and that they are capable of being addressed through political action. Once a baseline understanding of the possibility of political action has been established, the problem of collective action proper arises - persuading all individuals in the group that they can rely on others to support them in action, or motivating them that their contribution is required for the overall success of the action. All of these present problems in the case of classes.

As noted in Chapter 5 above, Urry has suggested that one way in which these problems can be alleviated is through relying on locally based organisation:

> One way of generating an identity which can deflate the conventional instrumental costs of membership of labour organizations, is through developing and sustaining the distinctiveness of place, of the forms of work and the skill of the workers resident

within that place. (1983, p.125)

This reintroduces a concern for spatial relations. Urry's comment suggests that the way a potential political actor (i.e. a group which seems to have some common interest) is spatially organised is of some importance in determining whether that group can sustain collective action. This seems to be true in two senses. Firstly, groups which are not locally concentrated simply have much less chance to discover that they do have a common interest. Secondly, the trust and motivation necessary to engage in political action on the basis of a perceived common interest, also needs to be fostered in continuous local interactions. In this context one could recall Marx's disparaging remarks about the French peasantry in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte":

> The small-holding peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with one another. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. ... In this way, the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes. ... They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. (Marx 1977, pp.317-8)

Because of the importance of localities in fostering and sustaining political action, the way in which political actors are structured trans-locally will also be significant in determining their political effectivity. In this connection it should be remembered that Urry is of the opinion that working class organisation has the tendency to fragment between localities, i.e. the bonds between local working class organisations based in different places tend not to be strong enough to overcome the cross-pulling effect of inter-locality conflict.

Trans-local political organisations have to develop mechanisms to deal with this problem of trans-local co-ordination of political programmes and political philosophy. There are many ways in which this co-ordination can occur. At the one extreme would be the situation where essentially locally based political organisations enter into a loose alliance to co-ordinate activities around issues of common concern. At the other extreme would be a tightly knit national political organisation with subsidiary local structures.

The work of Cooke on Wales referred to in Chapter 5, suggests that a class would be able to sustain coherent political organisation at a supra-local level more effectively to the extent to which there are parallel class institutions or social networks operating at that level. In the case of Wales, for example, the union movement spawned a series of other institutions, such as health associations and reading rooms which strengthened the regional influence of the Welsh working class.[5]

The following points can be made by way of summary:

1. Classes (as defined by relationship to the means of production) are not the only kinds of political actors, nor need they be political actors at all.

2. Commonality of interests does not guarantee that there will be political action based on it. There are important spatial preconditions for generating and sustaining political action.

3. The nature of the spatial linkages within a potential collective political actor (particularly trans-local linkages) are important in determining the potential effectiveness of the actor in sustaining political action.

4. The matrix of other institutional and social linkages in which a political actor is embedded is important in either strengthening or weakening trans-local political bonds.

The state

Following Saunders (1979, pp.149ff) one can distinguish between four different approaches to the study of the state: representational, instrumentalist, managerialist and structuralist perspectives. I first want to deal with the last of these, because structuralism has been very influential within Marxism, and then comment on the adequacy of the other three approaches.

Structuralist accounts attempt to explain state actions in terms of the state's location within the structure of society as a whole. Consequently, it is held that the state's actions cannot be explained with reference to any particular group or groups of actors - whether capitalists or state officials.

The *Staatsableitung* (state derivation) approach developed in Germany during the early 1970's

is one example of such an approach (cf Holloway and Picciotto, eds. 1978; for a discussion see Jessop 1982, Chapter 3). The starting point for theorists in this tradition is the separation of the "political" and the "economic" in capitalism. An attempt is then made to "derive" the forms and functions of the state according to the specific dynamics and requirements of capitalist society. For example, it is pointed out that capitalism is a competitive system, but that there are a number of functions which "capital in general" requires which cannot be accomplished through the actions of individual capitals:

> Therefore, capital cannot itself produce through the actions of the many individual capitals the inherent social nature of its existence; it requires at its base a special institution which is not subject to its limitations as capital, one whose transactions are not determined by the necessity of producing surplus-value, one which is *in this sense* a special institution 'alongside and outside bourgeois society', and one which at the same time provides, on the undisputed basis of capital itself, the immanent necessities that capital neglects. (Altvater 1978, p.41)

Another "derivation" starts from the fact that capitalism is a system of generalised commodity production. The process of commodity circulation, however, requires a particular legal structure to support it, e.g. the notion of freely contracting agents. These legal relations are interpreted as forming the basis for the form and nature of the capitalist state (cf Pashukanis 1978; Blanke et al. 1978).

The state derivation debate made a significant contribution to Marxist theory in that it highlighted the fact that political structures cannot be construed as epiphenomena of economic ones. It showed that the economic "base" cannot function if certain political preconditions are not met.

Even so, considered as contributions to political theory, structuralist accounts are fundamentally flawed. The main problem is the functionalist framework within which these arguments are constructed.

This point deserves further comment. In functionalist explanation the existence of a particular object, institution or practice is explained by its effects. It is because the state is necessary for the functioning of a capitalist economy that it exists. An equally good functionalist argument could go as follows: without oxygen human society could not exist, ergo the existence of oxygen is explained by its beneficial effects for human life. The problem with

these "explanations" is that they offer no credible mechanism which relates the beneficial effect of the object in question back to the processes by which the object is created or maintained in existence.[6] What these arguments show is that if the state took a different form, or acted in different ways then capitalism could not exist. They do not establish why the state should take this form or act in the way it does. As Giddens suggests, many functionalist arguments should be understood as "implicit counterfactuals":

> They call for explanations, they do not provide them. (1982, p.531)

A further problem with many functionalist accounts of the state is that they are specified at levels of generality at which they end up explaining very little. Experience suggests that capitalism has a fair degree of tolerance for different kinds of political systems. So even if counterfactual arguments such as those of the *Staatsableitung* school explained the nature of the state, they would be able to delineate its contours only in the most general kinds of ways. The specifics of state action would be left unexplained. One could presumably argue that such details are of little importance, but this does not sound convincing. Thatcherite and social welfarist policies are both compatible with advanced capitalism, but they imply profoundly different distributions of costs and benefits to different groups in society.

Furthermore structuralist approaches generally do not have convincing accounts of how structural imperatives become converted into policies advocated by particular political actors and adopted by the state. This problem of human agency has been referred to in earlier chapters.

If structuralist approaches are rejected, one is forced back to considering the different ways in which particular political actors relate to the state. This is essentially what representational, instrumentalist and managerialist perspectives are about.

Representational and **instrumentalist** perspectives are similar in that they see state actions as being determined by interests essentially outside the state. Where they differ is that the former views these interests as being multiform and shifting, whereas the latter sees the state as being dominated by one particular set of interests.

