

Forthcoming in Critical Planning & Design Roots, pathways, and frames, edited by Camilla Perrone, Springer, 2021

Submitted version

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The Urbanization of Capital (with a z because it's American) and *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* were collections of previously published papers and some new material, put together by David Harvey in the early 1980s and published in 1985. Neither book is necessarily the best way of starting to read Harvey but I am writing here about *The Urbanization of Capital* because it was so important for me. I describe my intellectual situation in the 1980s in an attempt to explain the value this book had for me and for my subsequent teaching. Rather than summarising the book's content I explore some of the directions in which it has led me and others in the intervening decades.

As a young university teacher in England in the 1970s, I found intellectual and political nourishment mainly in the Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE), a network of hundreds of social scientists and activists which met for an annual conference in Bradford and published a Newsletter which later became the journal *Capital and Class* (and which lives on). It spanned a wide range of fields of study under an implicit aspiration for an integrated social science, more-or-less Marxist. There were some great luminaries in that group including Robin Murray, Diane Elson, Simon Mohun and Cynthia Cockburn and there emerged a sub-group, the CSE Political Economy of Housing Workshop, convened by Steve Merrett and me and with inputs from Doreen Massey, Michael Ball and a few dozen others. Through all this I was beginning to read Marx, as were others in my university faculty who were less concerned with housing, more with construction or architecture and planning.

Out of these friendships in our university (The Bartlett School, UCL) emerged a plan to hold a Bartlett International Summer School on the Production of the Built Environment (BISS), blessed by a start-up grant of £1000 and tacit permission to use the name from the head of the Bartlett, John Musgrove. The first of the Summer Schools was held in 1979 and they continued until 1996, with a printed volume of *Proceedings* emerging in each subsequent year.¹ The notion of a 'school' with distinct teachers and taught had been part of the first meeting but it immediately faded and all participants had the same status and contributed to the costs thereafter.

The distinctive core of the BISS was the sharing of a broadly Marxist approach to the built environment, insisting on the integral analysis of production (in the narrow sense of construction) with distribution, circulation and the realisation of value (i.e.

¹ Long out of print, these volumes have now been scanned by May Day Rooms and the PDFs are free downloads at:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1bPR860zXGUch7sVXvceY9CpDJgRu4hwC>

production in its full sense). For many the labour process, especially on the construction site, was regarded as the driver of change while those of us interested in planning, infrastructure and the markets in buildings were often a bit divergent, discussing land ownership, rent, urban planning and so on.

I think men outnumbered women in the BISS but not heavily and the leader throughout was Linda Clarke, initially a PhD student and now a Professor at the University of Westminster. She and her partner Jörn Janssen from Dortmund remained very productive and are a leading force in the European Institute for Construction Labour Research². Doreen Massey had taken part in some meetings, while Anne Haila of Helsinki joined BISS a few years later.

Out of the group in the Bartlett School there also emerged plans and a syllabus for a Masters programme on Production of the Built Environment which launched in 1986 and led to my first encounter with the actual David Harvey. Harvey's work provided a major part of the reading list for our course so by December we had all read a lot of his output & I asked whether we should invite him for a seminar. The students were keen, though only on condition that he didn't give a talk, that instead they would prepare short provocations or challenges for discussion. We put this idea to him and he accepted –rather intrigued– and he duly came in the spring of 1987. The students did a superb job. I recall a powerful argument from Madeleine Wahlberg that Harvey's omission of gender issues seriously undermined not just the treatment of reproduction of labour power but the whole analysis of urban structure. Someone else, probably Jonathan Charnley (later Charley), started a discussion on Harvey's rather minimal attention to the state. Alan Spence, former shop steward, Communist Party editor and Covent Garden activist, led a debate on urban social movements and their potential for the working class. These exchanges, and others which I have forgotten, took all afternoon and we ended up sitting on the grass with bottles of wine. Harvey had been receptive and responsive throughout and ended up saying that, like Marx when he died, he had a lot of unfinished work to do.

