
The Dialectics of Dystopia: Disorder and Zero Tolerance in the City

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That city with its side bathed by the Savio, just as it lies between the plain and mountain, lives somewhere between tyranny and freedom (Dante, *The Inferno*, 1980: 249).

Dante, writing in the early years of the fourteenth century, was here referring to a real city, Cesena. His words demonstrate that the great Italian maestro had a keen eye for the peculiar ambivalence the city holds forth. That city, Cesena, Dante says, lives somewhere between tyranny and freedom. Being Dante, that somewhere always seemed to be on the edge of a deep and dark abyss. Even Florence, his beloved Florence — especially his beloved Florence — Dante's home town, and from where he was banished forever, was portrayed in much the same light: 'Be joyous, Florence', he proclaims (1980: 239), 'you are great indeed,/for over sea and land you beat your wings;/through every part of Hell your name extends!'

With lines like these, Dante — whom Frederick Engels (1967: 75), in his preface to the 1893 Italian edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, saw as 'the last poet of the Middle Ages and the first poet of modern time' — sets the tone for some of the liveliest urban realism and criticism in our own day. His portrait of hell, of course, we now recognize as none other than the secular modern city. These days, many commentaries have intoned how modern cities such as New York, London and Los Angeles, express the best and worst that human civilization has to offer. In these cities, the literature says, we find joy and hope fighting it out with nihilism and despair. In these places, the 'sighs and lamentations and loud cries' that Dante (1980: 21) spoke about now transpire as dire poverty, homelessness and violent crime; and this coexists with enormous personal freedom and mobility (for both men and women), with dazzling stores stocked with every delight under the sun, with movie houses and theaters and restaurants and night clubs that suit practically every taste and fantasy.

But there is another sense in which Dante's urban visions are way ahead of their time: He was, for example, a precursor of an emergent species of writers, a species I shall call dystopian urbanists. Dystopian urbanists subvert received meanings of pain and pleasure in the city. Many emerge from differing disciplinary backgrounds, some hold differing political stances — though mostly they are on the Left; still more don't recognize the paradoxes of their own analyses and wouldn't admit to their dystopian credentials. And yet all, one way or another, graphically illustrate that there is a perverse allure to urban horror and pain and squalor. The ugly, the dangerous, the garish in city life can in fact be astonishingly titillating, a pleasure itself, a source of attraction, that simultaneously thrills and appalls, even while you sometimes hate yourself for being thrilled. Try as Mike Davis (1990) might to indict twentieth-century Los Angeles, the more he recounts its litany of horrors, the more we want to go there, and the more we, like Davis himself, are mesmerized and fascinated by its dynamics, by its perversity and absurdity.

Similar things can be said about other Left chroniclers. Take Ed Soja (1989; 1996), Fredric Jameson (1984) and Michael Sorkin (1991; 1992). They are all major exponents of a genre of urban commentary best described as the critical eulogy. They really indict capitalist cities and powerful politicians and planners and the rich, and their prose soars as they indict. But at the same time you can't help but hear more than a whisper of admiration and celebration.¹ They each secretly love their city, and why shouldn't they? It is this value perhaps most of all that animates their books and which makes them, like Davis, like urban Marxists everywhere, torn critics. This love of cities and urban life places considerable demands on them and other progressive urbanists. There is always likely to be two souls dwelling within their breasts. This ambiguity is very apparent in one of the first and most intelligent twentieth-century dystopian urbanists: Walter Benjamin. The tension between the low- and high-life of Paris and Berlin and the Marxist brain that sought to understand and condemn it, is central to Benjamin's best work like *One-way street* (Benjamin, 1979) and *Charles Baudelaire: a lyric poet in the era of high capitalism* (Benjamin, 1973).

Nevertheless, the attraction-repulsion dialectic compels all of us on the Left to consider a troublesome question: Why do we feel drawn to things in cities which we hate and which we are battling to stamp out? Why is it, as Elizabeth Wilson (1995: 160) says, that the 'wilderness of Jameson's gleaming car wrecks, the city as dystopia, is as romantic a vision as any?' In this article, I want to confront this troublesome question by initially exploring our lurid fascination with the dystopian city with a thicker philosophical texture. Here, I want to show how these implicit philosophical concerns have explicit political and practical policy overtones. Later, I will bring into the philosophical fray two of the twentieth-century's best known urbanists — Jane Jacobs and Lewis Mumford. Then, I will critically examine their views about disorder and order in the city against a backdrop of the Zero Tolerance initiatives currently being pursued in New York and London. In its entirety, the paper stresses how the Left's romance with dystopia exposes Arcadian utopian visions of a conflict-free city as hopelessly unrealistic, perhaps even hopelessly undesirable, and forces progressives of whatever stripe to consider the sorts of creative urban programs it should be pushing for.

The flight into intensity: the dystopian city, the city beyond good and evil

Since Dante's day, the city has continued to preoccupy countless thinkers, artists and intellectuals of all political persuasions. It is probably true to say that the bulk of them have condemned and expressed moral repugnance toward the city. Unsurprisingly, the city in its capitalist guise has especially been the bone of contention for most liberals and Leftists. Carl Schorske (1968) has suggested that over the last two-hundred years, three broad evaluations of the city have pervaded European social thought: the city as virtue, the city as vice and the city beyond good and evil. It was the medieval city that commanded the more laudatory appraisals. For people like Fichte and Schiller (as for Mumford and Bookchin in our own day), the medieval town symbolized democratic and communitarian ideals, and each thinker pined over artisanal things past. As industrial

1 In *Exquisite corpse*, a series of vignettes written originally for his *Village Voice* architecture column, Michael Sorkin demonstrates considerable literary flair and chutzpah as he takes to task the official planning, architectural and real estate profession in his hometown. Nevertheless, Sorkin seduces himself as well as his readers. What would New York be without glamor and dirty dealings and corruption? And why would anybody read Sorkin if they weren't turned on? Elizabeth Wilson (1995: 148) makes a similar argument with respect to Jameson's now classic essay: 'He [Jameson] himself converts what he loathes into something meaningful in aesthetic terms'.

capitalism started to deepen and broaden, however, Schorske reckons the idea of the city of vice took hold of the European liberal imagination. After all, it was there where poverty, class injustice, dark satanic mills and rampant individualism prevailed. Hardly any nineteenth-century socialists said anything nice about the industrial urban scene. Marx and Engels were no different from their contemporaries. Of course, all was not entirely lost: the city did have the wherewithal to become ultimately virtuous, yet this was a long-term hope. Meantime, we had to endure the dystopian horror of Mammon and Sodom and Gomorrah.