The classic statement of the representational (pluralist) approach is Dahl's account of New Haven (cf Chapter 6). According to this analysis, the differences in resources between different groups are non-cumulative, so that no one group manages to achieve a monopoly of all political resources within the community. Secondly these resources will not be deployed all of the time. They will be used when a particular group feels that one of its vital interests is being affected. Consequently, different groups will fight different issues with different degrees of intensity. As a result, state actions will reflect different interests on different issues.

A number of criticisms can be levelled at this position. Firstly, it does not analyse whether there are any groups who are so underendowed with resources that they are not able to make their interests felt at all. Secondly, it assumes that the channels through which different groups can affect state policy are equally accessible to all groups. The work on corporatism (e.g. that by Saunders and Simmie referred to in Chapter 6) disputes this. Thirdly, it assumes that the state does not have interests of its own. This assumption, however, is challenged by the managerialists.

The instrumentalist approach to the analysis of the state is exemplified by Miliband's study of the capitalist state (Miliband, 1973). He analyses the social composition of senior state positions. He concludes that the upper classes dominate these positions and through these positions the actions of the state. Consequently the state in capitalist societies is

> primarily and inevitably the guardian and protector of the economic interests which are dominant in them. Its 'real' purpose and mission is to ensure their continued predominance, not to prevent it. (p.238)

The major problem with instrumentalist accounts is that on numerous occasions the state has actually acted against the interests of the dominant economic groups. The nationalisation of various industries in post-war Britain was strenuously opposed by organised British industry, but was pushed through by the state anyway. It is not possible to accommodate these cases by arguing that the state was acting in the "real" interests of capital, because as soon as it is allowed that the actions of the state are not explicable solely in terms of the immediate desires of the dominant group, the account ceases to be an instrumentalist one. Furthermore, if the state has a certain autonomy in its actions, this raises the question whether there are any limits to this autonomy, and if so what these are. These cannot be theorised within an

instrumentalist framework, however.

Managerialist perspectives argue that the senior officials within the state have interests of their own, which are not reducible to those of any group outside the state. The actions of the state have to be explained with reference to the interests and projects of these managers. An example of such an approach within the local politics literature is Pahl's early work (cf Chapter 1).

A major limitation of this approach is that it does not take into consideration the constraints within which the state operates. State officials cannot simply do what they like. On the one hand in representative democracies there are various electoral checks, and on the other, there are checks arising from the fact that the implementation of policies requires resources, not all of which are controlled by the state. The limits on state discretionary power arising from the way in which it relates to groupings outside itself, cannot be theorised from within a managerialist framework.

How could one develop a reasonably satisfactory model of the state out of these conflicting perspectives? An analogy with a military contest might suggest a way.

On the pluralist perspective politics can be likened to a battle, in which two (perhaps more) armies do combat. Usually they would be equipped with different levels (and perhaps types) of armaments. Nevertheless the weaker David can still defeat the better armed Goliath, if he makes better use of the resources at his disposal. The role of the state in this model is that of recorder - state decisions record who has won which round on which issue.

In the instrumentalist view, the state can still be seen as the recorder, but only one of the armies is armed, so that the record reflects only what that contestant decides.

The managerialist approach by contrast rejects this passive view of the state. The state is seen as a player, rather than mere spectator. Indeed, on an extreme reading of the managerialist thesis, the state personnel is the only player. Nevertheless a more realistic assessment would see the state personnel as one of the contestants, perhaps in alliance with other contestants,

perhaps pursuing independent goals.

Nevertheless, it is probably insufficient to analyse the state's role merely from the point of view of how its personnel relates to particular conflicts. The work of Saunders and Simmie suggests that the structure of the state affects the capacity of different groups to have an input into state decision-making. To stay with the martial imagery, the state can therefore also be seen as the **terrain**[7] on which the battle takes place - it will facilitate the use of certain weaponry and make it difficult to deploy others, it possibly means that certain groups have the advantage of fighting "downhill" whereas their opponents have to battle "uphill". Let me elaborate on some of the ways in which I believe that the nature of the state shapes conflict.

Firstly, the actions of the state take place within a framework in which social relations are divided into a "private" and a "public" domain. The latter is seen as the legitimate sphere for state intervention. The boundaries of these domains are not fixed. Consequently conflict does arise over the way in which these boundaries are defined. For example, rabid capitalists want company decision-making to be regarded as part of the "private" domain. Social democrats argue that certain aspects of economic decision-making should be part of the "public" domain, e.g. minimum wage levels. Radical socialists want all aspects of the economy to be viewed as part of the "public" domain.

The precise way in which the public/private interface is currently drawn, as enshrined in current state practice, affects the capacity of different political actors to transform their concerns into state policies. Actors who try to lobby for state intervention in "private" matters face greater obstacles than those who argue for intervention in areas where the state is already active. A case in point would be the difficulties faced by the women's movements of various countries (including South Africa) to outlaw wife battery.[8]

A corollary to this, is that political actors who manage to have their concerns attended to in a routine manner (e.g. by the establishment of a special Ministry) will obviously have a better chance to have their interests met than those who have to lobby suppott for each new issue.

Spatial relations enter the public/private boundary through the "regionalisation" of certain

"public" issues. This involves the treatment of certain kinds of "public" issues as basically being the "private" or domestic matter of people living within a particular locality.[9] This is the foundation of "local government". As with the public/private boundary more generally, the way public issues are regionalised is subject to contestation. This contestation is likely to simultaneously involve conflict about whether the issue is really the "private" affair of local people, as well as about how the "locality" should be defined.

The second way in which the state acts as the "terrain" of politics, is in the nature of the channels through which political actors engage with state decision-making. As Saunders and Simmie point out, the degree of access which different political actors have to decision-making affects their capacity to influence state decisions.

These channels of access would include in the first instance the system of representation. Furthermore there could be other institutionalised channels for consultation, such as the provision for business representatives on the South African National Security Management System. Such specialised channels are characteristically created for specialised institutions. Finally, there are informal channels which operate through the composition of the state personnel. Importantly, these channels are not all equally significant[10]. The way in which different sections of the state relate to each other will help to determine how effectively messages travel through these channels.

It should be observed that these channels will be spatially structured in various ways. Access to a particular state institution might be through a "local" channel. This would be the usual way of access to local government, particularly where it has an elected component. Even nationally based state institutions, such as education departments, might introduce local consultative bodies, such as parent committees and educational advisory bodies. In the case of other state institutions, e.g. the Department of Foreign Affairs or the Department of Defence, access might be structured to permit only certain national political actors to participate in decision-making.

Furthermore, most state institutions are themselves spatially organised in particular ways - with "national", "regional" and "local" offices. This means that the internal decision-making

and policy-implementation processes are also spatially structured in most cases.

One should not need to stress the point, but this spatial structuring of access and the spatial structure of decision-making is important for determining the relative ease with which different groups can influence the state, and the facility with which the state can respond to particular concerns.