I should complete this scene-setting by explaining that our little group of teachers were partly preoccupied with how and what to teach first year undergraduate (bachelors) students in a course (Edwards, Campkin and Arbaci 2009; Edwards 2014) designed to foster an integrated understanding of urban development, challenging the inherited division of labour between professions and emphasising the social and economic forces at work in settlements. It was in this context that my reading of Harvey's book was especially valuable.

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Harvey's quest in this book was to put *space*, and specifically space at the urban scale, into a Marxist analysis, indeed to make it central. Whereas Marx had dealt brilliantly with time throughout his work, space had never seriously figured, save in a few disjointed insights like the famous passage in the *Communist Manifesto* on globalisation and its impacts on established trades:

² <http://www.clr-news.org>

They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. (Marx and Engels 1848.)

Formally, this book centres on the proposition that the continuing accumulation of capital will from time to time generate more money capital than can profitably be put to use in the primary process of the economy, the production of commodities. When this happens, one outlet for capital is to switch into a second process, the production of the built environment, i.e. urbanization. Thus we get the physical extension of settlements, transport, urban infrastructure and so on. There are further escape routes too for over-accumulated capital, into education, research and development and into social expenditures, policing and control.

The exposition of draws on the massive work which Harvey had completed a few years earlier in *The Limits to Capital* (1982), essentially a re-working of Marx for the late 1970s with a strong emphasis on geographical space.

These processes are mapped in the much-reproduced Figure 3 of the later book, drawn from chapter 12 of *Limits*:

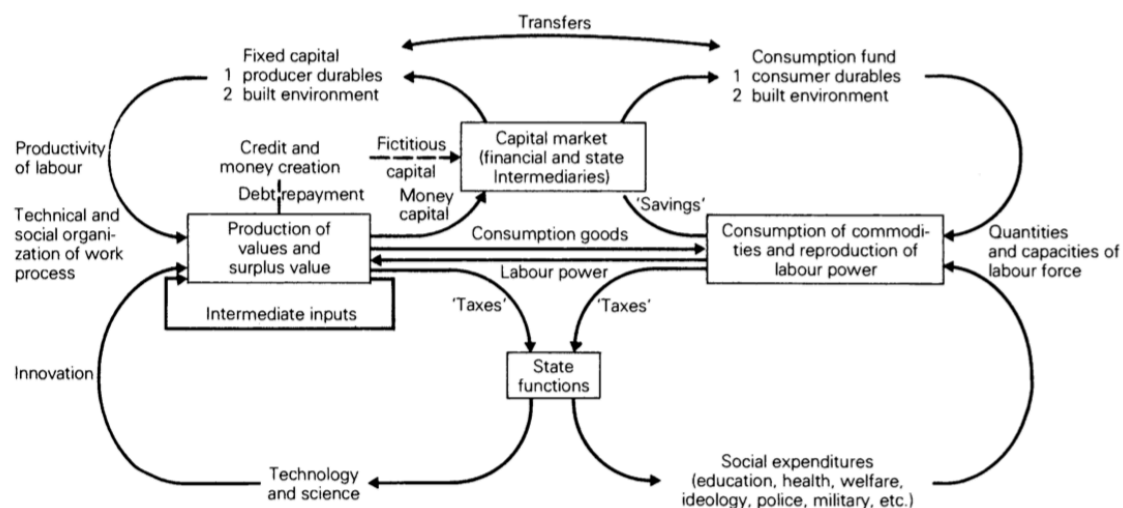


Fig. 3. The structure of relations between the primary, secondary, and tertiary circuits of capital

Figure n.1 The structure of relations between the primary and secondary, and tertiary circuits of capital, Fig 3 of the book, reproduced by kind permission of Blackwells/Wiley (all being well).³ We could crop the original caption.