Engels focused more explicitly on the city than Marx. When Marx was in Paris, trying to jettison his Hegelian-humanist legacy, Engels was in Manchester working and writing about his adopted home town. The result, *The condition of the working class in England* (Engels, 1987), penned in 1844/5, is now an urban classic. Engels pulled no punches: his indictment was absolute. His commentary was a heart-rending piece of social realism. Look, says Engels, at what the dynamics of capital accumulation does to working people in cities. Cities bear the brunt of industrialization: they house giant factories; they experience vast concentration and centralization of productive forces; they are the foundation of the division of labor and of government and of merciless class distinctions and glaring residential ghettoizations. Engels affirmed the capitalist city historically and existentially, yet condemned it ethically. True, the city offered certain freedoms over its feudal counterpart; and in a sense urban industrial workers were 'free'. But their freedom, Engels reckons, was really that of a 'free outlaw'.

Almost thirty years later, Engels still held this view. In *The housing question* [1872] (1988), he famously concluded that without revolution and without the total supersession of the market mechanism, no urban reform could rescue the poor, no housing or social initiative could attack the nub of the problem nor string up the real culprits. Instead, it just shifted it someplace else, to another part of town, usually somewhere that is more politically expedient for assorted capitalists and ruling elites. Urbanization under capitalism could, by the very logic of its own functioning, only ever produce inequality and impoverishment. The city of vice received its final marching orders.

Neither Engels nor Marx offered any concrete alternative. Both were dismissive of normative speculation and concrete blueprints. Blueprints, Marx (1978: 143) says, are 'purely scholarly questions'. There, too, the 'phrase went beyond the content' (Marx, 1963: 18). On the other hand, Marx and Engels both knew that the clocks could never go back: Arcadian bliss was not a serious solution, and Marx (Marx and Engels, 1948: 41) heaps scorn on what he called 'castles in the air'. Somehow, then, the purgatory of the capitalist city is necessary: it is a progressive evil. Of course, it is socially disintegrative and disruptive, but it also helped socialize the productive forces; and it brought the masses together where they would recognize common grievances, organize and unite, and hopefully rise up. Thus Marx affirms bourgeois creative destruction because it might be a transitional stage to something more virtuous, something more permanent, more solid, less likely to melt into air, and where a 'real community' of communist citizens could blossom. Just what that future communist city might look like, Marx never said, nor could ever say.

Some of Marx and Engels's contemporaries, however, took a different tack here. Many thrived on paradox and irony. Several were perhaps even more dialectical than Marx and Engels themselves, especially with respect to their urban evocations. Some, like Baudelaire and Dostoevsky, were poets and novelists. Baudelaire, around the same time as Engels's Manchester study, thought Parisian life 'rich in poetic and wonderful subjects' (1967: 107). 'The marvelous', Baudelaire says, 'envelops and saturates us like an atmosphere; but we fail to see it' (1967: 107). Marx saw and felt this atmosphere, and was even part of it for a while, but he trivialized it. Indeed, in 1857, when he was writing his enormous *Grundrisse* (Marx, 1973) manuscript in the British Museum, and communing from Soho to Bloomsbury, Marx existed on a plane far removed from the streets he traversed. In Paris, though, in the very same year, Baudelaire (1991: 175) wrote

of his home town: 'O great city!/While you encompass us, you sing and laugh and roar/In love with pleasure, even atrocities delight'.

Baudelaire put his finger on the pulse. He emphasized what is positive about alienation and deracination. There is strange joy and freedom, he says, in despair and urban loneliness. Baudelaire (1967: 402) reveals how 'roaming in the great desert of men', amidst the fleeting and transient and contingent, could be grist to a person's mill. Because, paradoxically, losing one's fixed identity means discovering new freedoms and other identities, means gaining depth and breadth to one's own character; and in the here and now, not in a distant future: it is really all about the 'fleeting pleasure of circumstance' (Baudelaire, 1967: 402). Here Baudelaire unveiled the city of vice: if you look hard enough, he says, there is virtue in that vice. His city is 'beyond good and evil', or at least the boundaries between good and evil had now been smudged irrevocably. His city is the city of dreadful delight; he really got inside the whale and loved it. He shows how it is possible to follow Nietzsche's (1954: 97) provocative plea to live dangerously; Baudelaire shows how urbanites could and should play with fire and construct their cities under Vesuvius.

What is repellent had now become weirdly attractive, even a source of inspiration and poesis. Even T.S. Eliot apparently learnt this from Baudelaire. Indeed, Eliot (1965: 126) once admitted: 'I think that from Baudelaire I first learned, a precedent for the poetical possibilities, never developed by any poet writing in my own language, of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between sordid realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic'. Baudelaire knew his muse: the dystopian city had arrived, a terrible beauty was born; and Baudelaire 'opened vistas to the city dweller which neither lamenting archaist nor reforming futurist had yet disclosed' (Schorske, 1968: 421).

Meanwhile, in St Petersburg, Dostoevsky exhibited a similar 'intensity' toward the city. For him, as for Baudelaire, the city is 'the point of departure' in his 'flight into intensity' (see de Jong, 1975).² Dostoevsky craves for intensity of experience, craves the darker side of humanity and finds it in the city's depths, in the shady underworld of Russia's great imperial capital. His favorite haunts were gloomy tenement blocks, poor back alleys and dingy narrow streets in and around Haymarket Square. There he found all types of psychologically damaged, torn and twisted individuals: *declass  * civil servants, losers, alcoholics, gamblers and loners and petty criminals. Dostoevsky knew a lot of them, and in some probably observed himself. Neighborhoods like these constitute the lifeblood of his novels. His most fabled characters are ineluctably drawn there. 'Dozens of bums and dodgers of every kind and variety', he recalls in *Crime and punishment*, 'thronged the ground-floor chophouses, the dirty, stinking yards of the houses on the [Haymarket] square and most of all the cheap bars. These, together with the side streets in the immediate neighborhood, were Raskolnikov's favourite places whenever he went out for a stroll around town. Here his rags attracted nobody's supercilious attention and one could walk as one pleased without scandalizing anyone' (Dostoevsky, 1968: 64). Raskolnikov, we are told, often felt impelled to wander these streets whenever he felt sick — to make himself feel sicker.

Here Dostoevsky presents himself as the supreme exponent of a genre Donald Fanger (1965) calls 'urban gothic'. Dostoevsky conveys the melodramatic intensity and hidden luminosity of the city. It is all there if we knew how to look. And Dostoevsky, like Baudelaire, certainly knew how to look. Meanwhile, his depictions revel in urban paradox and ambiguity. His characters, like the city itself, 'teem with opposite elements' (Dostoevsky, 1960: 4). St Petersburg is hated: it has a bad climate and is expensive to live in; it is the 'most abstract and intentional city in the whole world'. And yet, one of his

2 Still, de Jong commits a howler when he says that for Dostoevsky and Baudelaire 'the city is the root cause of contemporary trauma and spiritual loss' (1975: 40).

protagonists says: 'I will not leave Petersburg! I will not leave because . . . Bah, it doesn't matter in the least whether I leave or stay' (Dostoevsky, 1960: 6). Hatred and admiration are galvanized into a sort of fascination. In great cities, we find novelty and surprise, disorder, thrill and erotic and sensual fantasy. That is fascination. Fascination is here, even in the city's minutiae — especially in its minutiae.