Thirdly, the way the appointment, promotion and dismissal of state personnel occurs also structures the way political conflict proceeds. The composition of the bureaucracy is important because, on the one hand, in many issues they have an input into decision-making; and on the other, the way in which these decisions get translated into action is largely dependent on them. The composition of the state personnel is determined not only by the representational structure (parliament), but also by the present incumbents. Furthermore, certificating institutions also have an indirect influence on certain positions.

These recruitment processes can also be spatially structured. For certain state institutions, notably local government, these processes might occur locally. Even national state institutions might fill certain "local" positions locally. Where appointment and promotion procedures are decided on "nationally", it might happen that recruitment or promotion of a candidate happens according to her "regional" or "local" origin. Such processes might be particularly pronounced where these spatial divisions overlap with ethnic, religious or other social divisions. The "regional" origin of state personnel can be of considerable importance, particularly when decisions have to he made which will impact on different areas differently. It has been suggested, for example, that Natal's share of South Africa's tourist industry has been systematically reduced by central government efforts to spread tourist revenues. The fact that Natalians are underrepresented in central government would have made this manipulation much easier[1].

The importance of the spatial origin of state personnel probably applies even at the "local" level. It is easier for municipal planners to route major thoroughfares through slum areas than through the plush suburbs in which they themselves live.

It is not only the spatial origin of state personnel which can be of importance, but their spatial deployment. Black South African policemen drafted in for "riot" duty have often been stationed in areas outside their home locality or region. This is designed to ensure loyalty to the central state by preventing informal channels of local influence emerging. Clearly it is more difficult to act forcefully against a population that one has some sympathy with.

Manipulation of where state personnel are deployed has been an important mechanism of maintaining coherence in "national" institutions, particularly where there are strong inter-regional or inter-local cleavages. It is interesting to note that one of the major demands of the Soviet republics is to have control over the deployment of "their" recruits within the Red Army.

To summarise this section:

1. Structuralist accounts of the state are inadequate, because they do not adequately take into consideration human agency.
2. In analysing the role of the state in political conflict one needs to examine *inter alia* the nature of the private/public boundary, the channels through which political actors gain access to state decision-making, the procedures by which state personnel are recruited, promoted and deployed.
3. Spatial relations enter each of these three facets. The way these interact could be termed the **spatial structure of the state**.

I wish to make two points in concluding this section. Firstly, implicit in the above is a polycentric view of the state. There is no *a priori* assumption that there is a unity of purpose among all state institutions (or indeed among state personnel). Clearly there is a limit to how much divergence there can be - a situation such as that in Allende's Chile in which radically opposed interests are entrenched in different parts of the state would seem to be an inherently unstable one. Nevertheless, the existence of some base-line co-operation is not the same as unanimity of interests.

Secondly, because the state shapes the ability of different political actors to exert their influence, conflict is likely to be as much about the structure of the state as about particular

issues at hand. This will apply equally to the state's spatial structure.

The trajectory of political conflict

In tracing the way that political situations develop, one clearly has to take into account all of the preceding aspects: the sources of political conflict, the way political actors constitute themselves around them[12], and the role of the state in the contest. The analysis of political conflict, however, also has to take into consideration other, less tangible issues - such as the skill with which different political actors deploy their resources, the bluffs and maneouvres open to them, and the timing with which particular tactics are used. This is merely a recognition of the fact that politics is a contest - and that it is not always sufficient to tally up the arsenals on either side and to assess the terrain to decide who will win.

What complicates political analysis, however, is that the political situation is often not like a battlefield on which two (or more) armies are doing combat in relatively ordered fashion; but more like a field on which thousands of little skirmishes are happening simultaneously, with the contestants continously arranging themselves into and out of particular formations, and then every now and then pitching themselves into a major battle in which most of the players are drawn up on one side or another.

This parallel development or cross-cutting of political issues also has a spatial expression. On the one hand there are many "local" political skirmishes which remain internal to the localities in question. On the other hand, "local" issues can spill over and become "national" ones. This happens, for example, if a particular "local" political actor chooses to call in outside assistance. A case in point would be the Boksburg Chamber of Commerce which appealed to the South African Supreme Court in 1990 to overturn a Boksburg City Council decision to reserve certain amenities for Whites only.

Conversely, "national" political issues can become "local" ones if particular political organisations choose to mobilise locally around it. To the extent to which the contestants in such a battle are not equally well organised in all localities, such "national" fights can show

a marked degree of regional or local unevenness. As noted by Duncan and Goodwin (cf Chapter 5) this means, for example, that state policies are implemented differently in different areas.

Political contests do not simply move from one spatial area to the next and from one spatial level to another; often they spill over from one issue to another. For example, the conflict between the Pietermaritzburg City Council and the Combined Residents and Ratepayers' Association (representing mainly Indian and Coloured residents of Pietermaritzburg) about the 1989/90 rates assessments soon involved the question of the Group Areas Act and the issue of the lack of representation of Indians and Coloureds on the Pietermaritzburg City Council[13].

This interrelationship between political issues and spatial levels is of some importance in explaining the trajectory of political events. Some national political organisations will hook into "local" issues, knowing that these will spill over into "national" issues[14]. Part of the "maneouvring" open to political actors is therefore the choice of shifting the political contest onto another spatial terrain.

The spatial development of politics: An example

An example of this kind of maneouvring around a single issue is provided by the case of bargaining around the statutory determination of minimum wages in South Africa (see Weekly Mail 1/9/89). When progressive unions[15] first achieved recognition by employers in the late 1970's and early 1980's, they refused to participate in the industrial council system arguing that these institutions were undemocratic. The primary issue, however, was that access to industrial councils was structured nationally and with reactionary unions still dominating large sections of industry, the progressive unions would have had little leverage at that level.

With the growth and increasing strength of these unions, however, many joined the industrial councils in order to negotiate conditions nationally rather than at plant level. In this way the national strength of the union could be used to exert pressure on the more intransigent

employers and benefits obtained even for unorganised workers.

These trends have not been lost on employers either, so that from staunch advocates of national level bargaining many have become supporters of plant-level agreements. The result of this has been that the number of industrial councils has decreased from 103 in 1984 to 95 in 1988 (Weekly Mail 1/9/89). This does not mean that employers have abandoned the idea of nationally fixed minimum wages - but they intend to use different channels to lobby for such conditions. According to the Weekly Mail (ibid) a section of the Labour Relations Act stipulates that where no industrial council exists employers can unilaterally make recommendations for wages and conditions of employment to the Minister, who then only has to consult the wage board for the region before gazetting the regulations. Employers are therefore not merely trying to change where the decisions are made, but also the way in which they are made - from collective bargaining to unilateral recommendations to the minister.

