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# The New Capitalism

BY RICHARD SENNETT

THE word *new* is a suspect word, the favored adjective of advertisers. Yet in the last twenty years profound changes in material life have occurred, changes that a score of years ago it was hard to foresee. Then, the great corporate bureaucracies and government hierarchies of the developed world seemed securely entrenched, the products of centuries of economic development and nation-building. Commentators spoke of “late capitalism” or “mature capitalism” as though earlier forces of growth had now entered an end-game phase.

Now a new chapter has opened: the economy is global and makes use of new technology; mammoth government and corporate bureaucracies are becoming both more flexible and less secure institutions. The social guarantees of the welfare states of an earlier era are breaking down, capitalism itself has become economically flexible, highly mobile, its corporate structures ever less determinate in form and in time. These structural changes are linked to a sudden and massive outpouring of productivity, new goods like computers, new services like the global financial industries. The cornucopia is for the moment full.

As a result, though, the ways we work have altered: short-term jobs replace stable careers, skills rapidly evolve; the middle class experiences anxieties and uncertainties that were, in an earlier era, more confined to the working classes.

Place has a different meaning now as well, in large part thanks to these economic changes. An earlier generation believed nations, and within nations, cities, could govern their own fortunes; now, the emerging economic network is less

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susceptible to the controls of geography. One measure of the changing relation between economy and place is immigration—a force perplexing cities like New York and Vienna, since the appearance of immigrants is not accidental, but tied to subtle structural changes in the economy of these cities. Yet the appearance of these strangers does not encompass the magnitude of the transformation of place we are now experiencing. A divide has opened between polity—in the sense of self-rule—and the global economy.

The culture of this new capitalist order of work and place is the focus of my own reflections—that is, what difference the new political economy makes in our ethical values, our sense of one another as social creatures, and our understanding of ourselves. As a point of departure, I'd like to put forward to you two simple propositions that seem to be emerging from this new order.

The first is that the new capitalism is impoverishing the value of work. Becoming more flexible and short-term, work is ceasing to serve as a point of reference for defining durable personal purposes and a sense of self-worth; sociologically, work serves ever less as a forum for stable, sociable relations.

The second proposition is that the value of place has thereby increased. The sense of place is based on the need to belong not to “society” in the abstract, but belong somewhere in particular. As the shifting institutions of the economy diminish the experience of belonging somewhere special at work, people's commitments increase to geographic places like nations, cities, and localities. The question is, commitments of what sort? Nationalism or ethnic localism—often expressed as hatred of immigrants or other outsiders—can indeed serve as defensive refuges against a hostile economic order, but at a steep human price. The man who hates the outside is weakened, rather than strengthened, by his hatred.

These two propositions might suggest an unrelievedly bleak view of the culture of the emerging political economy. But this is not my view. Work is a problematic frame for the self, since

it tends to equate worldly success and personal worth. And the renewed value on place aroused by troubled fortunes might in fact present an opportunity—the opportunity to construct a public realm in which people think about themselves and act socially other than as economic animals, their value as citizens not dependant upon their riches.

At least, this was Hannah Arendt's hope a generation ago, when she made, in *The Human Condition* (1958), her famous distinction between labor and politics. She hoped particularly that in urban life, with its large scale and impersonality, people could conduct a civic existence that did not merely reflect, or depend upon, their personal fortunes. Today, the uncertainties of the new economy argue more than ever for a selfhood, as well as civic behavior, unchained from the conditions of labor. Yet the places in which this might occur can neither be cities of the classical kind that Arendt admired, nor can they be defensive, inward-turning localities. We need a new kind of public realm to cope with the new economy.

### *Growth*

To make sense of the culture of the emerging political economy, we need to understand its key word, *growth*. Growth occurs, most simply, in four ways.

The simplest way is sheer increase in number, such as more ants in a colony, more television sets on the market. Growth of this sort appears in economic thinking among writers like Jean Baptiste Say, whose *loi des débouchés* postulated that “increased supply creates its own demand.” That's a form of growth that appears in the modern economy, for instance, in the computer industry, the ever-increasing supply of hardware and software arousing and pushing product demand.

An increase in number can lead to alteration of structure, which is how Adam Smith conceived of growth in *The Wealth of*

*Nations*; larger markets trigger, he said, the division of labor in work. Increase of size that begets complexity of structure has been the way government bureaucracy as well as industry have grown in the past. The technology of the new capitalism exemplifies this kind of growth in the ever more complex structure of information services linking the world.

A third kind of growth occurs through metamorphosis; a body changes its shape or structure without necessarily increasing in number. A moth turning into a butterfly grows in this way, so do characters in a novel. Much of the internal growth of modern corporations has occurred in this form. Though the press focuses on job loss and downsizing in the modern economy, radical metamorphoses in corporate structure can often occur even when the number of employees remains relatively constant; metamorphosis characterizes the restructuring of banking and other financial service industries, for instance.

