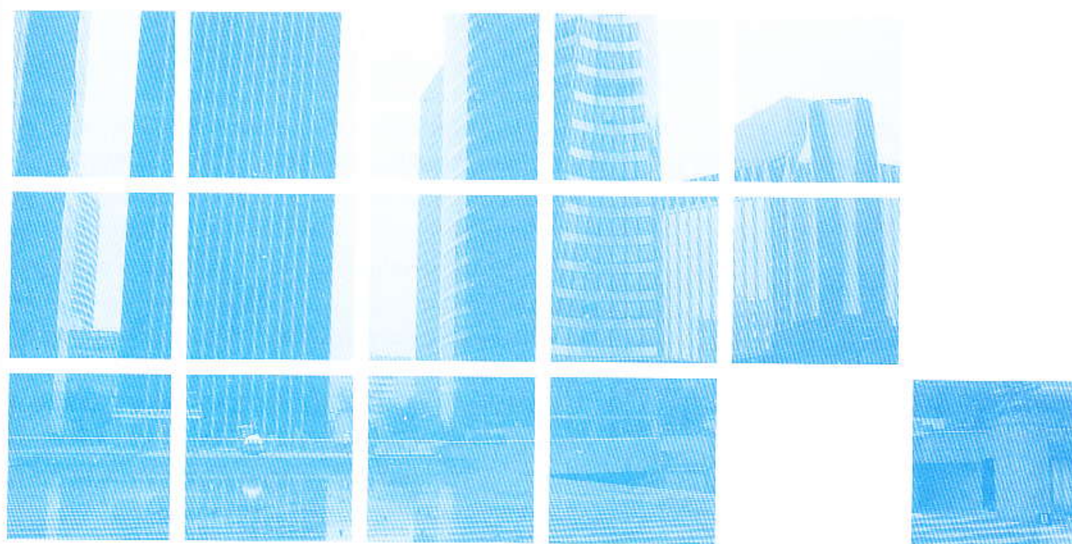

Chapter 9

Neighbourhood, community and the social construction of place

Key questions addressed in this chapter

- What has been the effect of urbanization upon community life?
- How do people construct images of urban environments and how do these affect the way they live their lives?
- What are the social meanings incorporated within the built environment?

A key theme running throughout this book is the fact that cities involve the interchange among many different cultures in relatively confined spaces, often leading to new cultural forms but also to social segregation (see Chapters 3 and 8). These cultural exchanges involve peoples with many differing and complex social networks – some overlapping, some separate. For urban social geographers, key questions include: whether some of these networks constitute a 'community'; whether this concept is synonymous with 'neighbourhood' or 'locality'; and, if so, in what circumstances.

According to classic sociological theory, communities should not exist at all in cities; or, at best, only in a weakened form. This idea first entered sociological theory in the nineteenth century by way of the writings of Ferdinand Tönnies, who argued that two basic forms of human association could be recognized in all cultural systems. The first of these, ***Gemeinschaft***, he related to an earlier period in which the basic unit of organization was the family or kin group, with social relationships characterized by depth, continuity, cohesion and fulfilment. The second, ***Gesellschaft***, was seen as the product of urbanization and industrialization that resulted in social and economic relationships based on rationality, efficiency and contractual obligations among individuals whose roles had become specialized. This perspective was subsequently reinforced by the writings of sociologists such as Durkheim, Simmel, Sumner and, as we have seen, Wirth, and has become part of the conventional wisdom about city life: it is not conducive to

'community', however it might be defined. This view has been characterized as the **'community lost' argument**.

9.1 Neighbourhood and community

There is, however, a good deal of evidence to support the idea of socially cohesive communities in cities. Writers have long portrayed the city as an inherently human place, where sociability and friendliness are a natural consequence of social organization at the neighbourhood level (see, for example, Jacobs, 1961). Moreover, this view has been sustained by empirical research in sociology and anthropology, which has demonstrated the existence of distinctive social worlds that are territorially bounded and that have a vitality that is focused on local 'institutions' such as taverns, pool halls and laundromats.

Urban villages: community saved?

Herbert Gans, following his classic study of the West End of Boston, suggested that we need not mourn the passing of the cohesive social networks and sense of self-identity associated with village life because, he argued, these properties existed within the inner city in a series of 'urban villages' (Gans, 1962). This perspective has become known as **'community saved'**. The focus of Gans's study was an **ethnic village** (the Italian quarter), but studies in other cities have described urban villages based on class rather than ethnicity. The stereotypical example of an urban village is Bethnal Green, London, the residents of which became something of a classic sociological stereotype. They exhibited 'a *sense* of community . . . a feeling of solidarity between people who occupy the common territory' based on a strong local network of kinship, reinforced by the localized patterns of employment, shopping and leisure activities (Young and Wilmott, 1957, p. 89, emphasis added, see also Box 9.1).

Similar situations have been described in a series of subsequent studies of inner-city life on both sides of the Atlantic. Although the utility of such studies is limited by their rather different objectives and by the diversity of the neighbourhoods themselves, the localized social networks they describe do tend to have common origins. In short, urban villages are most likely to develop in long-established working-class areas with a relatively stable population and a narrow range of occupations.

The importance of permanence and immobility in fostering the development of local social systems has been stressed by many writers. The relative immobility of the working classes (in every sense: personal mobility, occupational mobility and residential mobility) is a particularly important factor. Immobility results in a strengthening of *vertical* bonds of kinship and *horizontal* bonds of friendship. The high degree of residential propinquity between family members in working-class areas not only makes for a greater intensity of interaction between kinfolk but also facilitates the important role of the matriarch in reinforcing kinship bonds. The matriarch has traditionally played a key role by providing practical support (e.g. looking after grandchildren, thus enabling a daughter or daughter-in-law to take a job) and by passing on attitudes, information, beliefs and norms of behaviour. Primary social interaction between friends is also reinforced by the residential propinquity that results from immobility. Relationships formed among a cohort of children at school are carried over into street life, courtship and, later on, the pursuit of social activities in pubs, clubs and bingo halls.

Another important factor in fostering the development of close-knit and overlapping social networks in working-class areas is the economic division of society that leaves many people vulnerable to the cycle of poverty. The shared and repeated experience of hard times, together with the cohesion and functional interdependence resulting from the tight criss-crossing of kinship and friendship networks, generates a mutuality of feeling and purpose in working-class areas: a mutuality that is the mainspring of the social institutions, ways of life and 'community spirit' associated with the urban village.

The fragility of communality

The cohesiveness and communality arising from immobility and economic deprivation is a fragile phenomenon, however. The mutuality of the urban village is underlain

Box 9.1

Key debates in urban social geography – What were working-class communities really like? The case of the East End of London

A major source of controversy over many years in urban studies concerns the true nature of the older working-class communities of industrial cities. A key work here is Young and Wilmott's now classic book *Family and Kinship in East London*, which examined working-class life in the 1950s and became one of the most popular and influential works of social science ever to be published in Britain. Many have argued that Young and Wilmott's portrayal of Bethnal Green as full of close-knit family ties, mutual self-help and local social solidarity presented a somewhat romantic and sentimental view. Indeed, many years later Michael Young admitted that he missed a great deal during his researches (he initially had problems in understanding the Cockney accents) and that he may have exaggerated the presence in this community of certain qualities, such as warm family ties (characteristics that he found missing in his own, more austere, middle-class upbringing).

Critics argue that in addition to exaggeration, Young and Wilmott missed the double-edged character of close-knit communities; intense scrutiny of the behaviour of friends and relatives could be oppressive as well as supportive. Furthermore, women bore a large burden of responsibility in these communities. It is also argued that the problems associated with the relocation of Bethnal Green families to new council estates in outer suburbs of Greenwich were exaggerated. Over time, community ties were recreated in the new estates.

Another charge is that Young and Wilmott ignored the long and complex history of London's East End and therefore downplayed the social diversity stemming from previous waves of immigrants. This meant that they also ignored the conflicts between these groups. For example, in previous centuries there were riotous clashes between Irish immigrants and Huguenot silk weavers and later conflicts between various Jewish sects (especially tensions between Jewish immigrants who had previously been urban based compared with those from agricultural communities). In the 1930s white working-class East Enders had rioted against Jewish immigrants and more recently there have been tensions between Bangladeshi settlers and the white working class. Whereas older migrants had to forge bonds of community self-help to cope with the depredations of inner-city life, these more recent migrants have arrived in a well-established welfare state in which citizenship rights are already conferred on them, and this seems to be at the root of many conflicts (Dench *et al.*, 2006). Ironically, many of the Bangladeshi immigrants appear to have the attributes that Young and Wilmott perceived in the traditional working-class communities of Bethnal Green – extended families and mutual support systems.

