

## 4 Politics

Political language . . . is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.

(George Orwell)

### Introduction: ideology and capital

In this chapter, I will extend the theoretical dimension explored in *The Form of Cities* by asking 'what is the *method* of politics in regard to urban design?'. As urban designers, 'how do we recognise the political dimension of what we do, and how does it affect us even if we never ask the question?' Part of the answer lies in Gramsci's definition of ideology as a *lived system of values*. In Hitler's Germany, for example, it was easy to be a good fascist without actually 'knowing' what fascism was. Ideologies do not have to be understood to be lived. When it comes to urban politics, few urban designers would see themselves as part of an ideological conflict over ownership of, and access to, space. Henri Lefebvre notes the homology between ideology and politics in the production of space when he says that:

Social space shows itself to be *politically instrumental* in that it facilitates the control of society . . . [and] underpins the reproduction of production relations and property relations (i.e. ownership of land, of space; hierarchical ordering of locations; organisation of networks as a function of capitalism; class structures, practical requirements); is equivalent practically speaking to a set of institutional and ideological superstructures that are not presumed for what they are (and in this capacity, social space comes complete with symbolisms and systems of meaning – sometimes an overload of meaning); alternatively, it assumes an outward appearance of neutrality, of insignificance, of semiological destitution and emptiness (or absence).

(Lefebvre 1991: 349)

David Harvey states this more succinctly when he states that, 'Cities are built forms created out of the mobilisation, extraction and geographic concentration of the socially designated surplus product' (1973: 238). At the epicentre of this system lies the fundamental principle whereby capital, in its diversity, appropriates the collectively produced surplus and other forms of profit, thereby guaranteeing its rule in perpetuity. Erected on this foundation are two classes, those who own capital and those who own their own labour. Within this system, space is one form of capital and, like other resources, it is commodified and sold like any other good. Space is therefore deeply ideological, as it allows all forms of capital to function and to control the conditions for social reproduction and accumulation. Taken together, the statements of Lefebvre and Harvey get to the heart of the political dimension – it is ideological, it is concerned with space and it is therefore simultaneously deeply symbolic at one level, yet semiologically void at another. So the invisible becomes heterological for the visible. If we want to understand, as designers, the material world in whose creation we participate, we must first understand the reality of the invisible upon whose foundation we erect historically evanescent environments. The ideological system of capitalism has outlasted by far all but a handful of its physical creations.

However, as urban designers, we are also entitled to ask, 'why do we need to know this?'. And, of course, the answer is, 'we don't'. As I have shown, we can operate perfectly as vehicles for ideological practices without understanding what they are. As urban designers, we can continue as servo mechanisms for the invisible hand of the market, yet be blind to its indiscretions. But, in the process, we then choose to perceive space as a semiological vacuum, with all that it entails. Alternatively, we can embrace the dimension of politics/ideology and accept that it envelopes and penetrates everything we do, from the social production of the knowledge that we use to solve problems, to the methods of injecting semiotic content into space and its elements – monuments, buildings, public art, spatial forms, street names and other sedimentations that layer the urban realm. As we have seen from the historical process suggested in *Collage City*, underlying political and ideological frameworks cannot be understood merely by examining these fragments, but only by way of a clear and unambiguous examination of the methods deployed by capitalism (or otherwise socialism, in China and Russia) in regard to the use of social space (Low 2000). Of course, the infusion of politics into the urban fabric is designed, but not by architects. The design methods deployed address the underlying mandates of the system as a whole – ideology and politics, the institutional matrix that legitimates political action and the system of urban planning that underwrites the legitimisation process, not least the urban design of its spaces and places.

Below, I will begin with a brief look at *the method of urban politics* within capitalist economies, focussing on the undercurrents that inform our seemingly neutral design concepts and ideas. By this I refer to those ideologies that inform capitalist urbanisation *as a whole*, and the methods used to extract value and surplus value from urban space. I do not take this to mean how political parties are formed, councils elected etc., but the manner in which capital establishes the

conditions for its own expansion using the medium of the built environment. In this, we are still dealing with the interactions between the basic building blocks and processes of the capitalist system, namely:

- the operation of various forms of capital (financial, industrial etc.);
- the methods used to exploit the three factors of production in the material formation and transformation of cities (land, labour and capital);
- the basic economic processes required to accomplish this exploitation – production, consumption, circulation, exchange, and the urban symbolic, along with an effective system of urban administration;
- the institutional and ideological system that legitimises and reinforces private appropriation of the means of production (resources, factories, warehousing etc.), as well as the extraction of value from the built environment;
- the semiotic system that informs urban meaning in specific urban forms.

In order to explain these in context, I have chosen to limit my comments here to the hidden workings of capital, leaving concrete manifestations of its operation to the following chapter. Given space constraints, certain subtleties will necessarily be lost. So, for those who wish to pursue the topics further, I would make reference to a few masterworks in this region (Cohen 1978, Berman 1982, Therborn 1980, Althusser 1984, Balaben 1995).