The intensity aesthetic, says Alex de Jong (1975: 64), 'accounts for the peculiar note of exultation with which he [Dostoevsky] describes the wretched poverty-stricken St. Petersburg sub-culture'.³ Dostoevsky and his characters are plainly pained by what they see and hear and feel, but they are thrilled by it, lured toward it. Pain and suffering for Dostoevsky are a major source of intensity of experience. Of course, if Dostoevsky has a central motif in his writing, then it is his insistence that human beings crave suffering, need it badly, take perverse pleasure from it. Suffering, he has one of his characters conclude (1960: 115), makes you feel 'more alive'.

But what does 'more alive' mean? For answers, we need to delve into Dostoevsky's treatise on suffering a bit more. In a while, I want to bring the young Marx into the action and place him alongside Dostoevsky. So far as suffering goes, there are surprising points of convergence between the writings of the young humanist Marx and the mature fiction of Dostoevsky. We would do well to listen to their respective reasoning, because both tell us important things about ourselves and about the kind of environments we might want to inhabit.

Craving for contrast and contradiction: Dostoevsky and Marx on suffering

Let me begin by considering Dostoevsky's (1960) short novel, *Notes from the underground*, published in 1864. Here we encounter the character popularly known as the Underground Man. This underground 'paradoxicalist' reminds us that humans are deeply sensuous and spiritual creatures. We are, he says, endowed with consciousness, and have the capacity to suffer, to feel pain, to love, lie and hate. Nevertheless, some of us have more than our fair share of consciousness. In fact, such people — such underground people — possess what Dostoevsky (1960: 6) calls 'hyperconsciousness', a condition accentuated by residing in big cities. These people are acutely perceptive not only about themselves, but also about the society in which they live. Their highly developed consciousness comes about through withdrawal and isolation, producing 'intensely developed individuality' (1960: 26). It goes without saying that these furtives pay an intolerably high price: great emotional and physical suffering. But, according to Dostoevsky, they revel in it. After all, it is only through suffering — 'delight in one's own degradation' — that hyperconscious individuals are able to grasp in any depth their own whims and their '*hysterical cravings for contradictions and contrasts*' (1960: 42, emphasis added). These people soon come to know the 'intricacies of sensuality' and eventually enjoy their sufferings. For them there is even enjoyment in toothache, and the 'beautiful and sublime' can be found in the 'nastiest, most unquestionable trash' (1960: 7).

Dostoevsky's point here, thinly disguised in irony and black comedy, is that underground people are not merely one-off. These characteristics are, more or less,

3 It is perhaps worth mentioning that Dostoevsky's portrayals of human misery and degradation received both sympathetic and unfavorable hearings from the Russian Left. Dobrolyubov, a radical of the 1860s generation, thought Dostoevsky a great humanist writer, somebody compassionate about the humiliated man. Dostoevsky, says Dobrolyubov (see Seduro, 1957: 30), concerned himself with 'downtrodden people' and searched 'their soul for glimmerings of human dignity and protest'. On the other hand, Mikhailovski reckoned Dostoevsky a 'cruel talent' who held a morbid inclination to wallow in the sufferings of the downtrodden, especially in his later works. He suggested that Dostoevsky expressed a style of 'gratuitous and aimless torture and sadism' that bordered on delighting in human degradation (Seduro, *ibid.*).

embedded in the human personality. We are all, in one shape or form, 'eccentric' people. Some do not admit it or realize it or are afraid to carry it through even halfway. Notwithstanding, suffering is positively advantageous. Yet it ensures that humans can never be merely logical, coolly intellectual, thinking beings; no amount of common sense or reason or science can determine the desirable or what human beings yearn for. Our 'hysterical craving for contradictions and contrasts' thus militates against rational distinctions between pain and pleasure. Sometimes, Dostoevsky says, we lacerate ourselves even when — especially when? — we know it is harmful to do so. In a way, we have to, because suffering is the 'sole origin of consciousness' (1960: 31). On the other hand, it is also the 'greatest misfortune for man'. Maybe, he asks, human beings 'will devise destruction and chaos, will devise sufferings of all sorts, and will thereby have their own way'. Maybe, the Underground Man asks, human beings 'like something besides prosperity? Perhaps we like suffering just as much? Perhaps suffering is just as great an advantage to us as prosperity? Man is sometimes fearfully, passionately in love with suffering and that is a fact' (1960: 31). Suffering means doubt, means negation; and 'what would be the good of a Crystal Palace if there could be no doubt about it?' In the Crystal Palace, there would be nothing left 'but to bottle up your five senses and plunge into contemplation' (Dostoevsky, 1960: 31).

The object of Dostoevsky's scorn here is Nikolai Chernyshevsky's radical utopia. The Crystal Palace was Chernyshevsky's 'roseate vision of heroism' (Mathewson, 1958: 19) and its descriptions form the most radiant passages of his influential novel *What is to be done?*. The first installment, drafted in prison, appeared in 1863. The key scene is Vera Pavlovna's fourth dream phase where she imagines human perfectibility. Her ideal was symbolized, in Chernyshevsky's words, by a 'building, an enormous building, such as are now in but a few capitals . . . or no, there is not a single one like that now! It stands amid fields and meadows, gardens and woods. . . There is nothing like it now; no, but there is one that points towards it — the palace which stands on Sydenham Hill. Glass and steel, steel and glass, and that is all. No, that is not all, that is only the shell of the building. . . But there, inside, there is a real house, an enormous house. It is covered by this crystal and steel building as by a sheath. . . Life is healthy and quiet here. It preserves freshness' (Chernyshevsky, 1982: 319).

If we didn't know otherwise, we might swear it was Ebenezer Howard or Le Corbusier speaking. Instead, it is Chernyshevsky's invocation of London's Crystal Palace as a microcosm of a rational, ordered and conflict-free society, where all suffering, want and toil is banished and where human reason reigns supreme. Apparently, the great socialist radical visited Joseph Paxton's famous structure, the pinnacle of the World's Fair at Hyde Park in 1851, after it had been shifted to the Sydenham Hill site (cf. Berman, 1983: 235–48). Dostoevsky, too, had been there, in 1862, and gasped for breadth at the sight of this incarnation of ultimate truth, but recoiled in horror at the thought of living in it: 'you feel that here something has been achieved, that here there is victory and triumph. No matter how independent you might be, for some reason you become terrified. "Hasn't the ideal in fact been achieved here?" you think. "Isn't this the ultimate, isn't it in fact the 'one fold'? Isn't it in fact necessary to accept this as the truth fulfilled and grow dumb once and for all?"' (Dostoevsky, 1988: 37). Evidently, Dostoevsky sees the Crystal Palace, like he does Chernyshevsky's utopia, as a facile attempt to apply reason to solve existential dilemmas. The sort of society purporting to offer total freedom would, for Dostoevsky, really be a society of total slavery.