Young and Wilmott therefore missed the parochialism, xenophobia and racism that were often to be found in London's East End. But perhaps the most enduring feature of this area is its capacity, despite many tensions, to absorb in a relatively successful way over many years diverse immigrants from many areas (the most recent group has been asylum seekers from Somalia). This capacity is revealed by the building that today serves as the Brick Lane Mosque. This structure dates back to 1743 when it was built as a Protestant church to house the French Huguenot community. In 1819 it became a Methodist chapel, while between 1897 and 1976 it served as Spitalfields Great Synagogue (Lichtenstein, 2008).

Key concepts related to London's East End (see Glossary)

Community, ethnic village, neighbourhood, othering, 'primary' relationships.

Further reading

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Links with other chapters

Chapter 4: Box 4.2 Are Western Cities Becoming Socially Polarized?

Chapter 13: Box 13.1 The emergence of clusters of asylum seekers and refugees

by stresses and tensions that follow from social intimacy and economic insecurity, and several studies of working-class neighbourhoods have described as much conflict and disorder as cohesion and communality. The one factor that has received most attention in this respect is the stress resulting from the simple shortage of space in working-class areas. High densities lead to noise problems, inadequate play space and inadequate clothes-drying facilities and are associated with personal stress and fatigue. Children, in particular, are likely to suffer from the psychological effects of the lack of privacy.

The fragility of working-class communality stems from several sources, including the conflict of values that can arise from the juxtaposition of people from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, notwithstanding their common economic experiences. Another threat to communality is the disruption of social relationships that occurs as one cohort of inhabitants ages, dies and is replaced by younger families, who, even though they may be essentially of the same class and lifestyle, represent an unwitting intrusion on the quieter lives of older folk. A third factor is the disruption associated with the presence of undesirable elements – 'problem families', transients and prostitutes – in the midst of an area of otherwise 'respectable' families. The relative strength of these stressors may be the crucial factor in tipping the balance between an inner-city neighbourhood of the 'urban village' type and one characterized by the *anomie* and social disorganization postulated by Wirthian theory.

Suburban neighbourhoods: community transformed?

In contrast to the close-knit social networks of the urban village, suburban life is seen by many observers as the antithesis of 'community'. Lewis Mumford, for example, wrote that the suburbs represent 'a collective attempt to lead a private life' (Mumford, 1940, p. 215). This view was generally endorsed by a number of early studies of suburban life, including the Lynds' (1956) study of Muncie, Indiana, and Warner and Lunt's (1941) study of 'Yankee City' (New Haven). Further sociological work such as Whyte's (1956) *The Organization Man* and Stein's (1960) *The Eclipse of Community* reinforced the image of the suburbs as an area of loose-knit, secondary ties where lifestyles were focused squarely on the nuclear family's pursuit of money, status and consumer durables and the privacy in which to enjoy them.

Subsequent investigation, however, has shown the need to revise the myth of suburban 'non-community'. Although there is little evidence for the existence of suburban villages comparable to the urban villages of inner-city areas, it is evident that many suburban neighbourhoods do contain localized social networks with a considerable degree of cohesion: as Gans (1967) showed, for example, in his classic study of Levittown. Suburban neighbourhoods can be thought of as 'communities of limited liability' – one of a series of social constituencies in which urbanites may choose to participate. This view has been translated as '**community transformed**' or 'community liberated'. Instead of urban communities *breaking up*, they can be thought of as *breaking down* into an ever-increasing number of independent sub-groups, only some of which are locality based.

It has been suggested by some that the social networks of suburban residents are in fact more localized and cohesive than those of inner-city residents, even if they lack something in *feelings* of mutuality. This perspective emphasizes the high levels of 'neighbouring' in suburbs and suggests that this may be due to one or more of a number of factors:

- that the detached house is conducive to local social life;
- that suburbs tend to be more homogeneous, socially and demographically, than other areas;
- that there is a 'pioneer eagerness' to make friends in new suburban developments;
- that suburban residents are a self-selected group having the same preferences for social and leisure activities;
- that physical distance from other social contacts forces people to settle for local contacts.

The cohesiveness of suburban communities is further reinforced by social networks related to voluntary associations of various kinds: parent–teacher associations (PTAs), gardening clubs, country clubs, rotary clubs and so on. Furthermore, it appears from the evidence at hand that suburban relationships are neither more nor less superficial than those found in central city areas.

Nevertheless, there are some groups for whom suburban living does result in an attenuation of social contact. Members of minority groups of all kinds and people with slightly atypical values or lifestyles will not easily be able to find friends or to pursue their own interests in the suburbs. This often results in such people having to travel long distances to maintain social relationships. Those who cannot or will not travel must suffer a degree of social isolation as part of the price of suburban residence.

Splintering urbanism and the diversity of suburbia

It should also be acknowledged that the nature and intensity of social interaction in suburban neighbourhoods tend to vary according to the *type* of suburb concerned. One outcome of the 'splintering urbanism' described in Chapter 1 is that suburbia has become increasingly differentiated. This has involved a reorganization of cultural space around different lifestyles related variously to careerist orientations, family orientations, 'ecological' orientations, etc., and constrained by income and life cycle characteristics. It has also involved an increasing tendency for people to want to withdraw into a 'territorially defended enclave' inhabited by like-minded people, in an attempt to find refuge from potentially antagonistic rival groups.

In the United States, suburbs now not only contain the largest fraction of America's households and population but also a significant fraction of America's industry, commercial office space, retailing, recreational facilities and tourist attractions. Traditional patterns of suburbanization are being overwritten by massive changes in real estate investment, in tandem with equally significant changes in the structure and functional organization of metropolitan regions. This has prompted the emergence of a 'New Metropolis' (Knox, 2008), an encompassing term for the stereotypical urbanized region that has been extended and reshaped to accommodate increasingly complex and extensive patterns of interdependency in polycentric networks of edge cities, urban realms and corridors, exurbs, boomburbs, and micropolitan centres bound together through urban freeways, arterial highways, beltways and interstates and characterized by hopscotch sprawl and the proliferation of off-ramp subdivisions.

Today, then, the traditional form of the suburbs has slipped into history. America's metropolitan areas are coalescing into vast, sprawling regions of 'metroburbia': fragmented and multinodal mixtures of employment and residential settings, with a fusion of suburban, exurban and central-city characteristics (Knox, 2008). Michael Dear (2005, p. 248) notes that

> It is no longer the center that organizes the urban hinterlands but the hinterlands that determine what remains of the center. The imperatives of fragmentation have become the principal dynamic in contemporary cities . . . In contemporary urban landscapes, 'city centers' become, in effect, an externality of fragmented urbanism; they are frequently grafted onto the landscape as an afterthought by developers and politicians concerned with identity and tradition. Conventions of 'suburbanization' become redundant in an urban process that bears no relationship to a core-related decentralization.

Edward Soja (2000) has offered the term 'exopolis' in an attempt to capture some of the key dimensions of contemporary urbanization, including the growth of edge cities and the increasing importance of exogenous forces in an age of globalization. Traditional models of metropolitan structure and traditional concepts and labels – city, suburb, metropolis – are fast becoming examples of what sociologist Ulrich Beck calls 'zombie categories,' concepts that embody nineteenth- to late-twentieth-century horizons of experience distilled into a priori and analytic categories that still mould our perceptions and sometimes blind us to the significance of contemporary change (Beck *et al.*, 2003).