## The urban political agenda

Within the market economies of the capitalist system, land and its improvements, like labour, represent commodities to be bought and sold like any other good. Taken together, they aggregate a large proportion of the gross national product that accrues from land ownership. It is therefore necessary to the extended life of capital that both land and land development should not only be produced, but should also be continually reproduced within the urban system. This process necessitates the ceaseless destruction and modification of the built environment in the interests of capital accumulation from land and its improvements. Also, it refers, not merely to 'adding bits on the edges', but to a continual restructuring of the entire system of land development (for instance, through extension; redevelopment; reclamation; slum clearance; the renegotiation of political and administrative boundaries; the institutionalisation of squatting; the establishment of new towns; and the construction and deconstruction of urban infrastructure; not to mention the reinvention of history through urban conservation). As a general principle, I accept Lefebvre's dictum that space is both a material and ideological construct that emanates from the dynamic relationship between civil society, the state and capital (Poulantzas 1973, Miliband 1973, Frankel 1983). The contradictions that are subsequently generated reflect the collision of human interests emerging from the market allocation of land on the one hand and its political allocation on the other. Planning *qua* state intervention attempts to

mediate in the ensuing conflicts, where the structural logic of the system of capitals does not permit an equitable distribution of the surplus product, nor the just resolution of class conflicts. As a result, 'the hardest crusts always fall to the toothless'.

Social capital may be divided into three types, each with a particular function within the overall system of capitals (Lamarche 1976). First, industrial capital controls the process of production and the creation of surplus value. Then, commercial capital controls the circulation of commodity capital. Finally, financial capital controls the circulation of money capital. Lamarche argues for the existence of an additional, specialised capital – *property capital* – the primary purpose of which is to plan space with the purpose of reducing the indirect costs of capitalist production. One may also argue that the reduction of the number of capitals involved to four oversimplifies reality. In effect, there are as many capitals as there are enterprises, each with its own particular dynamic and mode of operation. In the breakdown of social capital into a number of specialised capitals, property capital is charged both with the planning of land and the improvements that take place upon it and is therefore central to the urban design process. The function of the various actors within public and private enterprise has been clearly stated in Harloe *et al.* (1974) and Short (1982). Although it is tempting to assume that property capital accrues from profits derived from surplus value extracted through the construction process, the main source of profit actually emerges from the letting of floor space over the life of the building. Therefore, the real revenue to the developer is represented, not by the difference between construction cost and the buying price of a particular building complex (or indeed between purchase price and resale price), so much as the difference between the buying price and rent on floor space.

The urban morphology that results reflects the way in which fixed capital is signified in physical structures and the delineation of urban space. Spatial advantage and amenity reflect land prices and building density and to a large extent, the functional appearance of most buildings, as well as their physical condition. We are all familiar with what 'upmarket' and 'downmarket' mean. So, at its most basic, capital is reflected semiotically in the physical manifestation of wealth and poverty in built form, and its methods are reflected in what Marx called *the transmuted forms of surplus value* – monopoly and differential rent from floor space, interest on loans and profit from capital investment. Then, there are the two fundamentals – ground rent from land and surplus value from the labour process. If we divide the working day into two parts, *necessary* labour refers to that part of the working day during which the worker covers the cost of his/her own wage, i.e. what is consumed. The rest of the day, the worker is involved in surplus labour purely for the benefit of capital, i.e. when the value produced by labour exceeds what he/she consumes. The value of this *surplus* labour (surplus value) is privately appropriated as one of the most fundamental processes of the capitalist system.

Given these considerations, if we consider the basic factors of production, namely land, labour and capital, it is axiomatic that the built environment is

collectively reproduced, but, in the main, it is privately appropriated. Also, the benefits of the environment so manufactured are extracted in various forms from the occupation of land and property. Much of this is based upon the differential locational advantages produced by the geographic distribution of built forms and structures. The only exception to this rule is in the concept of the public domain, and even then the use values of this environment that accrue to labour are not sacrosanct, and are increasingly open to privatisation. Hence, in building the city, a vast amount of surplus value is created through the labour process within the building industry, and the reproduction of surplus value from this activity is a product of the continual transformation of physical space. In the environment so generated, differential rent from floor space is obviously a major form of income, but this must be understood via the concept of ground rent. The 'transmuted' forms of surplus value are exactly that, and so it is the latter upon which I wish to elaborate as the point of origin of the entire system of speculation, as 'Rent is the economic form of class relations to the land. As a result, rent is a property not of the land, although it may be affected by its varying qualities and availability, but of social relations' (Bottomore 1983: 273).

## Land rent

The concept of 'rent' occupies a critical position in relation to land use, and high-rise development in particular, as it provides the connection between political economy, spatial location and urban form. Rent may be defined as a payment made to landowners for the privilege of occupying and using land. It represents interest paid either on the consumption fund (money spent on social reproduction) or on fixed capital investment. Whereas neoclassical theory simply considers land, labour and capital as the basic factors of production, making no qualitative judgements about them, Marx was careful to distinguish between them and between each element and its effects. 'Capital-profit (profit of enterprise, plus interest), land – ground rent, labour-wages. This is the trinity formula which contains all of the secrets of the production process' (Marx 1959: 814). These mandates underwrite the class system – that a worker will always produce more than he/she consumes, and this excess is privately expropriated and reinvested in order to reproduce more capital.