This example highlights some of the themes of this chapter:

1. that the spatial organisation of political actors influences their capacity to engage in conflict
2. that the spatial structuring of access to state institutions (e.g. national level bargaining through the industrial council system) affects the capacity of different political actors to exert their influence
3. that political conflict can be shifted from "local" to "national" level and back again
4. that the spatial structure of the state can itself become the subject of political conflict

Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned both with criticism and the construction of new perspectives. The critical part was designed to reject certain *a prioristic* approaches to the analysis of politics. The constructive part has argued for the need to conceptualise politics as a spatial process. These two aspects of the argument are not unconnected. A sense for the way in which processes develop differently over space cannot be easily squared with an *a prioristic* approach. Conversely, a sense for the relative contingency of social developments could make

one more sensitive to the differences in the ways in which political processes unfold over space.

Notes:

1. My comments are directed at Marxist thought, partially because it has been one of the more influential strands of political theorising, but mainly because it is the tradition that I am most acquainted with. Limiting the critique in this way does not affect the ultimate point that I want to make, because it is merely the starting point from which the spatiality of political processes is discussed.

2. I would have preferred to use the classical Marxian concept "contradiction", except that it would require an entire essay to explain properly how I understand it (and to defend my interpretation against others). However, in centering the discussion around the concept "source of political conflict" rather than "contradiction", one runs the risk that one's critique misses Marx's analysis, as not every source of political conflict qualifies as a Marxian "contradiction".

In order to minimise this danger, I have tried to ensure that the "contradictions" that I talk about in the text meet certain criteria:

a. The conflict is inherent in a particular social relation (i.e. it is not simply a contingent conflict between individuals)

b. The conflict is in some sense fundamental to that social relation (e.g. in the way that capitalism is defined by the relation between capitalists and workers)

For a conception of "contradictions" differing from this schematic outline see Elster (1978, Chapter 5; 1985, pp.43-48). For various discussions of Marx's dialectic, see Mepham and Ruben, eds. (1979).

3. The fact that any power relation (monopolies on skill, use of violence etc.) can be used to set up exploitative relations suggests that the axes around which exploitation occurs cannot be defined *a priori*. It should be noted that in this conception exploitation relations can be created as the outcome of political conflict. The level of determination therefore does not run simply from "contradiction" to conflict, but also back again. Consequently the idea of establishing an ontologically privileged basis from where conflict can be explained is not tenable.

The search for *a priori* determinable contradictions is, of course, intricately bound up with the search for an "objective", i.e. *a priori* definition of the working class. The idea that such a definition is possible is attacked *inter alia* by Laclau and Mouffe (1985, cf pp.77ff).

4. It should be noted that the terms of the exploitation relation were not defined simply in non-spatial terms (e.g. by setting the relative prices of agricultural to industrial goods), but were imposed through controls on mobility (internal passports), i.e. explicitly spatial measures.

5. The way in which non-political institutions, e.g. religious organisations, educational bodies, and social networks are constituted across space could be called the spatial structure of civil society. Its analysis could indicate how strong different kinds of trans-local political bonds are likely to be. To take the South African case, the fact that most organisational and social bonds operate inside the boundaries of particular group areas has meant that political organisation across these boundaries is much more difficult.

6. Cohen (1978, Chapter 9) explicitly defends functionalist reasoning. He claims that in the same way that causal explanations are based on lawlike statements such as

> Whenever F occurs E occurs

functional explanations are based on **consequence laws**. These take the form:

> If it is the case that if an event of type E were to occur at t_1, then it would bring about an event of type F at t_2, THEN an event of type E occurs at t_3. (p.260)

This defence of functionalist reasoning is, however, open to attack because it relies on a model of scientific explanation which is itself inadequate. Cohen uses the **deductive-nomological** account of scientific explanation as his model (cf Hempel 1966). Realist accounts of science, however, argue that the mere formulation of an empirical regularity is not the same as causal explanation. The claim that A causes B involves the claim that there is some **mechanism** which produces the observed effect (cf Harré 1970; Bhaskar 1978, 1979). Similarly, functional arguments only qualify as **explanations** if they can show the mechanisms by virtue of which the postulated relationship holds. Cohen himself seems to admit something along these lines. He says

> Now to say that *A* explains *B* is not necessarily to indicate *how A* explains *B*. (1982, p.487)

However, the specification of the mechanism, i.e. the elaboration of the way *how A* explains *B* is not an optional extra as Cohen seems to suggest - it is of the essence of the explanation itself. It is of course possible to make functionalist claims without knowing exactly how the mechanism operates, in the same way that it is possible to make causal claims without knowing how the causal mechanism works, but part and parcel of such claims is an assertion that there is such a mechanism. Functionalist **claims** must therefore be distinguished from functionalist **explanations**. In the former we assume that there is a mechanism, in the latter we demonstrate its existence.

There can be a number of such mechanisms. Natural selection is one of them. Deliberate human intervention would be another. Nevertheless very few social theorists who have used functionalist reasoning have specified such mechanisms. Indeed, in many examples of such reasoning it is difficult to envisage that there even could be such mechanisms.

(For further perspectives on the question of functionalism, see the debate in ***Theory and Society***, vol 11 no. 4, June 1982.)

7. This image is also used by Bob Jessop (cf 1982, Chapter 5).

8. The opposite difficulty is faced by groups who wish to remove certain issues from the "public" sphere and subject it to private decision-making. The abortion lobby faces this kind of problem.

9. The way in which "public" issues are "regionalised" varies. At the one extreme is where these issues are written into the constitution. At the other, is where the responsibility for deciding on particular issues is delegated by Ministerial decree. Somewhere in between is

where responsibility is allocated by Act of Parliament. Whatever the procedure by which responsibility is allocated, the fact is that at the end the "public" issue is treated as properly resolved at the "local" level, i.e. as "private" to the "locality". Where these differences become important though, is in the degree of difficulty in reversing the process, i.e. in re-incorporating the "local" issue within the ambit of "national" politics.

10. Clearly political actors can try to influence state decision-making through extra-institutional channels as well. Various coercive tactics are available in this regard, ranging from mass protests and boycotts to capital flight and investment strikes. Sometimes the threat of these would be sufficient. Obviously the state's relative vulnerability to these tactics also varies from group to group.

11. This allegation was made by an official of the Natal Regional Development Advisory Committee in an interview which I conducted in January 1990. The following extract from the transcript of the interview demonstrates quite well the point I'm trying to make:

> We in Natal battle against hardset perceptions by Pretoria's politicians, there is a kind of "let Natal go to the dogs" attitude. It's been there for a long time, ever since Natal has been opposition politics and "they're not with us, so they're against us, and why the hell should we do anything for them". And there have, in fact, been concrete strategies to reduce Natal's share of the national economy in one way or another. I'm not talking with empty ideas here. Ten years ago, for example, Natal had the lion's share of international tourists who came to South Africa. We had the infrastructure for it. And it was decided by the then South African Tourism Corporation, now the South African Tourism Board, to implement strategies to spread the largesse that Natal was getting. Those strategies have been successful to the extent that Natal now gets 5% of international tourism. And they are cynically and deliberately oblivious to the effects that these strategies have had on Natal.