Status panic and crisis communality

One thing that suburban neighbourhoods everywhere seem to have in common is a lack of the mutuality, the permanent but intangible 'community spirit' that is characteristic of the urban village. An obvious explanation for this is the newness of many suburban communities: they have not had time to fully develop a locality-based social system. An equally likely explanation, however, is that the residents of suburban neighbourhoods are

Box 9.2

Key trends in urban social geography – The growth of the New Urbanism movement

The movement initially found expression in what proponents called traditional neighbourhood development (TND), an attempt to codify tract development in such a way as to create the look and feel of small-town, pre-Second World War settings in which pedestrian movement and social interaction are privileged over automobile use. These ideas evolved in the 1990s to a 'New Urbanism', founded on the assertion that liveability can be propagated through the codification of design principles based on precedents and typologies derived from observations of patterns exhibited in traditional communities. The canon was established by architects Andres Duany and Plater-Zyberk, whose firm, DPZ, drew up a 'Lexicon of New Urbanism' and shared it with the Congress for the New Urbanism, the movement's coordinating network. The tenets and rhetoric of New Urbanism are a derivative mixture of ideas that borrow from intellectuals' utopias of the nineteenth century.

The physical configuration of streets is key to New Urbanism, as is the role of building mass as a definer of urban space, the need for clear patterns among elements of built form and public spaces, and the importance of having identifiable, functionally integrated neighbourhoods. The belief is that civic architecture, pedestrian-oriented streets, and a traditional vocabulary of urban design (with a morphology that includes boulevards, perimeter blocks, plazas and monuments,) can act as catalysts of sociability and community. This is to be achieved, according to the Congress for the New Urbanism, through a sort of painting-by-numbers for urban designers; detailed prescriptive codes and conventions, embedded in a series of regulatory documents – a Regulating Plan, Urban Regulations, Architectural Regulations, Street Types and Landscape Regulations – provide the template for new urbanist developments.

But in spite of its strong commercial appeal to developers of new subdivisions, New Urbanism has come in for a great deal of criticism, especially by social scientists. Most new urbanist developments have tended to be somewhat exclusive suburban or exurban projects, catering for white middle-class households and resulting in the kind of 'privatopias' described in Chapter 5. New Urbanism's fondness for neotraditional design has been characterized as a form of cultural reductiveness that results in inauthentic settings, superficial and vulgar, a New Age urbanism that is part conventional wisdom and part fuzzy poetic, resonant but meaningless. Critics have also seen neotraditional urban design as being inherently socially regressive. Richard Sennett (1997, p. 67), for example, describes them as 'exercises in withdrawal from a complex world, deploying self-consciously "traditional" architecture that bespeaks a mythic communal coherence and shared identity in the past.' He describes their designers as 'artists of claustrophobia' and concludes that 'Place making based on exclusion, sameness, and nostalgia is socially poisonous and psychologically useless.' But the principal underlying weakness of New Urbanism is the conceit of environmental determinism and the privileging of spatial form over social process. In the prescriptive reasoning of New Urbanism, design codes become behaviour codes. 'Good' (i.e., new urbanist) design equals community, civility and sense of place; bad design equals placelessness, ennui and deviant behaviour. This, of course, is a chimera: place is socially constructed, and the relationships between people and their environments are complex, reflexive, and recursive.

Key concepts associated with the new urbanism (see also Glossary)

Community, Disneyfication, hyperreality, imagineering, neighbourhood, simulacra, sustainability.

Further reading

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Links with other chapters

Chapter 7: Box 7.3 Jane Jacobs

Chapter 9: Neighbourhood and Community

Chapter 13: Urban Social Sustainability

simply not likely to develop a sense of mutuality in the same way as urban villagers because they are not exposed to the same levels of deprivation or stress.

This reasoning is borne out to a certain extent by the 'crisis communality' exhibited in suburban neighbourhoods at times when there is an unusually strong threat to territorial exclusivity, amenities or property values. Examples of the communality generated in the wake of status panic are well documented, and the classic case is that of the Cutteslowe Walls. In 1932 Oxford City Council set up a housing estate on a suburban site to the north of the city and directly adjacent to a private middle-class estate. The home owners, united by their fear of a drop both in the status of their neighbourhood and in the value of their property, and drawn together by their mutual desire to maintain the social distance between themselves and their new proletarian neighbours, went to the length of building an unscalable wall as a barrier between the two estates (Collinson, 1963). Other documented examples have mostly been related to NIMBY threats posed by urban motorways, airports or the zoning of land for business use.

Communities and neighbourhoods: definitions and classifications

As we have seen, the nature and cohesiveness of social networks vary a lot from one set of sociospatial circumstances to another, and it is not easy to say which situations, if any, reflect the existence of 'community', let alone which of these are also congruent with a discrete geographical territory. Nevertheless, it is possible to think in terms of a loose hierarchical relationship between neighbourhood, community and communality. Thus **neighbourhoods** are territories containing people of broadly similar demographic, economic and social characteristics, but are not necessarily significant as a basis for social interaction. **Communities** exist where a degree of social coherence develops on the basis of interdependence, which in turn produces a uniformity of custom, taste and modes of thought and speech. Communities are 'taken-for-granted' worlds defined by reference groups that may be locality based, school based, work based or media based. *Communality*, or 'communion', exists as a form of human association based on affective bonds. It is community experience at the level of consciousness, but it requires an intense mutual involvement that is difficult to sustain and so only appears under conditions of stress.

In the final analysis, each neighbourhood is what its inhabitants think it is. This means that definitions and classifications of neighbourhoods and communities must depend on the geographical scales of reference used by people. In this context, it may be helpful to think of *immediate* neighbourhoods (which are small, which may overlap one another and which are characterized by personal association rather than interaction through formal groups, institutions or organizations); *traditional* neighbourhoods (which are characterized by social interaction that is consolidated by the sharing of local facilities and the use of local organizations) and *emergent* neighbourhoods (which are large, diverse and characterized by relatively low levels of social interaction).

A rather different way of approaching neighbourhoods and communities is to focus on their *functions*. It is possible, for example, to think in terms of neighbourhoods' *existential* functions (related to people's affective bonds and sense of belonging), *economic* functions (geared to consumption), *administrative* functions (geared to the organization and use of public services), *locational* functions (relating to the social and material benefits of relative location), *structural* functions (related to the social outcomes of urban design), *political* functions (geared to the articulation of local issues) and *social reproduction* functions (related to the broader political economy of urbanization).

9.2 The social construction of urban places

'**Place**', observes David Harvey, 'has to be one of the most multi-layered and multi-purpose words in our language' (Harvey, 1993, p. 4). This layering of meanings reflects the way that places are socially constructed – given different meanings by different groups for different purposes.

It also reflects the difficulty of developing theoretical concepts of place:

> There are all sorts of words such as milieu, locality, location, locale, neighbourhood, region, territory and the like, which refer to the generic qualities of place. There are other terms such as city, village, town, megalopolis and state, which designate particular kinds of places. There are still others, such as home, hearth, 'turf,' community, nation and landscape, which have such strong connotations of place that it would be hard to talk about one without the other.
>
> (Harvey, 1993, p. 4)

In this context it is helpful to recognize the **'betweenness' of place**: that is, the dependence of place on perspective. Places exist, and are constructed, from a subjective point of view; while simultaneously they are constructed and seen as an external 'other' by outsiders. As Nicholas Entrikin put it, 'Our neighborhood is both an area centered on ourselves and our home, as well as an area containing houses, streets and people that we may view from a decentered or an outsider's perspective. Thus place is both a center of meaning and the external context of our actions' (Entrikin, 1991, p. 7). In addition, views from 'outside' can vary in abstraction from being in a specific place to being virtually 'nowhere' (i.e. an abstract, perspectiveless view) (Sack, 1992; see also Box 9.4).

These distinctions are useful in pointing to the importance of understanding urban spaces and places in terms of the insider, the person who normally lives in and uses a particular place or setting. Yet insideness and outsideness must be seen as ends of a continuum along which various modes of place–experience can be identified. The key argument here is that places have meaning in direct proportion to the degree that people feel 'inside' that place. One important element in the construction of place is to define the other in an exclusionary and stereotypical way. This is part of the human strategy of **territoriality**: the idea that humans have an innate desire to occupy a specific territory to satisfy needs of safety, security and privacy and to enable the expression of personal identity.

Another key element in the construction of place is the existential imperative for people to define themselves in relation to the material world. The roots of this idea are to be found in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, who contended that men and women originate in an alienated condition and define themselves, among other ways, spatially. Their 'creation' of space provides them with roots, their homes and localities becoming biographies of that creation (Heidegger, 1971). Central to Heidegger's philosophy is the notion of 'dwelling': the basic capacity to achieve a form of spiritual unity between humans and the material world. Through repeated experience and complex associations, our capacity for dwelling allows us to construct places, to give them meanings that are deepened and qualified over time with multiple nuances.