The Crystal Palace prefigured a society based on 'mathematical exactitude' and where there is 'nothing left to do'. Then, one would 'be neither able to stick one's tongue out nor thumb one's nose on the sly' (Dostoevsky, 1960: 31). What worries Dostoevsky so much is not whether doing away with disorder and painful conflict and chaos is possible, but whether it is desirable. Dostoevsky's (1960: 29) hope against hope is that people will only like utopian Crystal Palaces 'from a distance', only invent utopias and

not really want to live in them. Living in them means the end of novelty, fantasy and curiosity; everything would become routine, never adventure, the death-knell to the human spirit. All passion would be throttled and who could possibly accept that? From where, asks Dostoevsky, would intensity of experience, the sole origin of consciousness, then emanate?

Ironically, this concern chimed somewhat with that of the youthful Marx. Marx even framed it in strikingly similar terms in his *Economical and philosophical manuscripts* of 1844 (Marx, 1974; cf. Merrifield, 1999). Marx's point of departure here, much like Dostoevsky's, is that humans are endowed with what he calls 'vital powers'. Vital powers, Marx says, exist in all of us as 'dispositions' and 'capacities' and 'drives' (1974: 389). On the other hand, 'as a natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective being', Marx adds (p. 390), humans are 'suffering, conditioned and limited beings'. Marx suggests that sensuality gives human beings reality. But to be sensuous and real one has to be passionate. And yet, Marx is unequivocal: 'to be passionate it is firstly necessary to suffer, to feel pain' (p. 390). (In the original, suffering — *Leiden* — is always italicized.)

This idea figures in a short unfinished essay called 'Critique of Hegel's dialectic and general philosophy', tucked away at the end of the final 'Third manuscript'. In those pages, Marx attacks the 'mystifying' speculative philosophy of Hegel's *Phenomenology of spirit* (1977). While Marx recognizes the positive elements of Hegel, he couldn't advocate the priority Hegel conferred to pure, abstract thought. Humans, from Hegel's standpoint, only know themselves-for-themselves through a reflective self-consciousness. Hegel knew only one kind of labor: Marx calls it 'abstract mental labour' and views it as heady 'one-sided' stuff. He reckons it afforded too much credit to thought per se. Hegel implied a consciousness comprised of one component, that of knowing as knowing. Perceiving, feeling, suffering, hearing etc. are all duly downplayed.

Marx (1974: 389), on the other hand, holds that humans are 'directly natural beings' with their 'feet firmly planted on the solid earth and breathing all the powers of nature'. Humans know themselves not by turning inward contemplatively, but by reaching out and feeling and seeing and comprehending the external world around them; a world which is simultaneously their own and which incorporates other people. Marx considers the question to be at once ontological and epistemological. As natural beings, he believes, people 'must confirm and realize themselves both in their being and their knowing' (Marx, 1974: 391). Still, to have being, one must be sensuous. Sensuality, moreover, is 'to be an object of sense, a sensuous object, and thus to have sensuous objects outside oneself, objects of one's sense perception. To be sensuous is to suffer (to be subjected to the actions of another)' (p. 390). So, Marx is implying, and much like Dostoevsky, that it is precisely suffering which makes us passionate beings; and passion is a person's 'essential power vigorously striving to attain its object' (p. 390). In short, suffering and passion are some kind of 'integral human essence'. They are what Marx calls 'human effectiveness'; suffering thereby becomes '*an enjoyment of the self for man*' (p. 351, emphasis added).

What is Marx getting at here? Let us remember why he wrote the *Manuscripts* in the first place: to affirm the primacy of 'free conscious activity' in the 'species-character' of man and women (Marx, 1974: 328). Here, again as in Dostoevsky's *Notes*, he wants to emphasize the importance of free will and individuality. This is why Marx indicts capitalism so ardently, so persistently. It restricts the parameter for free individual development. It is bourgeois society that often treats humans as machines and forces people to behave like 'piano keys' and 'organ stops', to use Dostoevsky's (1960: 28) terminology. To that extent, Marx yearns for a society where people can fully express their individualities and unrealized desires. He wants all the human senses — seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving (the language is Marx's own) — to blossom as 'organs of individuality' and 'theoreticians in their immediate praxis' (Marx, 1974: 352). In other words, Marx yearns

for a society that intensifies feeling and experience, not one that desensitizes feeling and experience. And this intensification of our capacity to feel and experience would presumably intensify negative as well as positive emotions.

Marx is trying to give suffering a much more positive bent. He is invoking the need for a social and physical environment in which the possibilities for adventure and intrigue would intensify, and so, too, the stimulation of our passions and desires. Maybe that is why he says, so intriguingly, that suffering is 'enjoyment of the self for man'? Marx is telling us that feeling and suffering — both physical and emotional — is a kind of knowledge. When we feel and suffer we are able to learn things about ourselves that intellect alone cannot discern. And it is a learning process which, he suggests, is an 'integral human essence': it happens to everybody, everywhere and at all times, whether we like it or not, or whether we confront it or not. Strangely, we need it somehow. Painful and dangerous encounters offer an intensity of experience and feeling which equips us to be whole people; paradoxically, too, it may even make us feel more alive and helps us stave off what Marx (1974: 351) called 'one-sided individuality'. In effect, we, as human beings, crave a society where both positive and negative passions can be played out, and openly and honestly. Only then does Marx believe that people might freely and vigorously strive to attain their object. So, in the end, despite their metaphysical and political differences, Marx and Dostoevsky become existential bedfellows: both really challenge us to imagine more free and open-ended societies.

The flight away from intensity: home remedies and big plans

What light does Marx's and Dostoevsky's philosophical wisdom shed on the dynamics of the city? Maybe it is on the city's shadows and inner recesses where they shine brightest. Maybe here both would insist on the life-enhancing qualities of shadows, of the darker side of existence, where passions and desires and contradictions reside, get acted out, collide, often threateningly, always precariously. Didn't Marx suggest that the senses are 'organs of individuality'? Didn't the Underground Man yearn for contradictions and contrasts? Yet, didn't the Underground man equally remind us that this yearning sometimes brought the 'greatest misfortune' for human beings?