Clearly it is easier for state officials to make decisions which negatively affect an area if they have no ties to that area.

12. Saunders (1979) has suggested that political passivity should be as much the province of political analysis as political action. More particularly he argues from the perspective that non-action needs to be explained if people do not seem to act in ways that further their interests. There seem to be three cases to consider:

a. People are aware of the fact that they share a common interest and would be prepared to act on it, except that they fear the consequences. This situation says quite a lot about the societal constellation of forces, but it does not raise any special problems for analysis. Presumably a sufficiently sensitive investigator could establish that the passivity was based on fear, and not on a contentment with the situation.

b. People are not aware of the fact that they share a common interest, and they cannot become aware of this fact, because they are dispersed or have difficulties in coming into contact with each other. This would be the case of the French peasantry considered above.

c. People are not aware of the fact that they share a common interest although they **could** become aware of this fact. This is the case of "false consciousness". The problem with judging that someone has "false consciousness" is that the abandoning of the idea of *a priori* determination of "contradictions" also implies the abandoning of the idea of a necessary correspondence between certain social positions and particular interests. As noted earlier,

interests become redefinable so that what is a common interests according to one definition of the situation ceases to be so on another. Consequently interests can be judged only in relation to particular interpellations and within the specific conjuncture (cf Jessop 1982, pp.256-7)

Clearly there are certain basic interests which one would presume to be common to virtually all definitions of the situation - preservation of life, avoidance of pain, good health and so on. If a group's interests in these are violated, yet it still displays "false consciousness" about its interests this would obviously cry out for explanation.

13. The original issue was that rates assessments in the "Indian" and "Coloured" areas had gone up by about 50%, whereas those in the "White" areas had remained relatively stable. It was fairly easy to show that the reasons for this racial disparity lay in the operation of the Group Areas Act. Because there was a shortage of land zoned for Indian and Coloured occupation, market forces drove the price of land up far beyond what it was in White areas. This reflected itself in the rates increases.
In the context of this section, it is interesting to note that the Pietermaritzburg rates issue almost became a national issue, because at one stage the Pietermaritzburg City Council proposed to hold a referendum about whether or not Pietermaritzburg residents wanted to "open" the city to all residents. A "yes" vote in this referendum would have placed significant pressure on the South African government to at least amend the Group Areas Act. A discussion of some of the local, regional and national politicking around this issue, as well as more details on the rates issue is presented in Wittenberg (1990).

14. In the early and mid-1980s in South Africa, United Democratic Front activists were responsible for setting up civic organisations in many "Black" townships. The reason for this was not simply to improve living conditions. It was clear that these issues were so intricately involved with the overall lack of political rights that they would inevitably spill over. Civic organising would yield the base from where a more general political attack could be made on apartheid.

15. i.e. those unions initially operating outside the ambit of South African government sanction.

10. Local political analysis

Localities are social constructs. Politics is a spatial process. There is an appealing symmetry in the arguments of the previous two chapters. But how do "localities" and "politics" relate to each other?

In Chapter 7 it was suggested that there could be four ways of approaching the study of local politics: 1. Defining "local areas" and investigating political processes occurring within them; 2. defining "local areas" and showing that there are distinctive types of political processes occurring within them; 3. specifying a particular political process and showing that it operates within spatially restricted boundaries corresponding with the notion of "local areas"; 4. specifying a particular political process and showing that it generates spatially defined "local areas", and showing further that these in turn give rise to distinctive kinds of political processes.

The argument that there is no non-arbitrary way of defining "localities" immediately rules out the third and fourth options. Indeed, it also seems to preclude the second alternative, because if there was some way of showing that there are distinctive political processes occurring in "local areas" (however defined), these processes presumably could be used to define the concept "locality". It therefore seems that there can be no necessary connection between "localities" and particular types of politics. Nevertheless, rather than leaving it at that, I wish to show this in more detail, by considering the relationship between "localities" and the sources of political conflict, political actors, the state, and political conflict.

For the purposes of this discussion I assume that one can make a distinction between "localities" and supra-local spatial entities (although admittedly only in an arbitrary way).

Local sources of political conflict

There would seem to be at least three ways in which one could characterise a source of political conflict as "local". Firstly, the conflict could arise out of the specific ways in which social relations are constituted within the particular "locality". The concept of uneven development, as well as my argument about the spatial constitution of classes and other political actors, indicates that social relations are likely to be constituted in distinctive ways in different areas. This specificity opens up the possibility that there could be locally unique sources of conflict.

Secondly, the nature of the particular spatial relations within a "locality" could also lead to conflict. Examples of this would be zoning issues and other kinds of disputes about land uses.

Thirdly, as argued in the last chapter, there are issues which are societally regarded as "local", i.e. the "private" concern of the residents of the area. Such issues could, for example, deal with the way in which certain collective consumption items are provided. Questions about how such issues should be resolved within the "local area" could also be regarded as "local sources of conflict".

It seems clear, however, that none of these can serve as the basis for an *a priori* definition of "local sources of political conflict". "Contradictions" falling under the first category arise out of the contingent way in which social relations happen to be constituted within a particular "locality" - this contingency clearly does not lend itself to *a priori* theorising. Similarly the "contradictions" resulting from the particular spatial relations obtaining within a "locality" also cannot be deduced *a priori*[1]. Finally there is no *a priori* basis on which one can specify which issues will be regarded as "local" within a particular society. It might be true, for example, that collective consumption issues are usually assigned to the local level. As argued in Chapter 2 above, however, there is no necessary reason why this should be so, and, indeed, there are important differences between countries in which collective consumption issues are handled by "local government".

The fact that it is impossible to conceptually delimit "local" issues, has its counterpart in the

fact that such local issues are continuous with national issues. This means that under certain circumstances what might be characterised a "local" issue is or might become also a "national" one. For example, the specific way in which various social relations came together in Pietermaritzburg - traditional "tribal" authority relations, relations between youth and older people, relations between township residents and the South African Police, and so on - resulted in a war between United Democratic Front (UDF) and Inkatha supporters in the late 1980s. Local UDF and trade union members alleged that the conflict was actually a national one - part of the general attack by the South African state on the UDF, only in this case waged by proxy through Inkatha. The issue became nationalised in any event, because different national political organisations proposed their own "national" level solutions to the conflict. The South African Police for their part brought in thousands of reinforcements from around the country to quell the conflict.

The example shows that there are different ways in which a local issue can become a national one. For example, broader national forces can interact in specific ways in a locality to create a locally specific conflict, but one which is obviously created in part by these national political currents. Alternatively, the contestants in a local conflict can appeal to "outside" forces for help.