³ In this caption and in Harvey's text the term 'circuits' is used though, as Brett Christophers (2011, note 1) rightly points out, there is potential confusion because elsewhere Harvey (following Marx) distinguishes the circuit of productive capital, the circuit of commodity capital and the circuit of money

The first thing to stress about this diagram is ‘the structure of relations...’ because the entire book is about relationships: the links between processes, classes of people, institutions. A second key feature is that it can be seen sequentially, with the primary activity along the centre of the chart, secondary (including built environment) above and tertiary below. Indeed this chart, like so many, is the lecturer’s friend because it’s much more communicative when drawn live by the speaker, or animated as a story. Anyone who has not seen the Royal Society of Arts animation of a Harvey short talk is urged to see it. Search engines know where it is.

The related text in Harvey’s foundational chapters 1 and 2 explores the relationships in some detail, reflecting for example on whether the switching of capital from one function to another tends to be sequential or simultaneous and what may trigger such switches. The key here is crises. That’s a term bandied about rather loosely by some Marxists but Harvey is very measured with it. A sectoral crisis arises where a specific part of the economy finds itself stricken, giving capital an incentive to move out of that field if it can, or at least stop reinvesting profits there, and to switch –to another sector or perhaps out of commodity production altogether. Another quite precisely defined form is a regional crisis, arising when a geographic area no longer yields good returns, provoking switching to others. Or, of course, a crisis can be global, system-wide, provoking capital to switch everywhere out of the direct production of commodities into other spheres in search of opportunities to accumulate.

I have always found these ideas to be invaluable tools, helping me to make sense of what I see in the world and to help students make sense of their experience and to link spatially scattered phenomena. In our teaching we would always take our students for a week to a foreign city, asking them to describe and make sense of what they could see there: the buildings and urban fabric telling of periods of rapid growth, decline, abandonment of shipbuilding in Venice or of steelmaking in the Ruhr; looking out for international flows of investment in the built fabric of Barcelona or Bilbao & linking those to the supply chains which made them possible. Did you know, for example, that the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is clad with titanium after the huge stocks hoarded during the cold war were dumped on the world market in the dissolution of the USSR, making it briefly affordable?

Back in London, it was invaluable in the 1980s and 1990s to have this kind of mental apparatus to hand in making sense of the surges and collapses of property speculation, notably the boom and bust of the office market which surged while capital withdrew from manufacturing in the Margaret Thatcher period and switched to finance and property development – either direct, with the same firm moving from one to the other, or more commonly via the financial sector and capital markets channelling money towards property. Here we had radically new structures in the banking sector —multi-function mega-banks replacing archaic little specialised elite companies in operating the financial markets. They needed a completely new built

capital, a quite distinct usage. I’m following Christophers here and trying to avoid ‘circuits’, as indeed Harvey did in the caption of this diagram in *Limits*.

environment and they got it, very very fast, with attendant professions working day and night to produce the buildings, the City of London planning department throwing out their plan for a new one to enable the change and the relatively new London Docklands Development Corporation approving the massive development of Canary Wharf only months after a developer suggested it. Great lessons here about the role of the financial sector and of 'the state'. The English state apparatus was perhaps always very well adapted to the needs of capital (or at least some capitals) and, in the 1980s, was an effective midwife to the new financialised rentier economy which was to dominate the rest of my lifetime.

Harvey's insights were indirectly useful to us in a social movement at King's Cross, opposing developers over a massive, mainly office, development planned behind the railway station. I was working with this campaign and in 1990 we were trying hard to fend off the risk that the local municipality, Camden, would grant permission. I was convinced that the office market bubble would soon burst, others in the campaign agreed and we did all we could to secure delay. I met an ex-student, by then chairman of London's leading property market analysts. He whispered his agreement. It worked. The London office market crashed, taking with it Canary Wharf, the King's Cross developers and many others.

The actual empirical testing of Harvey's 1985 propositions about capital switching received very little attention at the time but Brett Christophers undertook a careful study of the UK data from 2000 to 2007, charting the lead-up to the great financial crisis, thinking this would be a good test. His paper (Christophers 2011) is a great vindication, demonstrating not only that there had been a massive expansion of investment flowing into real estate in the UK in the run-up to the 2007 crash, but also that it really did appear to be investment switched from production processes, much of it via the growing amounts of cash which companies were retaining instead of reinvesting back into production.