It is interesting to bring this dialectical analysis into confrontation with perhaps two of the most influential twentieth-century commentators on the city: Jane Jacobs and Lewis Mumford. It is interesting in the sense that the whole question of contradiction and contrast in the city, of disorder versus order, of dystopia versus utopia, animates and gets re-enacted in their best-known work. I want to suggest that neither Jacobs nor Mumford got it quite right. I think that Dostoevsky and Marx can give us hints why. Nevertheless, all four can lead us into the contradictions and contrasts of our own urban scene and pinpoint the sorts of questions we now urgently need to ask.

Jane Jacobs (1961) starts off in a vein reminiscent of Dostoevsky. She is dead against big ideals and radiant visions. For her, the city isn't a work of art nor is it a 'garden' or anything 'beautiful' in the sense that planners conceive it. Instead, she maintains that true descriptions of urban reality are 'drawn not from how it ought to be, but how it is' (1961: 23). And when you look at how it is, Jacobs thinks, you find some pretty amazing things going on. 'The way to get at what goes on in the seemingly mysterious and perverse behavior of cities is, I think, to look closely, and with as little previous expectation as possible, at the most ordinary scenes and events, and attempt to see what they mean'. Surprisingly, Jacobs (1961: 25) says 'most of the material lies at my own front door'. Soon she opened her front door, stepped outside, looked around at her Greenwich Village neighborhood, inspecting its streets, its people and kids, its shops and bars and parks. Then, in 1961, her findings were published in a now canonical text: *The death and life of great American cities*.

Immediately, Jacobs lambastes Ebenezer Howard and the whole Garden City movement. 'His aim', she reckons (1961: 27), 'was the creation of self-sufficient small towns, really very nice towns if you were docile and had no plans of your own and did not mind spending your life amongst others with no plans of their own'. For her, cities worked best when they deliberately encouraged spontaneous diversity and teemed with all sorts of activity and behavior. The commingling of multiple functions and services and shops and people in the same block brought life to neighborhoods and helped cities flourish — both socially and economically. Jacobs defends disorder and messiness, and says the differing degrees of social contact and continuous neighborhood movement create 'intricate street ballets' which 'eddy back and forth' day and night. And because these streets are animated, they attract more people, all kinds of people, who want to wander and loiter and live in its environs. Dynamic sidewalk life bolsters safety: 'a well-used street is apt to be a safe street' (1961: 44).

Jacobs highlights that there is beauty and an abundance of life in the ostensibly disordered street. Its day-to-day functioning is a subtle and highly developed organism that needs watering and nurturing, not wholesale bulldozing and rebuilding anew. Ordered, homogeneous neighborhoods need staying off. Planners hedge people's craving for contrast and contradiction and socially engineer sterile spaces, believing them beneficent for humanity. Planners, Jacobs argues, have little real idea about the pleasures of urbanity or about what makes cities tick. Their prescriptions to save the city from its raving pathologies of congestion and overcrowding — by reducing numbers to 'normal' proportions and through stiff zoning regulations — only, she concludes, 'do the city in' (1961: 27).

Lewis Mumford (1962: 155), conversely, considered this line 'comical' in its inaccuracy and vented his rancor at Jacobs' 'home remedies'. He used his influence at the prestigious *New Yorker* magazine to defend planning with 'hate in his heart' (Miller, 1989: 474). To begin with, though, he concurred with Jacobs: true, he says, a neighborhood 'is not just a collection of buildings but a tissue of social relations and a cluster of warm personal sentiments, associated with the familiar faces of doctor and priest, the butcher and the baker and the candlestick maker, not least with the idea of 'home'' (Mumford, 1962: 152). True, too, this 'able woman had used her eyes and, even more admirably, her heart to assay the human result of large-scale housing... [and] saw more deeply into the plight of both those who were evicted and those who came back to live in homogenized and sterile barracks that had been conceived in terms of bureaucratic regimentation, financial finagling, and administrative convenience' (p. 152). But from a gallant 'sense and sensibility' there emerges, Mumford thinks, a 'pride and prejudice' (p. 154).

Underneath her thesis, which suggests that the sidewalk, the street and the neighborhood, in all their 'higgledy-piggledy unplanned casualness', are the very heart of urban vitality, Mumford (1962: 160) argues, 'lies a preoccupation that is almost an obsession: the prevention of criminal violence in big cities'. He accuses Jacobs of having an 'overruling fear of living in the big city she so openly adores, and, as all New Yorkers know, she has considerable reason for fear' (1962: 160). Yet her belief that planners should not interfere, and that everything should be kept small-scale and intimate, and shops and houses and people should be mixed together, is, he thinks, absurd for ameliorating criminal violence and urban malaise. If that is really the case, Mumford says, 'eighteenth-century London, which met all of Mrs Jacobs' planning prescriptions, would not have been the nest of violence and delinquency it actually was' (p. 162). For Mumford, the problem of cities is more fundamental and deep-rooted: 'overgrowth, its purposeless materialism, its congestion, and its insensate disorder — the very conditions she vehemently upholds as marks of vitality' (p.173).

Even things that Jacobs deals with best — like face-to-face interactions on the street, the common interest of certain neighborhoods, the stability of family relationships — rest

not on metropolitan dynamism but, Mumford reckons, on 'continuity and stability' and on 'the special virtues of the village'. Her urban vision is really a pastoral vision. It is a vision that is almost folksy and conservative in its defense of neighborhood integrity in the face of metropolitan expansion. Therein resides an irreconcilable tension in the Jacobsean argument: a destructive antagonism between her pursuit of neighborhood life, on the one hand, and her 'unqualified adoration of metropolitan bigness and dynamism', on the other (Mumford, 1962: 164). Nevertheless, Mumford suggests that this tension can be reconciled by the institution of planning and urban design.

Mumford seeks to address market growth and penetration, believing it will annihilate neighborhood intimacy in the long run. In response, he follows the shibboleths of Howard's Garden City model and Geddesian reformism, arguing that there are 'natural limits' to capitalist urban growth. So Mumford's city is an organism that has limits and if it expands beyond those limits, it cannot sustain itself as a healthy life form. At such a point, the humanist planner enters the fray to perform the necessary radical surgery. It is they who orchestrate decentralization, who break the city down into a series of smaller manageable units. From this standpoint, Mumford's city is a vast work of art, and it is the task of the great artist-planner to create a dignified and democratic expression of human culture. His urban vision is obviously romantic. Specifically, it romanticizes the past: the Greek city, Mumford wrote in *The city in history*, was 'neither too small nor too big, neither too rich nor too poor, it kept the human personality from being dwarfed by its own collective products' (Mumford, 1961: 148). He equally reminisces about the medieval town, his real urban ideal. He shares this nostalgia with his great antagonist.