Here, though, Heidegger introduced an additional argument: that this deepening and multiple layering of meaning is subverted in the modern world by the spread of telecommunications technology, rationalism, mass production and mass values. The result, he suggested, is that the 'authenticity' of place is subverted. City spaces become inauthentic and 'placeless', a process that is, ironically, reinforced as people seek authenticity through professionally designed and commercially constructed spaces and places whose invented traditions, sanitized and simplified symbolism, and commercialized heritage all make for convergence rather than spatial identity.

Yet the construction of place by 'insiders' cannot take place independently of societal norms and representations of the world: the 'cultural grammar' that codifies the social construction of spaces and places. Both our territoriality and our sense of dwelling are informed by broadly shared notions of social distance, rules of comportment, forms of social organization, conceptions of worth and value, and so on. We see here, then, another important dialectical relationship: between social structures and the everyday practices of the 'insiders' of subjectively constructed spaces and places. We live, as noted before in this book, both in and through places. Place, then, is much more than a container or a mental construct. It is both text and context, a setting for social interaction that, among other things:

Box 9.3

Key trends in urban social geography – The development of new 'sacred spaces'

Geographers have until recently paid relatively little attention to religious issues. One possible reason for this neglect may be the (mistaken?) assumption that Western societies are becoming increasingly secular. Chris Park argues that religious issues are relatively marginal in a great deal of academic analysis because of 'the assumed rationality of post-Enlightenment science, which dismisses as irrational (and thus undeserving of academic study) such fundamental issues as mystery, spirituality and awe' (Park, 1994, p. 1). We should also note here that the key social thinkers of the nineteenth century who laid the foundations for much contemporary social theory – Marx, Weber and Durkheim – all stressed the ways in which religion has been used to bolster the existing social order in society, justifying inequalities and placating the poor with the hope of a better after-life.

Recently, however, there has been an increase in geographical work on religion. The reasons for this should have become clear by now from previous chapters on culture, identity, space and ethnicity. For many people in Western societies religious values continue to play a key role in the formation of their sense of identity. Indeed, the very idea that 'religion' can be defined as a distinct separate sphere of life is a particular Western notion; for many religions, including Sikhism and Islam (which are now extensively practised in Western cities), the very idea of separating religious and non-religious spheres is anathema. Although there has been a decline in the numbers attending established forms of Christian worship, there has been a substantial increase in alternative forms of worship such as evangelicalism.

Furthermore, places of religious worship such as churches, chapels, cathedrals, temples and mosques can have a powerful symbolic value. These are places where members of a religious community come together to reinforce their beliefs through various rituals. Some religions such as Sikhism regard the whole of the world as a sacred space full of the presence of God and yet, like most religions, Sikhism also has buildings and spaces that are of special spiritual significance.

Most religions proclaim moral values that are universally relevant and which have been communicated to humankind by an omniscient being(s) through various prophets and gurus. This stance stands in sharp contrast to secular humanist approaches which stress that values are specific to particular times and places. In practice, many religious belief systems have been modified over the years to accommodate changing societal attitudes towards issues such as the role of women and science. However, in response to post-modern moral relativism, and state secularism, we have recently seen the growth of various fundamentalist and evangelical religious movements asserting moral absolutes over issues ranging from homosexuality to abortion, dress and diet.

On a more progressive note, in London religious faith is bringing people together, not only to boost their self-confidence and self-esteem in difficult and sometimes degrading occupational settings, but also to form a new politics in the workplace. Migrant workers in the capital from diverse religious backgrounds have formed an ecumenical movement called London Citizens to petition for better wages for those in subcontracted forms of employment such as cleaning, catering and construction (Jamoul and Wills, 2008).

Key concepts associated with sacred spaces (see Glossary)

Essentialism, identities, signification.

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Links with other chapters

Chapter 5: Box 5.1 The relationships between diversity, difference and inequality

Chapter 12: Box 12.4 The growth of transnational urbanism

- structures the daily routines of economic and social life;
- structures people's life paths, providing them with both opportunities and constraints;
- provides an arena in which everyday, 'common-sense' knowledge and experience is gathered;
- provides a site for processes of socialization and social reproduction; and
- provides an arena for contesting social norms.

Urban lifeworlds, time–space routinization and intersubjectivity

This dialectical relationship lends both dynamism and structure to the social geography of the city.

The crucial idea here is that of the **lifeworld**, the taken-for-granted pattern and context for everyday living through which people conduct their day-to-day lives without having to make it an object of conscious attention. Sometimes, this pattern and context extend to conscious attitudes and feelings: a self-conscious sense of place with an interlocking set of cognitive elements attached to the built environment and to people's dress codes, speech patterns, public comportment and material possessions. This is what Raymond Williams (1973) termed a *structure of feeling*. The basis of both individual lifeworlds and the collective structure of feeling is **intersubjectivity**: shared meanings that are derived from the lived experience of everyday practice. Part of the basis for intersubjectivity is the *routinization* of individual and social practice in time and space. As suggested by Figure 9.1, the temporality of social life can be broken out into three levels, each of which is interrelated to the others. The ***longue durée*** of social life is bound up with the historical development of institutions (the law, the family, etc.). Within the ***dasein***, or lifespan, social life is influenced by the life cycle of individuals and families and (interacting with the *longue durée*) by the social conditions characteristic of their particular generation. And within the *durée* of daily life, individual routines interact with both the structure of institutional frameworks and with the rhythm of their life cycle.

The *spatiality* of social life can also be broken down into three dimensions. At the broadest scale there is institutional spatial practice, which refers to the collective level of the social construction of space. 'Place' can then be thought of as related to the human consciousness and social meanings attached to urban spaces.

	Longue durée	*Dasein* (lifespan)	*Durée* of daily life
Longue durée	Institutional time History	Coupling of history and life history Generation	Dialectics between life institutions and daily life
Dasein (lifespan)		Life history, the 'I'	Relation between life strategies and daily life
Durée of daily life			Day-to-day routines (time use)

Figure 9.1 Interrelations among the dimensions of temporality.
Source: Simonsen (1991), Fig. 1, p. 427.

Time / Space	*Longue durée*	*Dasein*	*Durée* of daily life
Institutional spatial practice	Sociospatial development (historical geography)	Life strategies in spatial context	Geographical conditioning of daily routines
Place	Local history, culture and tradition	Biography in time and space Identity	Spatially based 'natural attitudes'
Individual spatial practice	Historical conditioning of spatial practices	Relation between life strategies and spatial practices	Daily time–space routines (time–geography)

Figure 9.2 Temporality, spatiality and social life.
Source: Simonsen (1991), Fig. 3.

Finally, individual spatial practice refers to the physical presence and spatial interaction of individuals and groups. These three levels of spatiality, in turn, can be related to the three levels of temporality of social life, as depicted in Figure 9.2. We are, thus, presented with a multidimensional framework within which time–space routinization is able to foster the intersubjectivity upon which people's lifeworlds depend.

The best-known element of this framework to geographers is the time–geography of daily life that has been elaborated by Torsten Hägerstrand (Carlstein *et al.*, 1978). His basic model (Figure 9.3) captures the constraints of space and time on daily, individual spatial practices. It illustrates the way that people trace out 'paths' in time and space, moving from one place (or 'station') to another in order to fulfil particular purposes (or 'projects'). This movement is conceptualized as being circumscribed by three kinds of constraint: (1) **capability constraints** – principally, the time available for travelling and the speed of the available mode of transportation; (2) **authority constraints** – laws and customs affecting travel and accessibility; and (3) **coupling constraints** – resulting from the limited periods during which specific projects are available for access. The particular significance of time–geographies in the present context is that

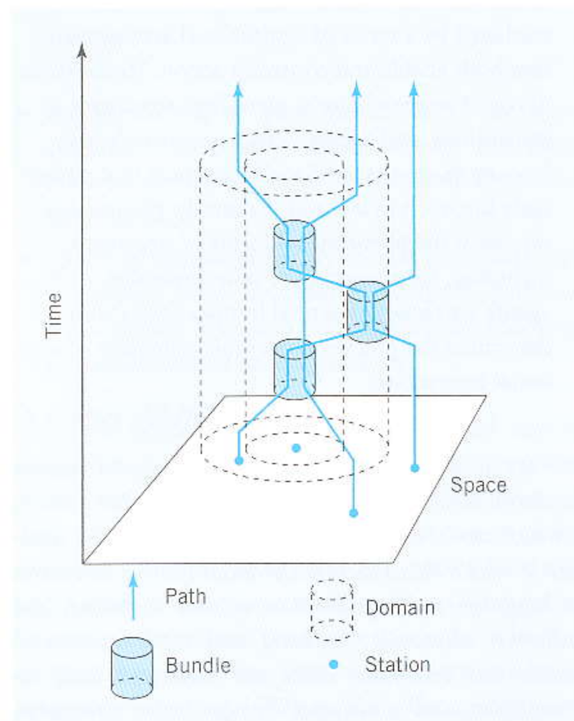

Figure 9.3 Concepts and notation of time-geography (after Hägerstrand).
Source: After Gregory (1989), Fig. 1.4.4, p. 82.

groups of people with similar constraints are thrown together in 'bundles' of time–space activity: routine patterns that are an important precondition for the development of intersubjectivity.