Marx distinguishes between three forms of rent, which represent the main pathways or methods through which profit may be expropriated from land development, namely monopoly rent, absolute rent and differential rent. All of these take place within the secondary cycle of capital and are responsible for creating particular types of urban form, one of the most important being high-density development, as it maximises the owner's interest and reflects land prices at central locations. *Monopoly* rent accrues to landowners insofar as they can charge a monopoly price for some unique or special feature that the land may possess. Harvey is of the opinion that monopoly rents in Marx's sense arise only through 'substantial imperfections in spatial competition' (1973: 179). *Absolute*



rent is more difficult to define, and indeed Harvey's definition is somewhat opaque (Harvey 1982: 349–53). Absolute rent considers the question of scarcity (a socially produced condition) and a landowner's ability to extract capital purely on this basis, by withholding land from exploitation and capitalising on speculated future profits. Discussing the formation of absolute rent, Lamarche has this to say:

The developer's right of ownership enables him to extract a rent for the *real* advantages which his tenants actually benefit from, whereas that of the land-owner enables him to obtain a rent for the *potential* advantages which the property developer will actualise.

(1976: 85)

*Differential* rent may be divided into two categories. Differential rent type 1 relates to the site-specific advantages of a property, although the owner-developer does not create these benefits. This form of rent is a function of differentially produced spatial advantages that accumulate in favour of the owner but that are external to his property. These may emerge from other private-sector investors in adjacent locations, or in improvements from government expenditures vis-à-vis: infrastructure, rapid-transit systems, public open space etc. Housing, insofar as it represents the concentration of wages as a potential market in the purchase of commodities, therefore serves the primary function of increasing differential rent type 1 by maximising opportunities for commercial and related uses. Differential rent type 2 is charged on the basis of the proximal capacity of different enterprises located within a particular development to generate excess profits. It is quite obvious from this that differential rent type 1 may be transformed into differential rent type 2 on the basis of an owner extending his powers through the purchase of adjacent properties. It is also obvious that the main nexus of differential rent type 1 originates from public investment in transportation facilities. The extension of business catchment areas and greater accessibility within the urban system may permit increasingly higher densities, land prices and profits to developers, at no personal cost. All spatially differentiated improvements created out of public revenues are ultimately capitalised in land prices and then appropriated in the form of rent. Differential taxes levied by the state on profits, wages and rents effectively diminish each of these quantities. Similarly, reduced rents charged to labour for the consumption of public housing effectively subsidise commodity production by reducing wage prices.

Therefore, public housing rental does not necessarily constitute a huge benefit to labour; it constitutes a subsidy to capital by reducing the wage necessary for survival. However, it is apparent that such rent does not fit within any of the four categories discussed above. The central reason is that, as public housing is a politically manufactured context and does not emerge directly from market forces (covering cost of capital, labour and profit), money paid to occupy such housing must be considered an *administered price* rather than a true rent. As

such, it represents interest paid on the consumption fund itself (money allocated for the provision of social housing and facilities and other items of collective consumption). This is the principle that has underwritten the development, for example, of Singapore and Hong Kong and has been central to the phenomenal economic growth of these two economies, as well as their somewhat unique urban form and design. High-rise public housing, at the most phenomenal densities ever seen, is a testament to how much profit and surplus value have been extracted over the last half a century by industrialists and developers, by banks, insurance and financial institutions.

In order to maximise the extraction of profits from the urban system for capital, public housing should not be seen to intrude on this process, and it therefore becomes imperative that it should possess certain required qualities. For example:

- Public housing should not occupy land that interferes with the expropriation of the various forms of rent as defined above.
- With respect to absolute rent, the proviso can be added that the existence of squatter settlements throughout the world, substandard housing and redevelopment areas may be used as a justification for withholding land from the market, thus increasing its potential for absolute rent. In Hong Kong, for example, squatter settlements have been used in support of the government's high land price policy, where potential political unrest has been used as an excuse for withholding land from development. Planning authorities in developing countries can contribute to this situation via planning 'blight', where land adjacent to an area that is subject to planning action becomes affected by the 'uncertainty' factor in planning action itself, e.g. proposed major road system developments that, because of political, economic or other factors, acquire an indeterminate status, thus affecting all adjacent land prices.
- High-rise, high-density public housing development tends to take place where the three basic forms of rent are likely to be reduced below the margin of profitability, and where urban locational *disadvantages* are reproduced.
- The provision of public housing in this particular manner effectively maximises the potential of the urban system to generate rent in its various forms. Infrastructural and other costs are reduced, and the benefits of public investment into the urban system may be capitalised within the private sector through differential rents. Labour power is efficiently managed, and the increased costs of transportation are inevitably passed on to the consumer in terms of escalating travel costs.