Local political actors

Political actors could be characterised as "local" in at least two ways: Firstly, if their orientation is towards "local" issues; and secondly, if they are not organised at a supra-local level. There is no necessary connection between them. Civic associations for example, might be organised into regional or national federations. Conversely, a political body representing a locally concentrated group, e.g. an ethnic minority, might still be oriented towards "national" issues.

It would seem fairly obvious that the points made in relation to local sources of conflict would show that there are no *a priori* ways of characterising particular types of political actors as "local". Furthermore in this case too there is a continuum between "local" and

"national" political actors. The simplest example of a "local" political actor would be a local residents' association which restricts its concerns simply to "local" matters such as the efficiency with which refuse is collected. Intermediate cases would be where a supra-local body takes up local issues, or where a local body takes up supra-local issues. The other end of the continuum would be a national political organisation which restricts its attention to "national" matters.

An interesting example of a hybrid case is the UDF. It started off as an umbrella organisation of mainly "local" organisations dealing largely with "local" issues. The UDF itself, however, was created as a political body contesting national political issues. The UDF therefore combined within itself the entire continuum: It had affiliates which were local bodies taking up local issues; at various times as a national organisation it lent support to particular affiliates in contesting local issues; affiliates were at various times called upon to take up national campaigns; and finally as a national structure it contested national issues.

The reason for this kind of complexity is not only that "local" issues can blend into "national" ones, but there is a continuum of ways in which "local" bodies can be integrated into "national" ones. At one end of the spectrum, the "local" body has no links outside the "locality". Then there are various types of informal links which can exist. A further progression would be when such links are formalised in some kind of structure, yet even at this stage the local body can retain some degree of autonomous decision-making power. At the other end of the spectrum, the local body has no independent existence anymore, but is completely subservient to the supra-local organisation.

Local state institutions

As in the case of political actors, state institutions can be differentiated by the kinds of issues they tackle and by the extent to which they are integrated into supra-local structures of decision-making. Again there are complexities in the way issues and spatial organisation relate to each other.

The simplest case of a local state institution is the case of "local government", i.e. a state institution which tackles "local" issues, which is locally based and has relative autonomy[2] in making and implementing decisions. An intermediate case would be that where a local structure of a supra-local state institution has responsibility for local issues. In South Africa this was the characteristic way in which "African" townships were administered. Another hybrid case would be that of a local unit of a national state institution dealing with "national" issues, but doing so within a geographically confined area. The local police station of a national police force engaged in crime-prevention in its area would be a case in point. The other end of the spectrum is a "national" state institution dealing with "national" issues - such as the Reserve Bank and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

In view of this complexity, the concept "the local state" does not seem very useful. Within a particular area there might be more than one local state institutions operating. What makes a City Council more "local state" than the local police station? The concept "the local state" leads one to expect a relatively homogeneous entity, when, in fact, there is often a multiplicity of "local state institutions" operating in a particular locality. To the extent to which these different institutions act in concert it might be meaningful to talk about "the local state". This coherence between institutions needs to be demonstrated, however, and not simply assumed.

Local politics

What makes a political conflict "local"? Again there seem to be a number of different ways of characterising this. The issue could be "local"; the political actors or state institution involved could be "local"; or the conflict could occur within a locally restricted area. At this stage it should be clear that there is no necessary correspondence between these aspects.

Indeed, this non-correspondence is what creates much of the interplay between "national" and "local" politics: with national political organisations taking up local issues; local bodies appealing to national state institutions to adjudicate on local disputes; local political organisations challenging national state institutions about their performance in the local area; and so on.

It is clear, then that "local politics" cannot refer to a peculiar kind of process; it is an abstraction from a continuum of processes - the pervasive spatiality of politics. More particularly the dichotomous concepts "local" and "national" politics can be misleading, because they conceal the multiplicity of ways in which "local" and "national" level politics interact.

Localities and politics

The conclusion of the previous four sections bears repeating: *There is no necessary connection between localities and politics.* There are no *a priori* definable local issues, political actors or state institutions. Concepts such as "local politics", "local state", "local political organisation" and "local issue" are *a posteriori* abstractions which are designed to enable us to make sense of the pervasive spatiality of politics - although they can just as easily help to obscure the issue[3].

Does the fact that there is no intrinsic connection mean that there is no place for "localities" in political analysis? This does not necessarily follow. A notion of "locality" (however defined) is very useful in tracing how different political actors and state institutions are organised over space and how they relate to different areas. It enables one to make the kinds of distinctions made in the discussion above.

This picture of the different ways in which "local" bodies relate to "national" ones helps to explain how particular political conflicts develop over space - to what extent they will remain confined to the "local" area or become generalised. Conversely, it draws attention to the ways in which political actors and state institutions are "locally" organised.

The latter is of some importance, because it has been suggested earlier that direct interactions between people at the "local" level are fundamental in enabling political action. Characteristically, "local" organisation is the fundamental building block of "national" political activity. It needs to be observed, however, that the definition of the "local" varies greatly from organisation to organisation, and from group to group. For example, the unit of political

organisation among Black South Africans is generally the individual township, whereas among Whites it is usually the entire city. On the one hand, this probably reflects the greater mobility of Whites (as a result of car ownership). On the other, the greater availability of technological aids (e.g. telephones) and a greater reliance on written information means that the "local space" in which Whites operate is more extensive.

In the case of state institutions there can also be different ways of defining the "local". An example of this would be the fact that the Umgeni Water Board, which is a state controlled company responsible for providing water to the metropolitan areas of Pietermaritzburg and Durban, works within different boundaries than do the municipalities. The South African Police has yet other ways of defining "local" areas of operation in the same geographic region.

The differing ways in which state and political bodies structure themselves have the capacity to enhance or undermine the salience of particular notions of "locality". For example, the basic spatial unit of most state institutions in South Africa is still the racial group area. As a result, "White" and "African" areas have different local government institutions, different educational institutions and so on. These all serve to reinforce the importance of a racial sense of locality. Political organisations that wish to change this organisation of society, such as the African National Congress, face the problems of how to construct "local" political structures which cut across this spatial structure, but yet remain meaningful for people.

This example shows up an interesting reciprocal relationship. Political processes, through the way they are structured in space, have an important influence on the definition of "locality". To the extent to which such a definition becomes entrenched in social practices and everyday life, the "locality" in turn becomes an important structuring element for political practice.

This dynamic can be interpreted in another way. Political processes structure and impact on everyday life in a variety of ways. As such they help to give meaning to the idea of "locality". Conversely the relations of everyday life shape, sustain and structure political relations. In this way the "locality" serves as the building block for politics. Ultimately, the relationship between "localities" and "politics" must be sought in this dynamic. The analysis

of "local politics" should be concerned with capturing it.

Cities and politics

Just as there is no necessary relationship between "localities" and "politics", there is none between "cities" and "politics" either. There can therefore be no *sui generis* type of "urban politics". In analysing the contingent relation between them, something like the dynamic identified above can, however, be identified as well.