So, although Mumford and Jacobs approach the urban question from different scales and from different standpoints, they each end up with not so much an anti-urban manifesto as an anti-metropolitan one. But Mumford goes a lot further with his anti-metropolitan bias. He, remember, fled New York City for his cherished Amenia, a small upstate town, where he spent most of his adult life. It was he who hated the New York skyline, reviled skyscrapers and the city's bustle and congestion and noise and blight. Mumford got the hell out of New York at the same time as many other people wanted the hell in; and for those very same reasons Mumford wanted out! Those humble virtues Mumford yearned after — harmony, moderation, poise, symmetry, organic balance — are worlds removed from what a lot of city dwellers sought or still seek, and from the sort of metaphysics that Dostoevsky and Marx affirm.

Of course, Mumford has no truck with dystopia. He's an urbanist of the old school. His prescriptions lurch towards pragmatic utopianism. He claims to be a big-city boy, but he clearly has small-town values. His notion that disorder is somehow anti-human and anti-organic reveals these small town values. Nor is disorder somehow insensate. Marx and Dostoevsky would beg to differ: it is disorder, they say, that enables the senses to become 'theoreticians in their immediate praxis'. It is disorder, Marx and Dostoevsky say, that enables us to feel more, and provides us with 'enjoyment of the self'. Mumford, ironically, even appears to agree with that greatest champion of Order, Plato, who in Book Ten of *The republic* (1935: 305–6) wrote, 'If you receive the pleasure-seasoned Muse of song and epic, pleasure and pain will be kings in your city instead of law'. (I say 'ironically' because, in *The city in history* [1961: 177–8], Mumford had castigated Plato for undervaluing 'the vital stimuli and challenges to growth: variety, disorder, conflict, tension, weakness, and even temporary failure. Each of these, if it does not harden into a fixed pattern, may produce a far more desirable community than any mode of conformity'.) Jacobs grasps the uses and pleasures of disorder much better than her long-time adversary.⁴ She is maybe only a short step away from emphasizing the allure of dystopia itself. But she cannot quite bring herself around to make that step. Her focus on

4 Her concern is developed later in the decade by other eminent urbanists like William H. Whyte in *The last landscape* (1968) and Richard Sennett in *The uses of disorder* (1970).

safety and village intimacy wrenches her away in the other direction. In the end, both Mumford and Jacobs shy away from the flight into intensity that Marx and Dostoevsky endorse.

Thirty-odd years later, some of Mumford's and Jacobs' ideas are still important homilies. But a lot of their insights have also reached their sell-by date. For the 1990s and beyond, their urban visions sound somehow defensive and prudish. For one thing, neither ever imagined how disorder and danger, and even ecological disruption, might be enticing as well as unnerving. And it is enticing precisely because it is unnerving. Neither considered that this, too, is what gives the city its problematical energy. Neither did they realize that those self-same destructive forces are linked to things we crave for and seem unwilling to give up at any cost; and in the city we invariably find them: mobility, novelty, abundance and freedom from traditional virtues and pieties. Modern tragedy, Alfred Kazin aptly says (1981: xi), 'is unreflectiveness, apartness in our hearts from the lives we actually live and drive others to live'. Neither Jacobs nor Mumford ever pondered on the tragic joy of dystopia. Neither recognized how, somehow, we are liberated by dystopia. Needless to say, it is a liberation we pay dearly for. It is, of course, our very own pact with the devil. But in that pact we can sometimes discover ourselves as persons.

Neither Jacobs nor Mumford really understood the social and psychological dynamics of the unsustainable city. The unsustainable city is always the dystopian city, always a city on the edge, on the edge of a social and ecological precipice. But it is alive on that edge, not stable or moribund or safe. That it has an edge is surely its whole reason for existence anyway. Of course, it puts people on edge and, sometimes, tips you over the edge. And yet, a lot of people crave that edge. While many people, particularly middle-class people, have fled cities over the last couple of decades for the relative security and cost-effectiveness of the suburbs, others — often young, single people — have gone to cities to escape community and stability and continuity. They go to cities to invent and reinvent themselves. Some, if they can commandeer sufficient economic resources, succeed. Many more love cities because they can be rootless. As the other Marx, Groucho (1993: 148), once quipped, 'home is unquestionably where the heart is, but it is also the place where you bathe, change your clothes and get the hell out of as quickly as possible'. (The ever irreverent and wisecracking Groucho, incidentally, remained a great American romantic: 'Basically we are a gregarious and crowd-loving nation and no mechanical invention will ever plant us permanently in front of a fireplace'.) Sometimes, people yearn actively not to belong. Many follow the sentiments of Baudelaire or Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*, even if, as is likely, they don't ever know it. This sense of 'breakdown' — be it familial or moral or both — isn't a symptom of disruption or anarchy but a symptom of progression and freedom, and of life. The transcendence of 'basic' values, especially those which place people in roles or boxes or force them to operate under moral taboos or temporal and spatial prohibitions, is to be celebrated not denounced.

From the uses of disorder to 'Zero Tolerance'

Alas, a lot of today's politicians and ruling classes, both sides of the Atlantic, understand the dynamics of disorder and want to suppress it. None of which is to say that there aren't problems with certain forms of disorder. Nor is the unsustainable city a city that prostrates itself before a rampant corporate capitalism. But the added dilemma, at least in Britain, is that those who want to suppress disorder are not exclusively on the Right now. Intolerance of urban disorder has been voiced on the center Left too, and it has caused considerable political furor. Speaking loudest here has been Labour Home Secretary, Jack Straw. His views have been publicly endorsed by boss Tony Blair, who confessed all in the pages of *The Big Issue* homeless magazine.

Straw himself admits studying and being influenced by a 1995 report called 'The Year of Change: Reengineering the New York City Police Department', the brainchild of Republican Mayor Rudy Giuliani and ex-Police Commissioner William Bratton. Their report inaugurated a new term and tactic for dealing with street convulsions and disorder in the Big Apple: Zero Tolerance. This 'get tough' policy on vagrancy, panhandling, squeegee merchants, petty criminality and graffiti tries to stamp out public misdemeanor, however minor, by employing an intensified police presence. It purports to tackle relatively minor disorders before they can escalate into more serious crime — the so-called 'broken windows' thesis. The goal is nothing other than 'civic cleanliness'. Indeed, Zero Tolerance stateside boasts resounding successes: New York's crime rates have fallen 40% over recent years; the city's annual murder total has now dropped below the 500 mark, which is well less than half of the figure for 1990. Although many criminologists warn that other factors are responsible here — like the changes in New York's economic fortunes, the relative decline of numbers of teenage males in the nation's population, and stabilizing turf and gang wars (Currie, 1997) — Zero Tolerance initiatives have nonetheless impressed Labour government bigwigs. London's notorious King's Cross — long a gruesome site of crack dealing, drug abuse, prostitution and vagrancy — has been a test-case, and the six-week long experiment there deployed extra 'high-profile' police foot patrols.