Structuration and the 'becoming' of place

These issues are central to **structuration theory**, which addresses the way in which everyday social practices are structured across space and time. Developed by Anthony Giddens (1979, 1981, 1984, 1985: see also Bryant and Jary, 1991), structurationist theory accepts and elaborates Karl Marx's famous dictum that human beings 'make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing'. Reduced to its essentials, and seen from a geographical perspective, structurationist theory holds that human landscapes:

> are created by knowledgeable actors (or *agents*) operating within a specific social context (or *structure*). The structure–agency relationship is mediated by a series of institutional arrangements that both enable and constrain action. Hence three 'levels of analysis' can be identified: structures, institutions, and agents. Structures include the long-term, deep-seated social practices that govern daily life, such as law and the family. Institutions represent the phenomenal forms of structures, including, for example, the state apparatus. And agents are those influential human actors who determine the precise, observable outcomes of any social interaction.
>
> (Dear and Wolch, 1989, p. 6)

We are all actors, then (whether ordinary citizens or powerful business leaders, members of interest groups, bureaucrats or elected officials), and all part of a dualism in which structures (the communicative structures of language and signification as well as formal and informal economic, political and legal structures) enable our behaviour while our behaviour itself reconstitutes, and sometimes changes, these structures. Structures may act as constraints on individual action but they are also, at the same time, the medium and outcome of the behaviour they recursively organize. Furthermore, structurationist theory recognizes that we are all members of *systems* of social actors: networks, organizations, social classes and so on.

Human action is seen as being based on 'practical consciousness', meaning that the way in which we make sense of our own actions and the actions of others, and the way we generate meaning in the world is rooted in routinized day-to-day practices that occupy a place in our minds somewhere between the conscious and the unconscious. Recursivity, the continual reproduction of individual and social practices through routine actions (*time–space routinization*), contributes to *social integration*, the development of social systems and structures among agents in particular locales.

In addition, structures and social systems can be seen to develop across broader spans of space and time through *system integration*, which takes place through *time–space* **distanciation**: the 'stretching' of social relations over time and space as ideas, attitudes and norms are spread through print and electronic media, for example. All this recursivity and integration does not make for stasis, however, since the structurationist approach sees all human action as involving unanticipated or unacknowledged conditions and as having unintended consequences that modify or change the nature of recurrent practices (Figure 9.4).

This kind of perspective leads us to see urban spaces and places as constantly changing, or '*becoming*'. Place, in other words, is an historically contingent *process* in which practice and structure become one another through the intertwining of recursive individual and social practices and structured relations of power. At the same time, place involves processes (socialization, language acquisition, personality development, social and spatial division of labour, etc.) through which individual biographies and collective ways of life also become one another. The structurationist approach has become an important influence in contemporary human geography, particularly in urban social geography because of its central concern with the sociospatial dialectic. It has, nevertheless, proven difficult to incorporate into substantive accounts of city and/or neighbourhood formation. It has also been criticized for its emphasis on recursivity (to the relative neglect of the unforeseen and the unintended), for its inattention to the role of the unconscious, and for its neglect of issues of culture, gender and ethnicity.

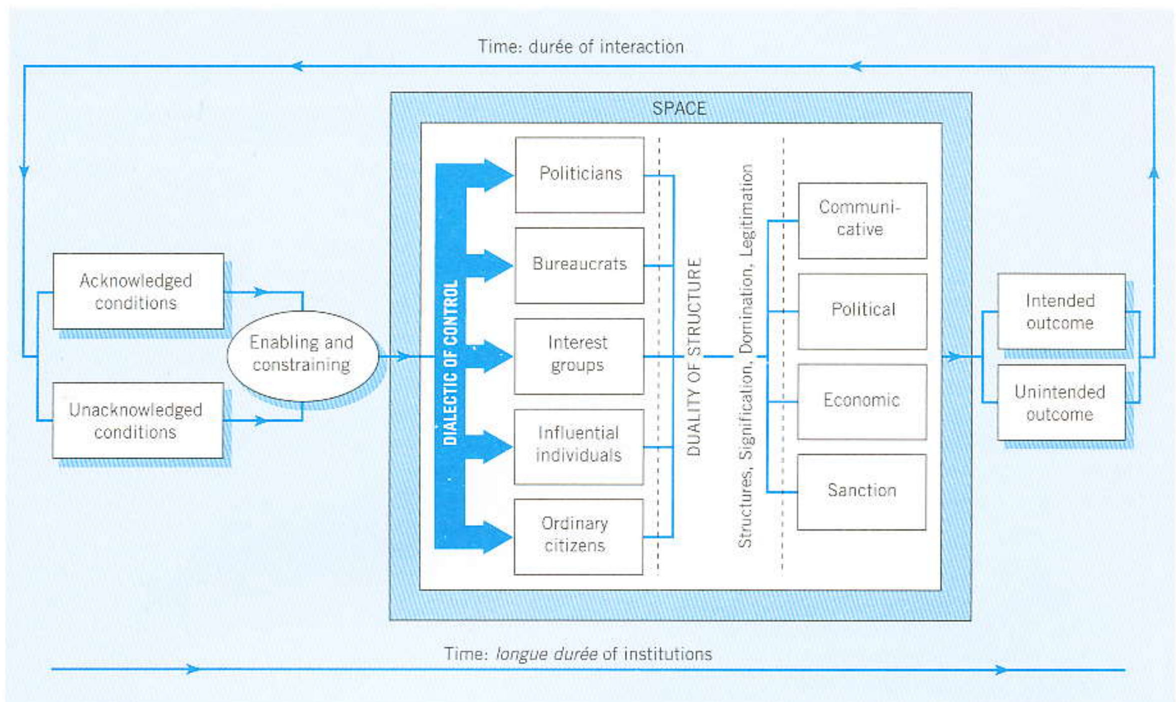

Figure 9.4 A model of the structuration of urban space.
Source: Dear and Moos (1986), pp. 351–73.

Constructing place through spatial practices

David Harvey's 'grid' of spatial practices (Table 9.1) provides one way of accommodating a broader, richer array of issues in addressing the ways in which places are constructed and experienced, how they are represented, and how they become used as symbolic spaces. The matrix is useful in focusing our attention on the dialectical interplay between experience, perception and imagination; and in clarifying the relationships between distanciation and the appropriation, domination and production of places. It does not, though, summarize a theory: it is merely a framework across which we can interpret social relations of class, gender, community and race.

The three dimensions on the vertical axis of the grid are drawn from Lefebvre's (1991) distinction between the experienced, the perceived and the imagined:

- *Material spatial practices* refer to the interactions and physical flows that occur in and across space as part of fundamental processes of economic production and social reproduction.
- *Representations of space* include all of the signs, symbols, codifications and knowledge that allow material spatial practices to be talked about and understood.
- *Spaces of representation* are mental constructs such as utopian plans, imaginary landscapes, paintings and symbolic structures that imagine new meanings or possibilities for spatial practices.