Most importantly, high-rise housing represents (at least ideologically) a quick technological 'fix' for a profound and endemic constellation of social problems. From the available evidence, this particular political approach appears to fail catastrophically, at every significant level of consideration, in solving the so-called housing 'problem'. It succeeds neither in terms of technical efficiency,

in improving health standards, in solving land-use problems in the inner city, nor in providing greater amenity and psychological security for the residents of such projects, a failure symbolised by the dynamiting of the prize-winning Pruitt-Igoe Housing Estate in St Louis in 1972 (Baum and Epstein 1978, Dunleavy 1981). Despite the undesirability of such housing forms as seen by future tenants, accessibility to public housing is itself heavily politicised in the process of selecting tenants, acting against particularly disenfranchised members of society and favouring others. In order to investigate exactly how this situation is located within a system of institutions that legitimise the total politicisation of social space, I must now turn to the relationship between capital, state legitimation and urban planning law.

## The state and urban planning

Within the system we call capitalism, society is class divided. This division is reinforced by the actions of the state and the ideological apparatuses that support the overall system (Figure 4.1). Consequently, the judicial system and its legal mandate and, by extension, urban planning law may be viewed as ideological constructs. In their very conception, they legitimise the social and property relations of capitalism, the resulting class division and the inequalities that accompany it, the unequal allocation of rewards and benefits and the artificial manufacture of scarcity round which the system flourishes. In reference to the ideological commitment of planning and design to the idea of social harmony, David Harvey says, in his chapter on 'Planning the ideology of planning':

The limits of this progressive stance are clearly set, however, by the fact that the definitions of the public interest, of imbalance, and of inequity are set according to the requirements of the reproduction of the social order, which is, whether we like it or not, a distinctly capitalistic social order.

(Harvey 1985: 177)

Hence, a fundamental hiatus affecting the planning apparatus as a whole is the conflict *between* the various capitals for urban space, with the capacity of planning to mediate the conflict. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the existence of urban social movements is a response for some honesty in this overall equation, a claim reinforced by the increasing penetration of neocorporatist agendas into the fabric of the state and the increasing privatisation of planning policy and practices.

Hence, the state invents and reinvents the servo mechanism of urban planning in accordance with its own agendas (this has been selectively covered in FOC 83–9). All this means is that in, for example, Hong Kong, the state will have a different structure from that of Singapore, and planning will necessarily operate differently (Castells 1990). As the dominant function of planning is regulation, the institution of planning will be configured differently in each place, depending



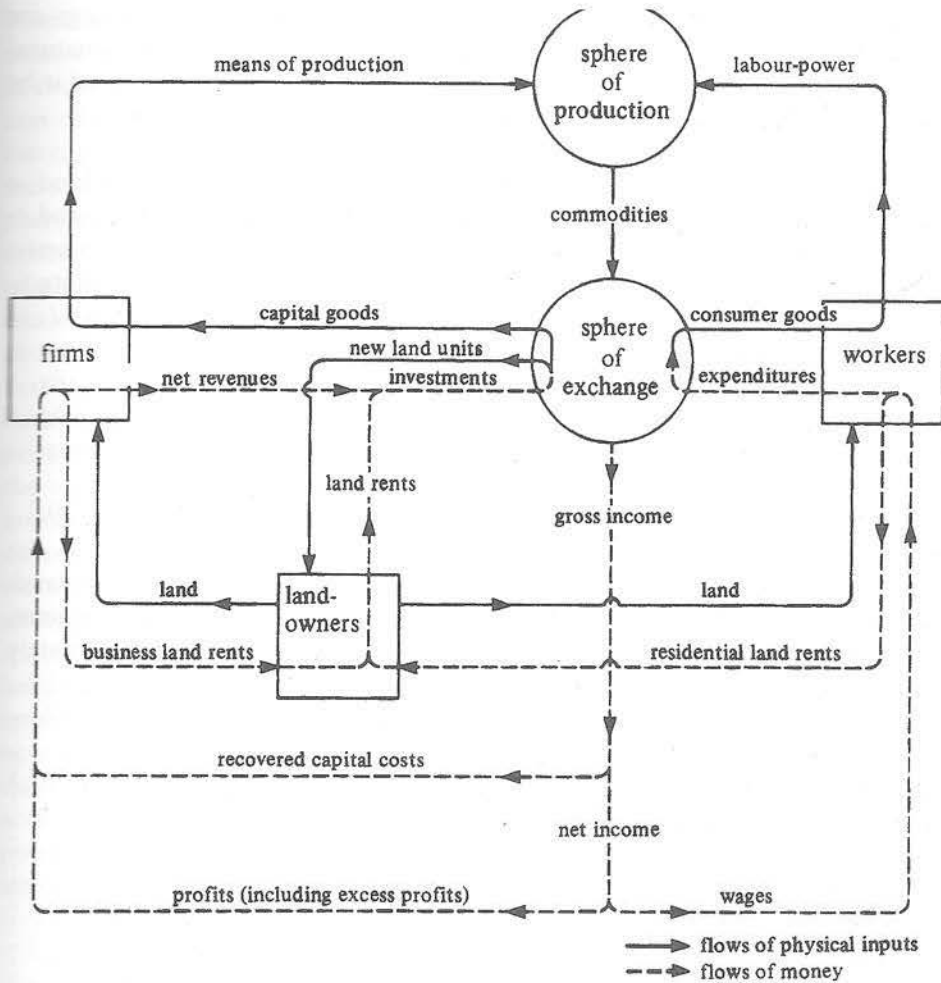


Figure 4.1 Commodity production: a simple schema of the interrelationships between capital, labour and land