Zero Tolerance, not surprisingly, is controversial. Liberals have been up in arms about the potential threat to civil liberties (see Shapiro, 1997, who points out that civilian complaints about excessive police force in New York have risen 41% since Giuliani came to power in November 1993). The biggest complainants are the homeless, who now get moved on with no place else to go. Many exist on the street, even have a rightful place on the street, are somehow of the street, however problematical this might be for them and for everybody else passing by. With Zero Tolerance, one can't help wondering whether the baby of disorder might be getting ditched with the criminal bathwater. While it is evident that disorder can lead to crime, it is also evident that not all disorder is criminal. The strategy, Jacobsesque in its paranoia over crime, also exhibits a denial of what the city is.⁵ Jacobs, remember, wanted disorder, but she also appeals for safety and neighborhood face-to-face intimacy. Intimacy, of course, implies some sense of inwardness and cohesiveness; and neighborhood inwardness and cohesiveness matched with the desire for safety might beget some pretty sinister exclusionary implications. Indeed, those who endorse disorder but who fear crime, like Jacobs, had better watch out that those who are also fearful of crime as well as disorder don't stamp out the sort of disorder that's so cherished and fundamental to a vibrant urban culture.

More recently, Jacobs has been invoked by other champions of Order. In their book *Fixing broken windows: restoring order and reducing crime in our communities*, for example, the conservative duo George Kelling and Catherine Coles (1996) cite Jacobs as their cult hero.⁶ 'Order arises', they say, 'out of what Jane Jacobs has called the 'small change' of urban life: the day-to-day respect with which we deal with others and the concern that we exercise for their privacy, welfare, and safety' (1996: 8). Look after the cents in the city and the dollars will supposedly look after themselves. 'What is disorder?' Kelling and Coles ask. 'In its broadest sense', they reckon, it is 'incivility, boorish and

5 Interestingly, London's Metropolitan Police Force claim not to adopt Zero Tolerance practices elsewhere in central London. The Charing Cross Station, whose beat includes Soho and the West End, seem to concur with Engels: 'moving rough sleepers on doesn't serve to solve the problem in the long term. It just moves them from one area to another which satisfies the resident's associations if they are moved on, especially in King's Cross where in some cases they've created major disturbances. Zero Tolerance is a knee jerk reaction. It only works for a short period of time. The problem will often come back and often in a worse form than when it started ... this is not to say that [we] take the soft option' (Sergeant of Homelessness Unit, Interview, 6 January 1998).

6 This book extends the earlier work of James Q. Wilson, whose article with Kelling (1982) in the *Atlantic Monthly* set the tone of much of the conservative debate about ordering disorder in the city. Wilson also writes a complimentary foreword to the latest Kelling and Coles monograph (1996).

threatening behavior that disturbs life, especially urban life' (p. 14). Reading between the lines, we soon discover the real target of Kelling and Coles's antipathy: civil libertarians, especially 1960s radicals, who have pioneered the growth of individualism and individual rights. In short, these radicals, Kelling and Coles (p. 42) say, have:

helped spur an increase in deviant behavior on city streets, while changes in legal doctrine, especially in constitutional and criminal law, not only permitted such behavior to continue but safeguarded the rights of those behaving in deviant fashion. Said in another way, disorder grew and was tolerated, if not ignored, because the expression of virtually all forms of non-violent deviance came to be considered synonymous with the expression of individual, particularly First Amendment or speech-related, rights.

For seemingly good reason, then, Shapiro (1997: 23) suggests that 'broken windows' and Zero Tolerance initiatives aren't concerned 'about crime at all, but [are] a vision of social order disintegrating under glassy-eyed liberal neglect'. Simply put, Zero Tolerance is 'an illusory obsession with order at all costs' (1997: 23). (In this context, a recent *New York Times* headline [20 December 1999] gets right to the real point here: 'Giuliani's New Mission: Get Marxists Off Streets'.)⁷

Arguably, policing and urban policy shouldn't stifle public disorders and uncertainty, neither should they crush street spontaneity and vibrancy. But neither, too, can a democracy allow all types of disorder to run amok (see Merrifield, 1996). Differentiating 'bad' from 'good' disorder will doubtless involve negotiation and argument, as well as a toleration of conflict, discordance and painful encounter, which has always had a rightful place in an authentic urban culture. And yet, disentangling 'good' from 'bad' disorder mustn't relapse into the kind of logic Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov preached, whereby one might love people at a distance or in the abstract but hate them close up, as neighbors, in all their concrete messiness (Dostoevsky, 1958: 231). Making these choices, therefore, requires something other than Zero Tolerance: it requires an understanding of what gives cities their frightening force and awesome grandeur. The Left has to fend off and contest Zero Tolerance tactics while it tries to formulate what the city of tolerance might look and feel and function like. In any event, that cities do frequently burn with an infernal flame, and get dramatized through human vulnerability, is something both policy experts and urbanists forget at their peril.

It is progressive urbanists who need to do the toughest thinking of all. Those of us on the Left who yearn for social justice, but who also love cities, find ourselves torn between the tyranny we see around us every day and the thrill that same tyrannical city can sometimes offer. How can alternative visions and strategies be devised that can promote the latter while negating the former? Does the just city have to be a sterile one? How are we to whet the appetite of our inextricable craving for contrast and contradiction while staving off painful nihilism? Or, on the other hand, is painful nihilism something we need? If it is, how can we harness it positively, use it as a creative as well as destructive force? This, of course, poses both philosophical and practical policy dilemmas, and the time is ripe to consider such dilemmas seriously and unflinchingly. But the theme is always likely to leave Leftists in some paradoxical position. We can see such a position infuse Davis' (1990) *City of quartz*: it is that which makes it a book worth reading. We can also think of other instances where the Left is often compelled to give up unsoiled purity, defend sleaze and vice and violence, and assume awkwardly defensive postures. Those who have followed and who are concerned about the fate of New York's Times Square in recent years will know just what I mean.

7 Giuliani's ongoing curbside crusade, which has hitherto been merciless in cracking down on street vendors, homeless people and the shambling habitués of New York City's sidewalks, is now venting spleen on another enemy: a sinister 'Red Menace' out on the street, specifically in the shape of union pickets and organized labor, to say nothing of 'anarchists who sacked a Starbucks' and 'gardeners who plant flowers in the city's vacant lots'. Of Marxism, the Mayor says: 'You know we have it in the city and the influence that it's had on universities and thinking and the idea of class warfare'.