The four dimensions across the horizontal axis of the grid have to be seen as mutually interdependent. *Accessibility and distanciation* are two sides of the same coin: the role of the friction of distance in human affairs. Distance, as we saw in Chapter 8, is both a barrier to and a defence against social interaction. Distanciation 'is simply a measure of the degree to which the friction of space has been overcome to accommodate social interaction' (Harvey, 1989b, p. 222). The *appropriation of space* refers to the way in which space is occupied by individuals, social groups, activities (e.g. land uses) and objects (houses, factories, streets). The *domination of space* refers to the way in which the organization

Table 9.1 A 'grid' of spatial practices

	Accessibility and distanciation	Appropriation and use of space	Domination and control of space	Production of space
Material spatial practices (experience)	Flows of goods, money, people, labour, power, information, etc.; transport and communications systems; market and urban hierarchies; agglomeration	Land uses and built environments; social spaces and other 'turf' designations; social networks of communication and mutual aid	Private property in land; state and administrative divisions of space; exclusive communities and neighbourhoods; exclusionary zoning and other forms of social control (policing and surveillance)	Production of physical infrastructures (transport and communications; built environments; land clearance, etc.); territorial organization of social infrastructures (formal and informal)
Representations of space (perception)	Social, psychological and physical measures of distance; map making; theories of the 'friction of distance' (principle of least effort, social physics, range of good, central place and other forms of location theory)	Personal space; mental maps of occupied space; spatial hierarchies; symbolic representation of spaces; spatial 'discourses'	Forbidden spaces; 'territorial imperatives'; community; regional cultures; nationalism; geopolitics; hierarchies	New systems of mapping, visual representation, communication, etc.; new artistic and architectural 'discourses'; semiotics
Spaces of representation (imagination)	Attraction/repulsion; distance/desire; access/denial; transcendence 'medium is the message'	Familiarity; hearth and home; open places; places of popular spectacle (streets, squares, markets); iconography and graffiti, advertising	Unfamiliarity; spaces of fear; property and possession; monumentality and constructed spaces of ritual; symbolic barriers and symbolic capital; construction of 'tradition'; spaces of repression	Utopian plans; imaginary landscapes; science fiction ontologies and space; artists' sketches; mythologies of space and place; poetics of space; spaces of desire

Source: Harvey (1989b) pp. 220–221.

and production of spaces and places can be controlled by powerful individuals or groups: through private property laws, zoning ordinances, restrictive covenants, gates (and implied gates), etc. The *production of space* refers to the way in which new systems of territorial organization, land use, transport and communications, etc. (actual or imagined) arise, along with new ways of representing them (see also Box 9.3).

We shall draw on this grid throughout the remainder of this chapter as we examine the ways in which material and social worlds are given meaning through cultural politics, in which political and economic power is projected through urban form, and in which space and place are appropriated through symbolism and coded meanings.

Place, consumption and cultural politics

An important lesson is implicit in the grid of spatial practices outlined by Harvey: it is that we should not treat 'society' as separate from 'economy', 'politics', 'culture' or 'place'. We are thus pointed to the domain of '**cultural politics**', defined by Peter Jackson (1991a, p. 219) as:

Box 9.4

Key thinkers in urban social geography – Henri Lefebvre

The publication in 1991 of an English translation of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (first published in French in 1974) was treated in some geographical circles like the discovery of the Holy Grail! In the two previous decades only a few geographers 'in the know' had spoken in awe of a French scholar who had developed a radical reformulation of Marxian theory that put space rather than time at the heart of his analysis. In the event, Lefebvre's book proved to be a densely written and, at times, impenetrable text that inevitably led to differing interpretations over the *real* meaning of his work. Nevertheless, Lefebvre's influence upon urban social geography should not be underestimated. In particular, he had a big influence upon the work of David Harvey, arguably the most influential human geographer in the late twentieth century (see also Box 1.1). A key insight has been Lefebvre's distinction between differing conceptions of space.

On the one hand Lefebvre referred to *representations of space* – the dominant ways in which cities are portrayed, such as in planning documents (sometimes termed 'conceived space'). These are bound up with existing capitalist norms involving issues such as property rights and legalization surrounding labour laws. On the other hand he noted that there are *spaces of representation*, the personal feelings that people have towards the spaces they inhabit through everyday interactions (sometimes termed 'perceived space'). The crucial point is that these two notions of space are interlinked and may be in conflict. For example, the way in which a city centre is portrayed in official governmental literature, extolling its virtues for shoppers and inward investment, may differ from the ways in which local inhabitants think of such a space. Relatively low-paid service workers may have a different idea of a regentrified city centre than well-paid high-tech workers or visiting tourists.

Lefebvre was especially interested in the processes that led to the creation of these dominant representations of space and the exclusion of other visions of space. As a social visionary, Lefebvre hoped that people could envisage new notions of space. Since he put space at the heart of his analysis, radical social change must involve more than changing the means of production, but also new concepts of space in which people live their everyday lives.

Lefebvre has been criticized for ignoring the new *cultural politics* (Blum and Nast, 1996) but he has inspired a number of Marxian geographers who have examined recent changes in cities (e.g. N. Smith, 1984; Merrifield, 1993).

Key concepts associated with Henri Lefebvre (see Glossary)

Material practices, representations of space, spaces of representation.

Further reading

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Links with other chapters

Chapter 1: Box 1.1 David Harvey

> the domain in which meanings are constructed and negotiated, where relations of dominance and subordination are defined and contested . . . In opposition to the unitary view of culture as the artistic and intellectual product of an elite, 'cultural politics' insists on a plurality of cultures, each defined as a whole 'way of life', where ideologies are interpreted in relation to the material interests they serve. From this perspective, the cultural is always, simultaneously, political.

Our experiences of material and social worlds are always mediated by power relationships and culture. 'Social' issues of distinction and 'cultural' issues of

aesthetics, taste and style cannot be separated from 'political' issues of power and inequality or from 'gender' issues of dominance and oppression. As noted in Chapter 3, the construction of place is therefore bound up with the construction of class, gender, sexuality, power and culture.

Habitus

An important contribution to this perspective has been made by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. His concept of ***habitus***, like Raymond Williams's concept of a 'structure of feeling', noted above, deals with the construction of meaning in everyday lifeworlds. *Habitus* evolves in response to specific objective circumstances of class, race, gender relations and place. Yet it is more than the sum of these parts. It consists of a distinctive set of values, cognitive structures and orienting practices: a collective perceptual and evaluative schema that derives from its members' everyday experience and operates at a subconscious level, through commonplace daily practices, dress codes, use of language, comportment and patterns of material consumption. The result is a distinctive cultural politics of 'regulated improvisations' in which 'each dimension of lifestyle symbolizes with the others' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 173).

According to Bourdieu, each group will seek to sustain and extend its *habitus* (and new sociospatial groups will seek to establish a *habitus*) through the appropriation of **symbolic capital**: consumer goods and services that reflect the taste and distinction of the owner. In this process, not every group necessarily accepts the definitions of taste and distinction set out by the elite groups and tastemakers with the 'cultural capital' to exercise power over the canons of 'good' taste and 'high' culture. In any case, such definitions are constantly subject to devaluation by the popularization of goods and practices that were formerly exclusive.

The fact that symbolic capital is vulnerable to devaluation and to shifts in avant-garde taste makes it even more potent, of course, as a measure of distinction. As a result, though, dominant groups must continually pursue refinement and originality in their lifestyles and ensembles of material possessions. Less dominant groups, meanwhile, must find and legitimize alternative lifestyles, symbols and practices in order to achieve distinction. Subordinate groups are not necessarily left to construct a *habitus* that is a poor copy of others', however: they can – and often do – develop a *habitus* that embodies different values and 'rituals of resistance' in which the meaning of things is appropriated and transformed.

All this points once again to the importance of *consumption* and of the **aestheticization** of everyday life introduced in Chapter 3. Consumption:

> purports to dispel the dread of being in a world of strangers. Advertisements tell us what to expect, what is acceptable and unacceptable, and what we need to do in order to belong. They are primary vehicles for producing and transmitting cultural symbols. [Consumption] not only produces and circulates meaning, it . . . interweaves and alters forces and perspectives, and it empowers us in our daily lives to change our culture, to transform nature, and *to create place.*
>
> (Sack, 1992, p. 132)

Consumption is inherently spatial. The propinquity of object and place allows the former to take on the cultural authority of the latter; objects displayed beside each other exchange symbolic attributes; places become transformed into commodities. The consumer's world consists not only of settings where things are purchased or consumed (shops, malls, amusement parks, resorts, etc.) but also of settings and contexts that are created with and through purchased products (homes, neighbourhoods). All of these settings are infused with signs and symbols that collectively constitute 'moral landscapes' and 'maps of meaning'.