Source: A. Scott, *The Urban Land Nexus and the State*. London: Pion, 1980, p. 29, Fig. 3.1

on the specificity of the ideological system. For example, in Singapore, tenancy of public housing is tied to superannuation benefits as a method of marginalising political controversy and social unrest affecting 80 per cent of the population. In Hong Kong, where so-called laissez-faire ideology held sway, a maximum of 50 per cent of the population has lived in social housing, hence reducing the price of wages to industrialists and developers. Political economy views planning as an intervention in the overall processes of the production and circulation of commodities and in the efficient reproduction of labour power. Planning is also called upon to manage conflicts emerging from the unequal distribution of the socially generated surplus. At the core of planning practice lies the management



bound up in its administration. Within cities, the highest rents exist at the most central location, which invariably corresponds to the highest building densities. In order to continually recreate and improve the circumstances for the extraction of rent in its various forms, planning is constrained by two mechanisms – increasing available floor space via increased density, and simultaneously increasing accessibility in order to make such an increase profitable. The phenomenon of high-density development and its geographic distribution in urban areas appears to go through ever-increasing and intensifying processes in relation to floor space, accessibility, transportation systems, planning action, escalating density of development and capital investment. As has been noted above, differential rents are extracted in proportion to the amount of floor space that a developer has available. This commodity is affected in its saleability by both internal and external factors (location, amenity, efficiency, configuration, price etc.) and in relation to the transportation system as the key parameter in the equation. Intervention by planning to ‘improve’ accessibility via public investment in infrastructure increases the potential for the expropriation of differential and absolute rents. As the government and the private sector derive mutual benefit in their respective ways from land development, planning comes under pressure from both sides to allow increased densities (hence, more floor space) via the relaxation of planning controls and constraints (plot ratios, height limitations, space and technical standards, conservation etc.). The paradox implied by the continual expansion of infrastructure to fulfil demand is that all new fixed capital in the form of the built environment represents a barrier to the reproduction of capital. Paradoxically, the very means to satisfy further accumulation in the form of transport and built form also constitute a physical framework of resistance to profits and speculation. To quote a by now historic statement by David Harvey:

Capital represents itself in the form of a physical landscape created in its own image, created as use values to enhance the progressive accumulation of capital. The geographical landscape which results is the crowning glory of past capitalist development. But at the same time it expresses the power of dead labour over living labour and as such it imprisons and inhibits the accumulation process within a set of specific physical constraints. And these can be removed only slowly unless there is a substantial devaluation of the exchange value locked up in these physical assets.

(Harvey 1985: 25)

The need to intensify development within the urban area and for planning guidelines to reinforce this process assist in making accessibility even more problematic. New demands are placed on planning to intervene and deploy even greater amounts of public funds, with increasingly sophisticated technical solutions to the movement of materials, goods and individuals (rapid transit, pedestrian moving sidewalks etc.), thus increasing accessibility, demands for floor space, the potential for further capital accumulation and higher, even more dense

developments and so on. Such a scenario is played out *ad absurdum* in metropolitan areas throughout the world. Planning action, rather than being seen as the facilitator of solutions in the urban planning system, can be seen in this context as the means by which this overall process is deployed in the interests of speculation, and where all action for 'improvement' coincides with opportunities for new rounds of profit taking. In the face of incredible demands for floor space, this series of events also explains the paradox whereby many central areas of cities are left vacant, derelict or occupied by substandard or badly maintained facilities. In most instances, landlords can still extract some form of payment for the use of the site, while awaiting the appropriate moment to maximise the absolute rent that will accrue from the withholding of urban land from development.

Planning, consciously or otherwise, encourages this process in two ways: first, as indicated above, by allowing ever-increasing densities in the centre of urban areas, which encourage the withholding of urban land; second, by devoting vast reserves of manpower and resources to 'solving' the ensuing urban transportation problem, which so far has never been solved. As can be seen from countless examples worldwide, the transport 'problem' is insoluble, owing to its direct connection to population growth, commodity production and unsustainable urban planning practices. In the process, planning administration becomes so depleted of reserve funds that, inevitably, it cannot afford to compulsorily purchase land or supply the capital for urban redevelopment projects. The ensuing fiscal crisis, by now a permanent condition, forces planning to accommodate development needs on an unequal basis. It then falls victim to the neocorporatist agenda and is coerced into the voluntary euthanasia of the public interest.