Political processes impact in various ways on the development of "cities". They do so first of all through explicit government measures to regulate or promote city development. This can occur either at central or local government level. Harvey's account of local pro-growth coalitions would be an example of the latter. Secondly, many other government policies have implications for city development. For example, policies designed to favour industry at the expense of agriculture will tend to promote urbanisation. Local government provision of housing and education will tend to attract people. Thirdly, the location of governmental offices in cities, with the attendant availability of jobs, itself serves to promote urban development.

The ways in which cities develop will impact in turn in various ways on politics. Firstly, the operation of threshold effects, as Fischer has pointed out (cf Chapter 3), means *ceteris paribus* that political organisation is easier in cities. Secondly, and for the same reason, certain problems are likely to emerge in cities which are not such problems in smaller types of settlements - for instance rubbish disposal[4]. Consequently, cities will pose new political issues. Thirdly, the cumulative effect of urbanisation has the effect of continuously pushing against the limits of the current spatial structure of the state[5].

The last point deserves further comment. Part of the rationale for creating subordinate state institutions is to effectively respond to the variations in the intra-national space, as Duncan and Goodwin have pointed out (cf Chapter 5). The problem is that dynamic processes such as urbanisation and uneven development constantly modify the nature of this spatial variation,

so that the governmental structures that are put in place have to be periodically overhauled.

Furthermore, the possibility exists that different state institutions, with different demands on them, might respond to these challenges in different ways and at different times. In particular, it is possible for some state institutions to redefine their spatial structure, while others do not. A concrete example of this from the early 1980s would be the way in which South African economic planners, confronted *inter alia* by the challenge of urbanisation, started working within a spatial framework defined by "development regions", while most other state institutions continued working within the old apartheid framework of "White" South Africa and "homelands" (cf Cobbett et al, 1987).

The way in which such restructuring occurs within the urban area - e.g. moves towards metropolitan level "local government" - potentially has a significant impact on restructuring ideas of "locality" and on "local politics".

The study of "local politics"

I have suggested that the study of "local politics" should concern itself with the ways in which political processes impact on the structure of everyday life; and with the ways in which the structure of everyday life shapes and sustains political activity. What concretely would such a field of study concern itself with? Some of these concerns could be listed as follows:

1. The nature of spatial variation and the ways in which this sustains (perhaps competing) notions of "locality".
2. Political (and other) processes through which the nature of this spatial variation changes, i.e. through which "localities" are restructured.
3. The ways in which state institutions connect with "localities", i.e. the spatial structuring of access, and the implications this has for the distribution of power between different "local" groups.
4. The ways in which different political organisations and interest groups are organised "locally" and how they connect to extra-local bodies.

5. The nature of the sources of conflict within the "locality".
6. The processes by which "local" conflicts become translated into "national" ones.
7. The processes by which "national" conflicts become "local" ones.

These concerns are so broad that one is left wondering whether in fact this is a distinctive field of study, or not simply political analysis *tout court*. That is hardly surprising, in view of the fact that I have argued that "local politics" is not a distinctive type of politics. Nevertheless the fact that overall political processes are examined from the point of view of the "locality" seems to give it a distinctive perspective. In a sense, "local political analysis" does not investigate a different set of processes and issues from the rest of "political analysis" - it merely looks at those processes from a different angle.

Social theory and the study of "local politics"

The concern with the spatiality of politics and the state is obviously congruent with those theoretical positions which hold that a concern with "space" should become an integral part of social theory" (cf the contributions in Gregory and Urry, eds. 1985; Harvey 1985a, 1985b; Thrift 1983). In the words of Giddens:

> Time-space relations are portrayed as constitutive features of social systems, implicated as deeply in the most stable forms of social life as in those subject to the most extreme or radical modes of change. (1981, p.30)

However, the way that "space" connects with "society" is not a simple issue. Sayer has argued (1985) that a successful resolution of this problem needs to start off from a relative conception of space, rather than an absolute one. In other words, space should be conceived of not as a **thing** in itself, but as the set of **relations** between the objects constituting it. It should be noted that although spatial relations cannot exist independently of objects, they do not depend on the particular objects that constitute them (the relation "X is between A and B" can hold of people, planets and atoms). In this sense one can talk about "spaces" without talking about particular objects (Sayer 1985, pp.51-2).

Two characteristic mistakes can be made as a result of an inadequate conception of "space". The first is that of **spatial fetishism**. This is the mistake of attributing to "space" what is really due to its constituents (p.53). It is the error of seeing "pure space" as being a causally effective "thing". The second is that of **reductionism**. This is the idea that a "space", i.e a set of spatial relations, can be reduced to the objects that constitute it - i.e. that the spatial relations don't matter and that one should simply analyse the objects that make up the space (p.57).

In what sense do spatial relations make a difference? The central, and indeed the only, way is that spatial relations determine what kinds of causal interaction are possible and which are not. All causal interactions have spatial preconditions - the fuse, the light and the dynamite need to be brought into the correct relationship for the dynamite to explode. But "space" is no agent alongside the fuse, the light and the dynamite in the causal interaction. What happens does so because of the particular properties of the objects in question - but for these properties to become effective the objects have to be in the correct relationship to each other[7].

How can this example be transferred to the social domain? Social interactions also have certain spatial preconditions - much more flexible ones, but preconditions nevertheless. The argument above that spatial relations are involved in the constitution of political actors was in effect an argument that there are several spatial preconditions which have to be met before political action becomes possible.

Although these kinds of arguments are undoubtedly valid, they do not establish that spatial relations are **theoretically** important. Sayer, argues that spatial relations only become important in concrete research (cf pp.53-4). Abstract research, which is concerned with the intrinsic properties of objects, needs to consider spatial relations to a lesser degree. The idea behind this distinction can be understood by considering the example of the dynamite explosion again. In this case, abstract research would involve the investigation of the properties of the dynamite (and the fuse) by virtue of which dynamite is liable to explode. Concrete research would involve consideration of the particular ways in which the different elements of the interaction relate to each other. The latter is essentially a contingent matter,

i.e. it is not necessary that the fuse be properly connected to the dynamite, but the properties of dynamite are intrinsic to it and hence necessary.

According to Sayer, abstract research in the social sciences would also be concerned with the analysis of the necessary properties of social objects. He believes that spatial relations will play a rather less important part in this kind of research:

> Hence, while it is important for abstract theory to be aware of the existence of space, the claims that can be made about it are inevitably rather indifferent ones. (p.54)

Concrete research, on the other hand, because it investigates how different objects connect up has to be concerned with space in a much more integral way.