9.3 The social meanings of the built environment

At the most general level, the landscape of cities can be seen as a reflection of the prevailing ideology (in the sense of a political climate, *Zeitgeist*, or 'spirit') of a particular society. The idea of urban fabric being seen – in part, at least – as the outcome of broad political, socio-economic and cultural forces has been explicit in much writing on urbanization. We can illustrate this with reference to the simple example of the

symbolization of wealth and achievement by groups of prosperous merchants and industrialists. Early instances of this include the industrial capitalists of Victorian times, who felt the compulsion to express their achievements in buildings. The Cross Street area of central Manchester, for example, is still dominated by the imposing gothic architecture commissioned by the city's Victorian elite who, preoccupied with the accumulation and display of wealth but with a rather philistine attitude towards aesthetics, left a clear impression of their values on the central area of the city.

As the petit bourgeoisie of small-scale merchant and industrial capital lost ground to corporate and international capital, so the symbolization of achievement and prosperity became dominated by corporate structures. Huge office blocks such as the Swiss Re Building in London and the Pirelli Building in Milan were clearly intended as statements of corporate power and achievement, notwithstanding any administrative or speculative functions. At a more general level, of course, the whole complex of offices and stores in entire downtown areas can be interpreted as symbolic of the power of the 'central district elite' in relation to the rest of the city.

Meanwhile, other institutions have added their particular statements to the palimpsest of the urban fabric. The sponsors of universities, trade union headquarters, cultural centres and so on, unable (or unwilling) to make use of the rude message of high-rise building, have generally fallen back on the combination of neoclassicism and modernism that has become the reigning international style for any building aspiring to carry authority through an image of high-mindedness rather than raw power.

The appropriation of space and place: symbolism and coded meanings

While the built environment is heavily endowed with social meaning, this meaning is rarely simple, straightforward or unidimensional. To begin with there is an important distinction between the *intended* meaning of architecture and the *perceived* meaning of the built environment as seen by others. This distinction is essential to a proper understanding of the social meaning of the built environment. David Harvey's study of the Sacre-Coeur in Paris, for example, demonstrates how the intended symbolism of the building – a reaffirmation of Monarchism in the wake of the Paris Commune – 'was for many years seen as a provocation to civil war', and is still interpreted by the predominantly republican population of Paris as a provocative rather than a unifying symbol (Harvey, 2003).

Another critical point is that the social meaning of the built environment is not static. The meanings associated with particular symbols and symbolic environments tend to be modified as social values change in response to changing lifestyles and changing patterns of socio-economic organization. At the same time, powerful symbols and motifs from earlier periods are often borrowed in order to legitimize a new social order, as in Mussolini's co-opting of the symbols of Augustan Rome in an attempt to legitimize Fascist urban reorganization; and (ironically) in the adoption of a selection of motifs from the classical revival in Europe by Jefferson and the founding fathers responsible for commissioning public and ceremonial architecture in Washington, DC.

How can all such observations be accommodated within a coherent framework of analysis that addresses the fundamental questions of communication by whom, to what audience, to what purpose and to what effect? These are the questions that have prompted a number of writers to build on structuralist social theory in such a way as to accommodate the social meaning of the built environment. According to this perspective, the built environment, as part of the socio-economic superstructure stemming from the dominant mode of production (feudalism, merchant capitalism, industrial capitalism, etc.), reflects the *Zeitgeist* of the prevailing system; it also serves, like other components of the superstructure, as one of the means through which the necessary conditions for the continuation of the system are reproduced. One of the first people to sketch out these relationships between social process and urban form was David Harvey, who emphasized the danger of thinking in terms of simple causal relationships, stressing the need for a flexible approach that allows urbanism to exhibit a variety of forms within any dominant mode of production, while similar forms may exist as products of different modes of production (Harvey, 1978).

Architecture, aesthetics and the sociospatial dialectic

The architect's role as an arbiter, creator and manipulator of style can be interpreted as part of the process whereby changing relationships within society at large become expressed in the 'superstructure' of ideas, institutions and objects. This allows us to see major shifts in architectural style as a dialectical response to the evolving *Zeitgeist* of urban–industrial society – as part of a series of broad intellectual and artistic reactions rather than the product of isolated innovations wrought by inspired architects.

Thus, for example, the Art Nouveau and Jugendstil architecture of the late nineteenth century can be seen as the architectural expression of the romantic reaction to what Lewis Mumford called the 'palaeotechnic' era of the Industrial Revolution: a reaction that was first expressed in the Arts and Crafts movement and in Impressionist painting. By 1900 the Art Nouveau style was firmly established as the snobbish style, consciously elitist, for all 'high' architecture.

The dialectic response was a series of artistic and intellectual movements, beginning with Cubism, that went out of their way to dramatize modern technology, seeking an anonymous and collective method of design in an attempt to divorce themselves from 'capitalist' canons of reputability and power. Thus emerged the Constructivist and Futurist movements, the Bauhaus school and, later, Les Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) and the Modern Architecture Research Group (MARS), who believed that their new

Postmodern architecture: the Harold Washington public library in Chicago. Opened in 1991, this building reflects earlier architectural styles (e.g. the 'Beaux-Arts' movement). Photo Credit: Michael Edema Leary.

architecture and their new concepts of urban planning were expressing not just a new aesthetic image but the very substance of new social conditions which they were helping to create.

The subsequent fusion and transformation of these movements into the glib 'Esperanto' of the International Style and the simultaneous adoption of the style as the preferred image of corporate and bureaucratic conservatism, solidity and respectability provide an important example of the way in which the dominant social order is able to protect itself from opposing ideological forces. In this particular example, the energy of opposing ideological forces – idealist radicalism – has been neatly diverted into the defence of the status quo. The question is: how?

Commodification

One answer is that the professional ideology and career structure within which most practising architects (as opposed to the avant-garde) operate is itself heavily oriented towards Establishment values and sensitively tuned to the existing institutional setting and economic order. Consequently, the meaning and symbolism of new architectural styles emanating from radical quarters tend to be modified as they are institutionalized and converted into commercialism; while the core movement itself, having forfeited its raw power in the process of commodification, passes quietly into the mythology of architectural education and the coffee-table books of the cognoscenti. There is a direct parallel here in the way that the liberal ideology of the town planning movement was transformed into a defensive arm of urbanized capital, systematically working to the advantage of the middle-class community in general and the business community in particular. According to this perspective, architects, like planners, can be seen as unwitting functionaries, part of a series of 'internal survival mechanisms' that have evolved to meet the imperatives of urbanized capital.

Architecture and the circulation of capital

Another way in which architects serve these imperatives is in helping to stimulate consumption and extract surplus value. The architect, by virtue of the prestige and mystique socially accorded to creativity, adds exchange value to a building through his or her decisions about design, so that the label 'architect designed' confers a presumption of quality even though this quality may not be apparent to every observer. Moreover, as one of the key arbiters of style in modern society, the architect is in a powerful position to stimulate consumption merely by generating and/or endorsing changes in the nuances of building design.

The professional ideology and career structure that reward innovation and the ability to feel the pulse of fashion also serve to promote the circulation of capital. Without a steady supply of new fashions in domestic architecture (reinforced by innovations in kitchen technology, heating systems, etc.), the filtering mechanisms on which the whole owner-occupier housing market is based would slow down to a level unacceptable not only to builders and developers but also to the exchange professionals (surveyors, real estate agents, etc.) and the whole range of financial institutions involved in the housing market. The rich and the upper-middle classes, in short, must be encouraged to move from their comfortable homes to new dwellings with even more 'design' and 'convenience' features in order to help maintain a sufficient turnover in the housing market.

One way in which they are enticed to move is through the cachet of fashionable design and state-of-the-art technology. Hence the rapid diffusion of innovations such as energy-conserving homes; and the desperate search for successful design themes to be revived and 're-released', just like the contrived revivals of haute couture and pop music. In parts of the United States, the process has advanced to the stage where many upper-middle class suburban developments resemble small chunks of Disneyland, with mock-Tudor, Spanish Colonial, neo-Georgian, Victorian gothic and log cabin de luxe standing together: style for style's sake, the *zeit* for sore eyes. And, in some cities, new housing for upper-income groups is now promoted through annual exhibitions of 'this year's' designs, much like the Fordist automobile industry's carefully planned obsolescence in design.