Harvey's own accounts of the 2007 crash are now numerous, most interestingly I think in *The Urban Roots of Capitalist Crises* (chapter 2 in Harvey 2012), always reworking the original switching analysis from the 1980s emphasising how, by 2007 the urban economy, with its mass of real estate values dominating other assets, WAS the economy. In a sense this way of thinking has become everyone's which is a great tribute. I was having thoughts indirectly inspired by Harvey in 2015 when I compiled this chart, Figure n.2, for a government report (Edwards 2015) without even citing him as an inspiration.

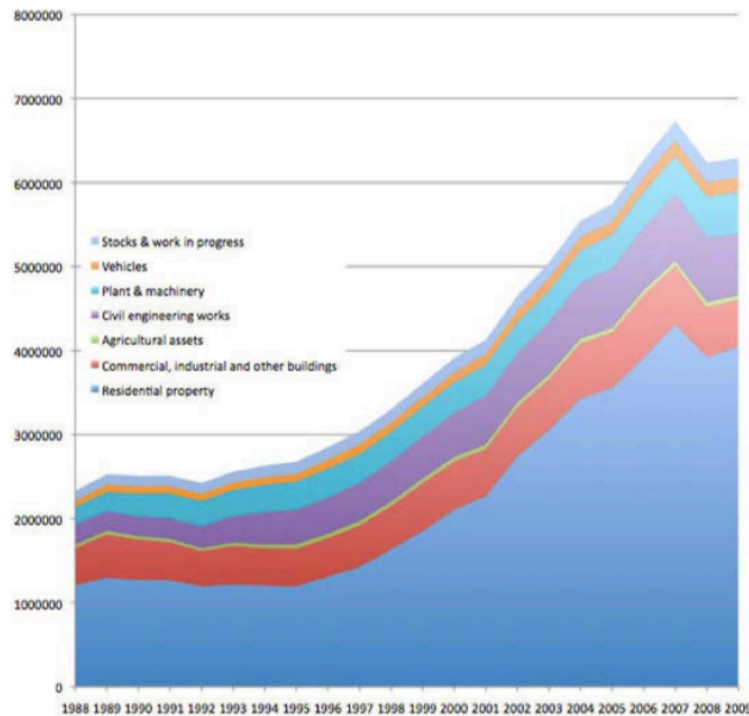


Figure 2. UK: Value of tangible assets, £m, 1988-2009,
Source: ONS Non-financial balance sheets (annual)