Whether we choose to view planning as the representative of capital, as the promoter of the public interest or as some kind of coalition between them, we may discern four realms of space that planning administers. The first of these is the space of *production*, where private-sector interests exploit nature and labour to manufacture commodities. In this space, labour is sold for a wage that represents only a fraction of the surplus value so produced in the production process. The second is the space of *circulation*, which allows commodities and populations to circulate by means of transportation systems. The third is the sphere of *exchange* or personal consumption, which allows a spatial congruence to occur between the commodity and the purchaser. The significance of the commodity as a symbol of class differentiation is thus acted out in the material world. At the same time, the excess wage of labour is reinvested in the commodities that have been created, thus allowing the system continuous evolution. The fourth is the space of *collective consumption*, where labour is reproduced and educated by means of some form of housing tenure, the provision of health, education and welfare facilities, entertainment and other functions. Ideological beliefs in the form of organised religion, political affiliation and even sport etc. are also embedded as homeostatic elements in the overall matrix. In addition, however, we need a fifth space to permit human movement in what is termed *the public realm*. What we should consider when we are thinking about this *fifth*

*space* is the subject of the next section, and I will use this term and *the public realm* synonymously.

## The public and counter-public realms

The public sphere is the site where struggles are decided by means other than war.

(Negt and Kluge 1993: ix)

In the spirit of connecting mainstream urban design to something larger than itself, we need to enlarge our obsession with designing urban space, to include the forces that bring it about in the first place. To do this, we need to investigate the word *public*, before we can comprehend its method of implementation. Here, we have to distinguish between urban processes and the spaces in which they materialise. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines a *sphere* as a *field of action, influence or existence* and a *realm* as a *kingdom or domain*. I will retain the former term for the social delineation of publics, and the latter for the spatial impacts and associations such publics entail (public realm, fifth space). Problematically, the universal yet questionable assumption that this fifth space has a concrete existence is paralleled by the intractable problem of definition. It is, without doubt, inordinately difficult to define the public realm, owing to complexities of ownership, form, management, transformation and substance (FOC4: 89–100). I will use the term *public space* in the currently accepted use of the term in social science, to include, not only streets, plazas, parks, shopping malls, pedestrianised ‘precincts’, neighbourhoods etc., but also the virtual space of the Internet.

As I have indicated in the previous chapter, for those in the environmental professions, the term *urban* is seldom explored in any depth and, at best, means ‘something to do with cities’. Given that the word lies at the root of *urban* design involvement, this lack of exploration represents a serious omission from design education and practice. Unfortunately, the same is true of the *public realm*, where the term *public* and the congruent *public space* are assumed rather than analysed. For example, in *Architecture Theory since 1968* (an eight-hundred-page tome), reference to public space occupies only a single page, in an article by Kenneth Frampton (2000: 364). So the architectural design of the public realm can clearly proceed without any knowledge of what it is. While the fifth space is urban, its heterology is the public sphere, the arena of political engagement and conflict.

In the development of settlements at all scales, from the village green to the grand boulevards of Paris, the public realm is a concept typically used to describe a space where all individuals should be allowed to communicate freely with all others, within the law. In democratic societies, it is also supposed to be the locus where the entire range of opinions, from politics to religion, can be freely expressed, and where people can behave without censorship or fear, provided that the law is upheld. This hypothetical fifth space, however, is rarely defined



or made explicit. Individuals are so used to the idea of some form of public realm, they seldom go beyond the assumption that such a space actually exists, or, more importantly, what influence, if any, they have over its access, ownership, use or disposal. This is particularly true of the design professions, and the term 'public realm' is used in everyday parlance with the tacit agreement that everyone understands what it means, and this is rarely the case.

As in the term *urban* discussed above, *the public realm* has an even less determinate reality. There has been little effort made to trace the social forms adopted by the public sphere to its contingent spatial structures and design implications, although there is no necessary or direct homology between the two. From the Greek *polis* to the virtual space of the Internet, it is clear that there is no concept of the public realm that is useful beyond a specific political economy of place and culture. In every era, the free movement of individuals in social space has taken place within a transient rule system imposed by multiple authorities that have seldom enacted the right of free movement into legislation. Today, we live in an age of neo-liberal politics and corporate governance, one where terror has been deployed as a system of control over subject populations, supposedly in the interests of their own protection, such that:

A creeping encroachment in previous years has in the last two decades become an *epoch-making* shift culminating in multiple closures, erasures, inundations and transfigurations of public space at the behest of state and corporate strategies . . . From city parks to public streets, cable and network news shows to Internet blog sites, the clampdown on public space, in the name of enforcing public safety and homeland security, has been dramatic. Public behaviour once seen simply as eccentric, or even protected by First Amendment rights, is now routinely treated as a potential terrorist threat.

(Low and Smith 2006: 1-2)

The authors also note that New York's zero tolerance policy, which has been extended globally to other cities, was subtitled 'Reclaiming the public spaces of New York', an example of the connection between political action and acceptable social behaviour (see also Katz 2006). State sanctions over public space are continually in a state of flux, and, with them, any idea we might have of an inalienable and consistent public realm. Given state protection to private space through legislation and urban planning practices, oriented to protect investments through infrastructure support, density and height controls, rights of light, compensation procedures etc., the public realm takes on the mantle of opportunity. In terms of political economy, it represents a major obstacle to capital accumulation, specifically property capital. Throughout the developed world, we may witness a continuing and relentless effort to absorb the public realm into its embrace, with an increasing degree of success. As part of capitalist enterprise, all property must be commodified, and the universal erosion of public space in cities is a signifier of this process (Kayden 2000).