But it is by no means only 'high' architecture and expensive housing that help to sustain urbanized capital. One of the more straightforward functions of architecture in relation to the structuration of class

relations through residential settings is the symbolic distancing of social groups. The aesthetic sterility of most British public housing, for example, serves to distance its inhabitants from other, neighbouring, social groups. At a further level, it can be argued that the scarcity of symbolic stimuli typical of many planned, post-war working-class environments may act as a kind of intellectual and emotional straitjacket, minimizing people's self-esteem and sense of potential while fostering attitudes of deference and defeatism. Although the process is at present very poorly understood, the role of the architect is clearly central to the eventual outcome not only in terms of the social order of the city but also in terms of the existential meaning of urban settings.

This brings us back to a final but crucial consideration: the role of the self in the interaction between society and environment. One framework that accommodates this is shown in Figure 9.5. Accepting architectural design as part of the superstructure of culture and ideas stemming from the basic socio-economic organization of society (whether as part of the prevailing ideology or as part of the counter-ideology), this framework focuses attention on: (1) the intended messages emanating from particular owners/producers and mediated by professional 'managers' (architects, planners, etc.); and (2) the received messages of environmental 'consumers' as seen through the prisms of cognitive processes and existential imperatives and the filter of the dominant ideology.

Box 9.5

Key thinkers in urban social geography – Nigel Thrift

It is impossible to venture very far into human geography before coming across the work of Nigel Thrift. Indeed, in many ways Thrift is the geographical equivalent of the highly influential social scientist Anthony Giddens. Like Giddens, Thrift has drawn upon a wide range of ideas from many sources. One of the most prolific writers in the field, with scores of books and articles to his name, the scope of Thrift's work is enormous, ranging from the nature of capitalism (2005), to globalization and regional development (Amin and Thrift, 1992), the character of money (Leyshon and Thrift, 1997) and the role of time in social life (Thrift, 1977) (to mention but a few!). It is impossible to summarize this vast corpus of work in any detail but, nevertheless, underpinning this extraordinary variety are a number of key themes.

Above all, Thrift has resisted the 'top-down' structuralist theorizing of Marxian approaches. While acknowledging the existence of complex networks of power, knowledge and authority, these are seen as the outcome of actions by people who make choices based on various types of knowledge that they employ in the course of their everyday lives. Issues such as performance, subjectivity, discourse, representation and identity therefore figure highly in Thrift's work.

Taken as a whole, Thrift's work represents a remarkable reconstitution, in a geographical setting, of diverse but interrelated ideas from a wide range of highly influential thinkers in the social sciences including: Torsten Hagerstrand's work on time–space budgets; Anthony Giddens' work on structuration theory; Michel Foucault's work on knowledge and power; Manuel Castells' work on 'spaces of flows'; Bruno Latour's work on actor network theory; and Gilles Deleuze's work on performance.

Key concepts associated with Nigel Thrift (see Glossary)

Embeddedness, performativity, subjectivity.

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Links with other chapters

Chapter 2: Box 2.4 Manuel Castells

Chapter 3: Box 3.3 Michel Foucault

Chapter 14: Box 14.1 Edward Soja

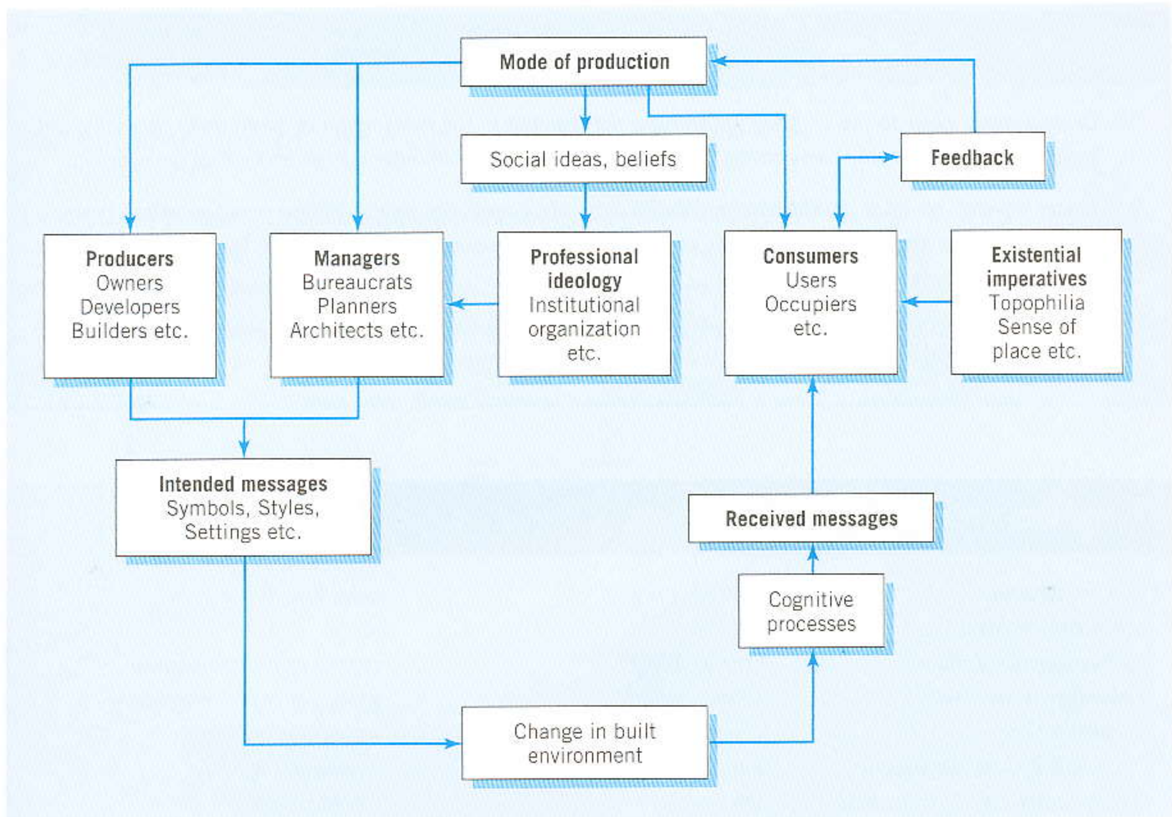

Figure 9.5 Signs, symbolism and settings: a framework for analysis.
Source: Knox (1984).

Box 9.6

Key novels related to urban social geography – Chapter 9

Berlin Alexanderplatz (1929) Alfred Doblin. A novel set in the underworld of working-class Berlin in the inter-war era, this is an innovative book that attempts to evoke the numerous moods of city life through newspaper reports, advertising and street signs.

The Catcher in the Rye (1951) J.D. Salinger. A classic novel of teenage rebellion in the post-war United States.

Cocaine Nights (1996) J.G. Ballard. A thriller that is also an examination of a new urban form – the retirement community.

Mrs Dalloway (1925) Virginia Woolf. An innovative novel, based in 1920s London, showing the isolation of the characters as geography, class and gender separate them.

Saturday (2005) Ian McEwan. Contemporary urban angst as experienced by an upper-middle-class inhabitant of London set in the context of international terrorism.

Chapter summary

9.1 Despite many views to the contrary, cities have not resulted in the destruction of community networks, but these have been radically transformed through decentralization, suburbanization and social polarization.

9.2 Places develop complex multilayered meanings depending upon the views of those who live within them, as well as those who live outside. These meanings have an important influence upon the ways people go about their everyday lives.

9.3 The landscape of cities tends to reflect the prevailing ideology of the times – a complex mixture of political, economic and cultural forces.

Key concepts and terms

aestheticization
authority constraint
'betweenness' of place
capability constraint
communities
'community lost' argument
'community saved' argument
'community transformed' argument
coupling constraint
cultural politics
daesin
ethnic village
Gemeinschaft
Gesellschaft
habitus
intersubjectivity
lifeworld
longue durée
material spatial practices
neighbourhoods
place
representations of space
spaces of representation
structuration theory
symbolic capital
territoriality
Zeitgeist

Suggested reading

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Concepts of space

Benko, G. and Strohmayer, U. (1997) *Space and Social Theory* Blackwell, Oxford

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Pinder, D. (2006) *Visions of the City* Routledge, London

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