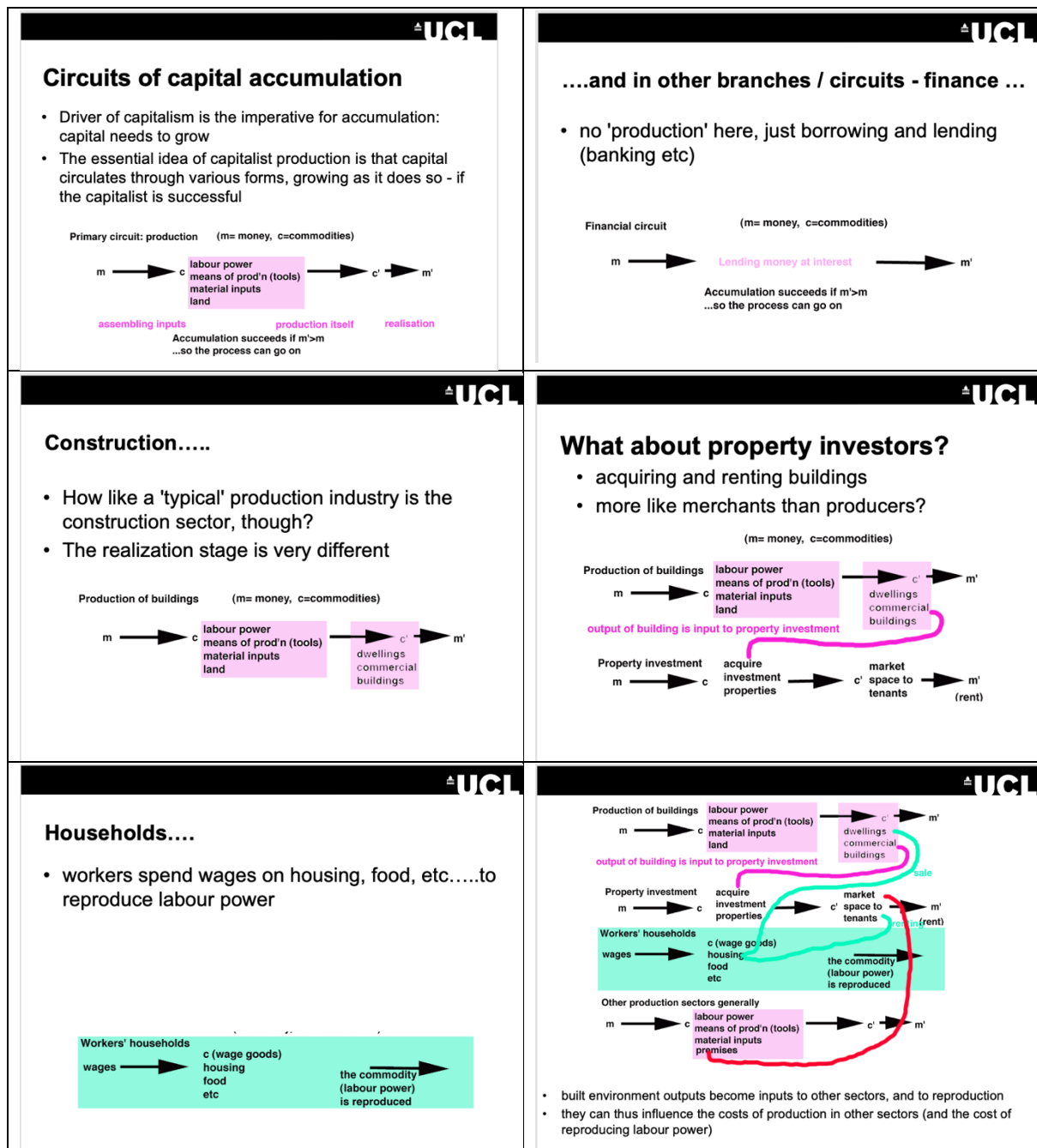
Figure n.2 UK Market value of tangible assets, £m, 1988-2009. Source Edwards 2015; data from ONS non-financial balance sheets (annual) – crop original caption and note: this exists also in monochrome.

I'm getting ahead of myself, both in time —leaping into the new millennium— and in scale: leaping to the economy as whole and away from the main learning I gained from Harvey's 1985 book which was about ways of analysing the production of the city and of individual buildings .

One of the valuable adaptabilities of Harvey's circuits diagram (Fig n.1 above) is that almost any part of it can be expanded to explore and explain processes in more detail. There are some brilliant examples in the work of Christian Zeller in which he elaborates the growth of derivatives markets and the securitisation of property investments by adding successive loops around the housing financing section. I can't illustrate them here as I have been unable to find an example.

Another expansion is one which I have used a lot in teaching: adding detail to the central horizontal spine of the diagram representing the production process and showing how it could link to processes we are concerned with in the built environment. Figure n.3 shows a sequence of 6 lecture slides which build from the generic commodity production industry, adding a financial sector, then a construction sector, then property investors (landlords) and lastly households. The final slide puts all these together and the talk discusses the flows of materials and money, the extraction of value at various stages and the interdependence of builders, landlords, banks and the working class. It can support, for example, discussion of how workers'

living standards depend not only on wages relative to the price of manufactured commodities but on rents and house prices too, a major problem now in so much of the world and dramatically so in London where I work.