I disagree with Sayer's assessment for a number of reasons. In the first place, I believe that most social objects cannot be abstracted from their spatial context in the way that the dynamite can be abstracted from the fuse and from its surroundings. Take the "state" for example. If my arguments are correct, then the state is in fact a set of relations and not a "thing" which can be detached from its context. When we talk about the "state" in Britain, in the United States or in Bangladesh we are not talking about the same object appearing in different spatial contexts. We are referring to a set of relationships between people which show certain common characteristics. It is valid to inquire what these are. Indeed it would also be legitimate to investigate what we would regard as being essential or necessary in our concept of the state, but this kind of analysis is quite different from the analysis of the internal structure of dynamite. To know, for example, that states are based on a public/private distinction tells us precious little about how states function. The problem is that it is a central component of states that they should play the role of battlefield. Now an analysis of battlefields abstracted from the contending armies on them, is not a particularly exciting exercise.

This argument, incidentally, also shows that there cannot be a theory of the state in general, or indeed, a general theory of the state in advanced capitalist countries. What there can be is the development of conceptual tools to allow us to examine the specifics of individual states. Furthermore to the extent to which there are similarities in the political actors and in the structures of the states, one can anticipate that some of the same political maneouvres and

strategies could be used. This, however, belongs to the province of concrete and not abstract research.

The second reason why Sayer's argument does not hold, is that the investigation of the nature of an object has to consider its internal composition. To take the case of the dynamite again. The scientific explanation of why it is in the nature of dynamite to explode would make reference to the types of chemical bonding that occur within it. This, however, involves spatial relations of a different order - those between the molecules in the chemical. If these spatial relations were to be different, then the chemical would no longer be dynamite and its macro-properties would be different.

A similar point has already been made in the case of political analysis. I have argued that the internal organisation of political actors affects their capacity for action at different levels.

These arguments would therefore tend to support the idea that spatial relations do have an important role to play in social theorising. More particularly, the way "space" should be brought into social analysis is not as an adjunct to essentially aspatially conceptualised social categories. Social processes are at the same time spatial, and where possible should be theorised at such. Failure to do so creates the problem of how to reconnect the social categories, abstracted from their spatial context, with spatial categories, abstracted from their social context. It is this kind of process which generates the pseudo-problem how "localities" ought to be related to "politics" or "the state".

In essence the argument that is presented here echoes that of Tilly (1988). He makes an impassioned plea for the idea that all sociology should be historical:

> [P]ast social relations and their residues - material, ideological, and otherwise - constrain present social relations, and consequently their residues as well. ... In short, social processes are path-dependent. That is why history matters. (p.710)

In other words, processes occur differently because of the occurrence of prior events.

I would add that processes at one point in space occur differently because of what happens at other places - the fact that Britain became the first industrial power precluded a whole range of other possibilities, e.g. India developing into a major colonial power. It is not simply

the temporal path of social processes that matters, but the spatial one as well. It is because social processes are path-dependent that space matters.

Notes:

1. Scott's theory of the urban land nexus can be seen as an attempt to identify *a priori* the kinds of contradiction occurring within urban areas. Its statements are, however, at a level of generality which do not lend themselves to specifying particular kinds of contradiction as occurring characteristically within "localities".

2. If it had absolute autonomy, it would no longer be local government but national government - as would be the case in a city-state like Monaco, perhaps.

3. By suggesting dichotomies, where more complex relations are at play.

4. I am not suggesting that these problems are created by cities - that would be an example of the "urban ideology" that Castells so rightly condemns. Clearly problems such as refuse disposal, noise pollution, traffic jams are a result of the particular social organisation of advanced capitalism (i.e. a reliance on lots of packaging, promotion of private vehicular transport etc.). Nevertheless, given the same social organisation, such problems are much greater in cities than they would be in a small town, because at some stage a mere quantitative increase in the number of cars or volume of rubbish leads to a qualitative increase in the difficulty of dealing with it.

5. Again I'm not suggesting that cities *per se* cause urbanisation. Nevertheless the benefits provided by a city location lead, in the context of a capitalist economy, to enormous pressures towards urbanisation.

6. The argument I have presented is obviously reminiscent of the concept of the "Socio-spatial dialectic" (cf Soja 1980). However, I regard this concept as not very useful. It poses "space" and "society" as two separate entities which relate to each other "dialectically". In order to be related in this way, however, they first have to be conceived separately from each other, i.e. abstractly. For different reasons I disagree with Smith's attempt to overcome this dichotomy through the concept of the "production of space" (Smith 1984). As Sayer has argued this involves a form of reductionism, in which space is viewed as equivalent to its constituent objects (1985, p.58). In my discussion I have tried to show that social processes are spatial processes. In this way there is no need to posit a dichotomy.

7. I'm here implicitly adopting a realist position, which views causal processes as being interactions between objects with particular powers and liabilities (cf Harré 1970; Bhaskar 1978, 1979).

Conclusion

The key conclusions of this thesis can be listed as follows:

1. Localities are social constructs
2. Politics is a pervasively spatial process
3. Localities enter politics in multitudinous ways, but there is no **necessary** link between the "local" and "politics".

In what way are these findings useful? I would argue that there are both conceptual and programmatic benefits of this work.

At the **conceptual** level, the thesis makes contributions in three respects. Firstly, it helps to make sense of the puzzling elusiveness of "place concepts". Secondly, it provides a much more nuanced and dynamic sense of how political processes actually occur than aspatial theories do. Thirdly, it indicates why "local politics" seems to encompass so many diverse aspects - from "spatial inequality" and processes of "collective consumption" to questions of the structure of "local government".

I contend that the concepts developed in this thesis do not simply offer a more satisfactory way of looking at political processes and their relationship to localities, they also open up new avenues for investigation of *what happens in local politics.* I would suggest that they have **programmatic** implications in at least two ways.

Firstly, they suggest that processes often excluded from the purview of "local politics", e.g. production and gender oppression, can be brought into the analysis - through a consideration of the ways in which they influence the constitution of the spaces of "everyday life"[1].

Secondly, the account raises the issue of **organisation** in a much more concerted way than other theories do. It therefore suggests that the (spatial) network of relations in which individuals are embedded and through which they become involved in political action, needs

to be researched[2].

Indeed, perhaps one of the most useful aspects of the conceptual framework is that it indicates some of the complexities of the linkages between "local" and "national" political processes. As such it invites the researcher (and indeed the political activist) to explore the multiplicity of ways in which conflicts can "travel" through space.

Ultimately, however, the usefulness of the framework can only be shown by its capacity to generate interesting questions for research. As such this thesis must stand as an invitation to political (and other social) scientists to conduct empirical research capable of illuminating the spatial relations within which political processes are embedded.

Notes:

1. The possibility of bringing production and consumption into "local political analysis" in an integrated way would be a major advance over theories such as those by Castells and Saunders which artificially divide them - cf Warde's critique of Saunders along these lines (Warde 1990). The influence of gender relations on urban space is addressed, for example, by McDowell (1983).

2. In this regard the analysis raises very similar concerns to those addressed by the structurationist school (cf Thrift 1983).

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