This little piece of America is now embroiled in all sorts of finagling involving the city and big capital. The biggest player here is Disney, who have set up operations in the New Amsterdam Theater on 42nd Street, forcing the City of New York to spearhead a massive clean-up campaign and commercial redevelopment scheme. Helped along by the 42nd Street Development Corporation and the Times Square Business Improvement District (BID) — the latter being established in 1992 and now providing a sidewalk, curbside and anti-graffiti crusade, regular security patrols, pornography regulation and other public ‘improvements’ — Disney is playing hardball in the cleansing of the district. Aside from Disney, the billion-dollar project includes other corporate giants like Marriott, MTV and HBO, Madame Tussaud and Reuters. With lots of ‘sweetheart deals’ and ‘corporate welfare’ on offer, endorsed by a glittering array of architectural luminaries — such as Philip Johnson and Robert Stern — retail strips and shopping malls, high-rise office space, TV studios, a hotel and a multiplex cinema are all set to go up soon (Berman, 1997).

Unable to disguise its nostalgia for the Golden Age of Times Square, the Left has immediately bawled its disapproval. Christine Boyer (1996: 80), for one, expresses a typical lament, and in familiar Left argot: ‘we have allowed a quintessential public space of an American city to be redesigned as a simulated theme park for commercial entertainment. Architect Robert A.M. Stern’s interim refurbishment plan extrapolates from the realism of the area’s popular and commercial features and returns this to privileged spectators who can relish the illusion in a sanitized and theatricalized zone’. Of course, that quintessential public space has always been one of vivid encounter and entertainment and an illicit sexual marketplace — which is, if you think about it, a peculiar thing for Leftists to defend in the first place. And yet, Times Square since 1905 has been a special kind of open-minded public space, along with all the hazards this engenders. Home of Tin Pan Alley, of vaudeville and burlesque and Ziegfeld Follies, of risqué and ‘legitimate’ theater, of peep and porn shows, of drug pushers, of hustlers and hipsters, both gay and straight, the neon light of the Great White Way at once shone brightly and created dark brooding shadows. It has traditionally satisfied an array of urban appetites and fantasies, challenged norms of public morality and behavior, norms about private parts in public places (Senelick, 1991), and infused itself into the popular psyche of New Yorkers and Americans alike. It has been a place where fortunes are made and lost, and where hearts are broken and dreams become nightmares. No surprise that Times Square has captured the imagination of successive generations of writers, poets, filmmakers, playwrights and musicians.

Now an object of Left affection, Times Square has long been denounced by moralists. In the past, as now, it was viewed as a ‘cesspool of filth and obscenity’ (Senelick, 1991). A cesspool of filth and obscenity though it may have been for some, it was, as William Sherman’s hard-boiled reportage *Times Square* makes clear, equally a popular haven. At the habitual New Year’s Eve celebrations, says Sherman (1980: 4), ‘some of the men at the party had served on the clean up of Times Square’. Formulating their own Zero Tolerance plans, these people ‘met in plush offices over coffee and Danish pastries and considered new zoning, new penal codes, anti-prostitution drives, more cops, curfews, padlocks for the porno stores, even closed circuit TV monitors for the worst blocks, and lawsuits to close the seamiest hotels. But while they partied on the roof, down below at the very crossroads of the world, a mammoth ‘pornucopia’ featuring the very latest in prepubescent masturbation magazines was open and doing a brisk business — even on New Year’s Eve’ (Sherman, 1980: 4).

Times Square was also a haven for gay hustlers and lonesome exiles, who would lose and find themselves on the street. John Rechy was there for a while and in *City of night* wrote of how he surrendered to its world: ‘I stand on 42nd Street and Broadway looking at the sign flashing the news from the Times Tower. . . The world is losing. The hurricane still menaces. . . I feel explosively excited to be on this street — at the sight of the people and lights, sensing the anarchy . . . like a possessive lover — or like a powerful drug — it

lured me. FASCINATION! I returned, dazzled, to this street. The giant sign winked its welcome: FASCINATION!' (Rechy, 1963: 26–34). Dostoevsky would have probably understood Rechy's fascination all too well. His *Underground Man* would have known exactly what Rechy meant by feeling 'explosively excited' to be out on the street, absorbed, overwhelmed by the city of night. If he had still been around nowadays, Dostoevsky might have asked: A Times Square without sleaze? Even that would have stretched Dostoevsky's imaginative capacity. But romanticization of sleaze? Well, that is something else again, and Leftists need to tread carefully here.

Opening: the dialectics of conflict and contradiction

Spaces like New York's Times Square and the Lower East Side and London's King's Cross are kept alive and energized by conflict. Conflict defines their nature and their culture. Conflict is the culture of these spaces. Conflict means danger, often it means injustice, but always it means life and human yearning, human fascination. Sometimes it also means death. This is, paradoxically, often the lifeblood of a vibrant urbanism and radical culture. In a sense, Marx himself revealed the enormous creative power of conflict, of human dissatisfaction. It is clear how much art and literature and kinship has developed out of conflict. Think of places like Tompkins Square Park in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, especially around homelessness and anti-gentrification struggles (Smith, 1996). The pages of Joel Rose and Catherine Texier's literary journal *Between C and D* (1988), or the *East Village eye* (see Moore and Gosciak, 1990), tell us a lot about an endearing and rugged neighborhood that's been at the cutting edge of life and death for a while now. And it is that conflict, that intensity of experience, which makes for compelling stories and attracts avid readers everywhere.

I am all too aware that this begs a dangerous and bothersome question for Leftists: bereft of dissatisfaction and conflict, what do humans become and how much creative capacity is lost? It is dangerous because this reasoning can be hijacked by the Right who will (and do) claim that inequality and suffering (for certain people anyway) is good insofar as it forces them to struggle. It is bothersome as well because Left urbanists now have to ask themselves whether a society — particularly an urban society — free from all inner contradictions, visible imperfections, threatening disorders and desperate strivings, is not, as Dostoevsky prophesized, so much possible as desirable.

Dostoevsky considered the pursuit for intensity as symptomatic of a cultural collapse which he partly tried to describe and partly tried to resist (cf. de Jong, 1975). Could it be, finally, that the current fascination with the dystopian city is similarly symptomatic of our very own cultural collapse? A collapse that has been engineered and hastened by multinational capitalism whose agents and representatives seem intent on homogenizing and sanitizing the whole world and our cities and everybody, papering over the globe with its own corporate logo, raising us on mind-numbing MTV, putting in place fast-food outlets and bland office developments and Virgin megastores everywhere, constructing crystal palaces where 'there is nothing left to do'. Plainly, there is always something left to do, and we need places and spaces and cities that can let us do it; and not in rubber gloves either. Not everybody will agree or approve of who does what where, and conflict and disagreement will likely ensue. Hell, as Jean-Paul Sartre famously said, really can be other people sometimes. But, as Dante also said centuries before, hell is something that we have to progress through, learn from, live with, not wish away. Only by working through hell, Dante says, will we ever 'see the stars'. Someday, maybe, we might see the stars in the shimmering neon-lit city of night.

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