The need to explore building or urban development projects in a systematic way, exposing the relationships between the class interests and individuals involved was a strong preoccupation of ours in the 1980s and 90s. It was an approach which enabled us to get beyond the crude application to urban development of the rent relationships which Marx had identified and explained in nineteenth century English agriculture. In the same year that Harvey's *Urbanization of Capital* appeared, a group of us produced a collected volume of papers on rent theory (Ball, Bentinegna, Edwards and Folin 1985). This book has just been reprinted and I have mightily

enjoyed re-reading it last year in a reading group convened by Elena Besussi and other Bartlett friends). I think it led us to rediscover the potential of rather open-minded examination of urban development as a historical or at least a sequential set of relationships, Marx and Harvey in the background. (Interestingly, Covid drove us from physical meetings to online sessions which initially felt like a loss but enabled new people to join from Sweden, Finland and Brazil so quickly became much richer.)

I want to end this catalogue of personal spinoffs from Harvey's book by referring to the important, but now almost invisible, work of Henrik Chambert. I'm not sure whether he and Harvey ever met, but certainly Chambert (1992) was pursuing a very Harveyish project. He led a team in the Nordic capitals who were exploring processes of capital accumulation in the construction processes of the respective countries, analysing every single social housing project over a number of decades after WW2. They were charting the division of costs and revenues between state agencies, building firms, construction labour force, materials suppliers and so on, working towards a very detailed understanding of the concentration of capital in the house building sector. The remarkably open data environment of Scandinavia enabled this sort of work to be done and demonstrated how one outcome of sustained social democratic and socialist housing production was massive capital accumulation in Skanska and other firms. I'm mentioning this because the research team developed a kind of tabulation of agents, functions and relationships which they and others have used to very good effect in the analysis of projects. Figure 4 here is an instance, used in this case as illustration in a talk of mine about the development of the Great Estates by aristocratic families in London in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was further developed and used as a research tool by Claudio de Magalhães (1999) and Mark Page (1996).

One helpful framework for thinking of urban development process (after Henrik Chambert, Claudio de Magalhães, Mark Page) applied here to leasehold development in London great aristocratic estates, 18th / 19th centuries

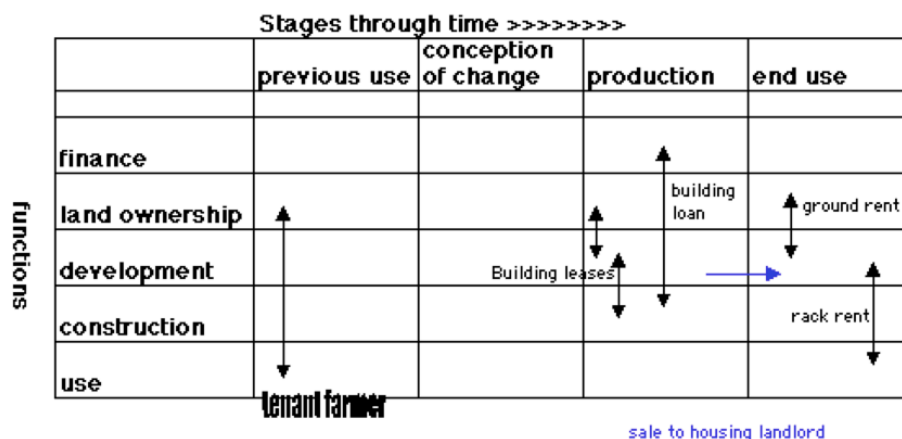


Fig n.4 Framework based on the work of Henrik Chambert, from Edwards 1995

Notes for that slide: Leasehold development of great estates in London:

Land: huge estates, mainly gifts from King after closure of monasteries

Building: small firms with little working capital, so contracts small

Development finance: banks not yet investing much; builders keen to avoid land purchase and borrow from land-owner if possible

Final users: growing middle classes / bourgeoisie, often enriched by slave trade or colonial trade, buying long leases for their own use or to sub-let. They take on maintenance & insurance costs and pay a ground rent to land owner. [=“leasehold”]

State regulation: Land and property law; building regulations against fire risk from 1670.

Planning: purely private urban design by land owners (internalizing the externalities from parks and squares. Bloomsbury; Regent's Park.) Some infrastructure.