At its most basic, fifth space performs the task of connecting the four forms of space indicated above, as well as the ideological function of cementing particular forms of representation – history, power, art, science, religion etc. – in the built environment. Hence, the difficulty in asking ‘where is it?’ constitutes a question of significant complexity and definition. If we then add the question ‘who owns and controls it?’ – the state, the private sector or ‘the people’ – we get into even deeper water. And if we then compound this by asking ‘what is it for?’, we can quickly grind to a halt with the sheer impossibility of the problem. Other concepts also come into play, such as those of right, freedom and social justice. Added to this, even ownership becomes problematic, as, in theory, the ‘public’ realm would belong to everyone and, hence, no one. In the realm of design, the spatial question is most significant, beginning with the idea that the other four forms of space are merely descriptive categories, and no homogeneity should be assumed in terms of spatial units. The spaces of production, consumption, circulation and exchange intersect with each other and the public realm in a myriad of land uses in the second dimension, in forms of building in the third dimension, and in the rate of dissolution and replacement in the fourth. The most basic analogy we can use here is that of a game of three-dimensional chess. But, in contrast to chess, where the units in play have only a single spatial function, the urban chess game contains, in addition, meanings, values, authority, power, difference etc. associated with the elements in the game.

The classic writing on the subject of publics in the last fifty years is arguably Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), which first appeared in German in 1962. Ten years later, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge wrote another seminal work on the subject, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Spheres*. Habermas’s text is a discourse on the evolution of the concept of the public sphere, and it deploys the method of political economy to analyse shifts in the development of publics using a chronological approach to modes of production up to the present time. Negt was a student of Habermas, and Kluge was a student of Theodor Adorno, and it is telling that their approach incorporates developments from Habermas’s original position with Adorno’s concerns for culture and the impacts of the mass media, which they refer to as *the consciousness industry*. Habermas’s text is now showing signs of age, owing to the extraordinary developments both in theory and in social life since his book was written. Therefore, in contrast to Habermas’s somewhat ordered presentation of the public sphere, Michael Warner introduces the concept of the counter-public sphere in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002). This offers a more heterogeneous and inclusive approach to the huge diversity of publics not included in a traditional analysis of the public sphere. In addition to these texts, other offerings are significant, particularly Arendt (1958), Sennett (1986), Fraser (1990) and Calhoun (1992).

Habermas’s method is to approach the problem of multiple publics as one of semantics and the use of particular terminologies relevant at specific historical moments. He frequently borrows terms from French and German to reflect developments in these countries that somehow redefine the term *publics*, noting

that similar terms in each language (*publicité*, *Öffentlichkeit* and *publicity*) gave rise to the idea of publics at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Marx was of the opinion that the deconstruction of medieval social relations and the evolution of feudal into bourgeois society, where modern property relations were established, allowed civil society to come into existence. He defined the public sphere as a fourth dimension in concert with the state, the market and what he called the intimate sphere of the family. Possibly the best example of the distinction between *public sphere* and *public realm* is that of the classic Greek *polis* and *agora* of 500 BC, despite the fact that space had not yet been commodified and, hence, had a much greater relevance as public. Nonetheless, the relationship between the *polis* and the *agora* demonstrates the relationship between rights in the public sphere and spatial access or conferred use in the public realm:

Rights in the polis were highly restricted to a very narrow and privileged social class recognised as free citizens, and many others were excluded – women, slaves, and the throng of common people. Likewise, the publicness of the agora was also circumscribed (albeit in a different fashion) and stratified as an expression of prevailing social relations and inequalities . . . Public space, in fact, comes into its own with the differentiation of a nominally representative state on the one side and civil society and the market on the other.

(Low and Smith 2006: 4)

Negt and Kluge state in their introduction to *Public Sphere and Experience* that the classic bourgeois public sphere of property ownership needs to include a counter-public sphere that is not exclusively limited to bourgeois interests and includes other publics. They also observe the enduring hiatus of labour that, in resisting the public sphere, it also remains in conflict with itself, as the public sphere is also constituted by it. In addition, the traditional (bourgeois) public sphere was denoted in the enduring relation between public and private spheres, and that the bourgeois public sphere of property ownership has been overlaid by a host of industrialised public spheres of production, ‘. . . which tend to incorporate private realms, in particular the production process and the context of living . . . hence, the public sphere has no homogeneous substance whatsoever’ (Negt and Kluge 1993: 13). They elaborate on this new public sphere as follows:

The classical public sphere of newspapers, chancelleries, parliaments, clubs, parties, associations rests on a quasi artisanal mode of production. By comparison, the industrialised sphere of computers, the mass media, the media cartel, the combined public relations and legal departments of conglomerates and interest groups, and, finally, reality itself as a public sphere transformed by production, represent a superior and more highly organised level of production.

(Negt and Kluge 1993: 14)

One thing we can remain certain of is the continually evolving relationship between the public and counter-public spheres and the public realm. In spatial terms, this now takes a multiplicity of forms, from the privacy of domestic life, to the private appropriation of land and the means of production, to the purchase and sale of property in virtual space. The public realm in many cities represents the last remaining undeveloped open space and, hence, is continually and unremittingly under development pressure, to the extent that the end of public space does not seem such an absurd idea. This penetration of corporate interests occurs in at least five dimensions: first, in areas such as beaches and lakes, parks, gardens, sports facilities, waterways, disused airports and docklands, reserve areas of horticultural or zoological interest, conservation areas etc., previously considered part of the public domain. Nor is this process limited to developed countries, and the rape of the developing world continues. An article in *The Guardian Weekly* recently demonstrated the unbelievable progression of this process, e.g. in Cambodia, where a repeat of Pol Pot's policies of social displacement is occurring without the associated genocide. Almost half of the country had been sold to private interests in eighteen months, 'causing the country's social fabric to unwind like thread from a bobbin'. This began through liquid assets accruing from the United States' sub-prime mortgage crisis in late 2008 sending venture capital looking for other opportunities. These included massive swathes of the Cambodian coastline, which would normally be considered as constituting public space, despite the fact that it had previously been designated as 'state public land', which could not be bartered or developed.

Second, urban space donated by corporate interests to 'the public', in exchange for a variety of development rights, bonuses or exchanges, falls increasingly under the control of the same corporate interests after such benefits have been received (Cuthbert and McKinnell 1997). This principle also applies to air rights, underpasses, overpasses and other connections between buildings using public space. Third, public spaces in all centres of commodity production, such as shopping centres, malls and pedestrianised areas, are frequently controlled or otherwise colonised by investment interests. Fourth, linkage areas between and within so-called 'public buildings' are enduringly overrun by private-sector exhibitions, displays, sales outlets and other non-public functions. Finally, the entire process of surveillance and control of public space by private interests, in the form of electronic media and physical policing, is a burgeoning industry, and there is an entirely new architectural vocabulary for security brought on by the events of 9/11. Michael Warner notes that the frequently contrasting meanings given to the terms public and private can adopt many forms and, with these distinctions, comes the opportunity for a plethora of publics to evolve (Table 4.1).

In prior publications on Hong Kong, I investigated these distinctions in regard to the public realm and commented that, at its very centre, the problematic of the public realm concerned the principle of *right*, which goes back to the question of which fundamental rights people should expect from society, as opposed to those they actually possess (Cuthbert 1995, Cuthbert and Mackinnell 1997). In

Table 4.1 The relation of public to private

<i>Public</i>	<i>Private</i>
1 Open to everyone	Restricted to some
2 Accessible for money	Closed even to those who could pay
3 State related; now often called public sector	Non-state, belonging to civil society, now often called private sector
4 Political	Non-political
5 Official	Non-official
6 Common	Special
7 Impersonal	Personal
8 National or popular	Group, class or locale
9 International or universal	Particular or finite
10 In physical view of others	Concealed
11 Outside the home	Domestic
12 Circulated in print or electronic media	Circulated orally or in manuscript
13 Known widely	Known to intimates
14 Acknowledged and explicit	Tacit and implicit
15 'The world itself, insofar as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it' (as Arendt puts it in <i>The Human Condition</i> )	

Source: M. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*. London: Zone, 2002, p. 29

turn, this tied into other related concepts, such as freedom, equality, justice, responsibility etc. Although we would expect freedom of movement and assembly, with space provided for those activities, to be a basic human right, it is immediately obvious that this is not the case. Magna Carta (1215) was the seminal example of a Bill of Rights, followed by France (1789) and the United States (1791). Since then, only Finland (1919), China (1949), India (1950), Canada (1960), New Zealand (1990) and South Africa (1996) have introduced a Bill of Rights, nine countries in all. So neither the actuality nor the form of the public realm can be assumed as a matter of right or inheritance.

## Conclusion

Given the above context, it is clear that, when urban designers, landscape architects, architects, planners and others are involved in designing public space, the exercise of design skills should be the last of our considerations. First, we need to grapple with the heterologies that structure our concept of space and form, so that we can make more educated guesses as to design propositions. We need to understand that many counter-public spheres exist in fifth space, and that their representation is a matter of equity and of social justice. Although there may be correspondence between a public and an urban space, this reflection of



one in the other is not necessarily homologous. Therefore, there is a contingent relationship between various types of public and counter-public and the types of space and form of representation that structure the public realm. Nonetheless, broad generalisations have some validity, such as the five types of space indicated above – production, consumption, exchange, administration and fifth space *qua* the public realm – although even these are collectively fractured and integrated in a diversity of ways. Importantly for designers, although fifth space is reputedly the public realm of private individuals, it also represents a major ideological canvas for the bourgeois public sphere, capital and the state. Unlike the other four forms, it has one unique property – it is the space where politics, ideology and culture are physically and symbolically condensed in the realm of monuments, to which we now progress.