Why did it end? I'm not sure. Factors include:

Railways, buses opened up new land for commuter suburbs in 19th century

Ownership of farm land more fragmented further out (and in South London)

Building firms accumulating their own working capital and able to finance developments themselves.

My account of this book has so far drawn on chapters 1 and 2 which set out the main argument. They are followed with two valuable chapters on rent which are classics and extend the analysis of spatial relationships already established. Chapter 5 on residential segregation and 6 on urban politics, however, are very different. Both build a Marxist logic from first principles for handling their topic but were written in a North American context which means they travel less well to European readers. The chapter 6 is a stimulating elaboration of the combinations of labour organisation and kinds of capital which can exist and struggle in urban areas —mainly conceived as labour market areas, though with lots of caveats. He argues that a ‘structured coherence’ is liable to emerge in an urban area in which coalitions of capital, sometimes with trade unions, coexist tolerably well for a while until disturbed. There’s a good discussion of the idea of ‘growth coalitions’ which was fashionable in 1980s USA and of the scope for radical change to take root in cities, albeit limited in space and time. It is stimulating to read, humane and rather abstract. To me they are like ideas waiting to be used.

The penultimate chapter 7 considers how the ideology of planning was, in the late 1970s, beginning to have to be transformed to meet the needs of capital as the harsher confrontations of capital and labour began to bite. He charts a transition from an earlier (almost golden) age of the post-war boom during which benign urbanists and technocrats were more-or-less able to carry through the project of absorbing available capital and labour into the car-based transformation of America with suburbs and freeways, accommodating some redistribution and some environmental awareness when pressed to do so. What the transition was leading to he didn’t, of course, know but he outlines the increasingly brutal transformations coming in the housing and urban systems as investors intensified their quests for rents and assets in a new class struggle waged by capital. He ends “And if we pursue this possibility, we might come to understand why the planner seems doomed to a life of perpetual frustration, why the high-sounding ideas of planning theory are so frequently translated into grubby practices on the ground, how the shifts in world view and ideological stance are social products rather than freely chosen” (page 184).

The book ends with a chapter bearing the book's name: the Urbanization of Capital. This is both a recapitulation of the analysis and a completely new essay in the history of urbanization as being the history of capitalism (and before that, of other class societies). It looks well into the future too and I won't spoil it for new readers by saying any more. It ends with a clarion call for us to envisage and make the socialist city. "Thinking through the paths to socialist urbanization is to chart the way to the socialist alternative itself." (p 226).

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So that is the book which has most influenced my life. Much of its content had appeared before as journal articles or in the massive *Limits to Capital* (1982) and much was to be re-worked later as the decades passed. So it may not now be the key book to buy – indeed that's almost impossible as it's out of print and the internet offers antiquarian copies from across the world for \$150, some of which will flow to Mr Bezos. Indeed this chapter nearly didn't get written. I have no personal copy of the book since some time in the 1990s when I went on an EU-funded delegation to Cuba led by Paloscia and Paba who asked us each to bring one or two books for the library of the School of Architecture at Havana which was unable to buy what it needed because of the US blockade. Thinking that the Cubans would soon be having to deal with capitalist urbanization again, I decided to take *The Urbanization of Capital*, and I hope that it is being worn out by avid readers. Being cut off from libraries by Covid I was desperate and appealed to Twitter. Within 24 hours I heard from a friend from Western Asia, in London to do a PhD, who had a PDF copy. It duly arrived by email and turns out to have been scanned from a library copy at the University of Barcelona. All this geography seems appropriate, somehow.

I'm a teacher who enjoys being taught and this book is a great bit of teaching, essentially because every idea is expressed with maximum clarity and with an implied invitation to argue or to elaborate. Where he doesn't know something he says so and where statements have to be nuanced and qualified they are. But Harvey is capable of holding vast chains of theoretical argument in his head. I'm not. I have to hunt about for instances and examples of the abstract relationships he posits. You can probably tell that from what I have written in this chapter. I think many of my students are like me in this respect and find theoretical discourse more informative fleshed out with cases. Harvey just makes all this a pleasure.

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