Finally, a system can grow by becoming more democratic. This kind of growth is antifoundational, as John Dewey argued: the elements in a system are free to interact and influence one another so that boundaries become febrile, forms become mixed; the system contracts or expands in parts without overall coordination. Communications networks like the early Internet are obvious examples of how growth can occur democratically. Such a growth process differs from a market mechanism, in which an exchange ideally clears all transactions and so regulates all actors in the system. Resistances, irregularities, and cognitive dissonances take on a positive value in democratic forms of growth. This is why subjective life develops through something like the practice of inner democracy—interpretative and emotional complexity emerges without a master plan, a hegemonic rule, an undisputed explanation.

My own view is that this form of growth is more than a matter of pure process; the very freedom and flexibility of the process gives rise to the need for signposts, defined forms,

tentative rituals, and provisional decisions that matter in future conduct, all of which help people orient themselves. And my argument is that the flexible economy is destroying exactly these formal elements that orient people in the process of truly democratic growth. Put another way, what we need to cope with the emerging political economy is to promote more truly democratic forms of flexible growth. The question is, Where? At the workplace, in the community? Are they equally possible, or equally desirable, sites for democracy?

### *Smith's Paradox*

A cultural paradox of growth has dogged the development of modern capitalism throughout its long history: as material growth occurs, the qualitative experience of work often becomes impoverished.

The age of High Capitalism—which for convenience's sake can be said to span the two centuries following the publication of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776—was an era that lusted for sheer quantitative growth, of the first sort I've described, but had trouble dealing with the human consequences of the second sort, in which the increase of wealth occurred through more complex economic structures.

Adam Smith argued that the division of labor, a structural complexity, was promoted by the expansion of free markets with ever greater numbers of goods, services, and laborers in circulation; a growing society seemed to him like a honeycomb, each new cell the place for ever more specialized tasks. A nail-maker doing everything himself could make a few hundred nails a day; Smith calculated if nail-making was broken down into all its component parts, and each worker did only one of them, a nail-maker could process more than forty-eight thousand nails a day. However, work experience would become more routine in the process. Breaking the tasks involved in making nails down into its component parts would

condemn individual nail-makers to a numbingly boring day, hour after hour spent doing one small job.

I'll call this coupling of material growth and qualitative impoverishment Smith's Paradox—he recognized its existence but didn't name it as such. Smith's Paradox came down into our time as what we call "Fordist production," the kind of assembly-line work organized in Ford's Highland Park plant in Michigan during the First World War.

Proponents of the new order claim that Smith's Paradox is now coming to an end; modern technology promises to banish routine work to the innards of new machines, leaving ever more workers free to do flexible, nonroutine tasks. But in fact, the qualitative impoverishment has instead taken new forms.

The new technology frequently "de-skills" workers, who now tend, as the electronic janitors of robotic machines, complex tasks the workers once performed themselves. The conditions of job tenure often compound deskilling, for workers will learn to do a particular job well, only to find that work task at an end. An executive for AT&T recently summed up the aim of reorganizing work this way: "In AT&T we have to promote the whole concept of the work force being contingent, though most of the contingent workers are inside our walls. 'Jobs' are being replaced by 'projects' and 'fields of work.'" The reality now facing young workers with at least two years of college is that they will change jobs, on average, at least eleven times in the course of their working lives.

More brutally, the division of labor now separates those who get to work, and those who don't: large numbers of people are set free of routine tasks only to find themselves useless or underused economically, especially in the context of the global labor supply. Geography no longer simply separates the skilled First World from the unskilled Third World; computer code is written efficiently, for instance, in Bombay for a third to a seventh its cost in IBM home offices.

Let me say a few words more about this particular

phenomenon. Statistics on job creation do not quite get at the fear of uselessness; the number of jobs, even good skilled jobs, does not dictate who will have access to them, how long the jobs can be held, or, indeed, how long the jobs will exist. Ten years ago, for instance, the U.S. economy had a deficit of computer systems analysts, today it has a surplus of such highly trained workers. And many do not, contrary to ideology, retrain well; their skills are too specific. The specter of uselessness, shadowing the lives of educated middle-class people, has now compounded the older experiential problem of routine among less-favored workers: as well as too many qualified engineers, programmers, systems analysts, there is a growing glut of lawyers, M.B.A.s, securities salesmen, and academics. The young suffer the pangs of uselessness in a particularly cruel way, since an ever-expanding educational system trains them ever more elaborately for jobs that do not exist.

The undertow connotation of uselessness, deskilling, and task labor is a dispensable self. Instead of the institutionally induced boredom of the assembly line, this experiential deficit appears more to lie within the worker, who hasn't made him or herself of lasting value to others, and so can simply disappear from view. The economic language in use today—"skills-based economy," "informational competence," "task-flexible labor," and the like—shifts the focus from impersonal conditions like the possession of capital to more personal matters of competence. Economic flexibility is legitimated by appeals to personal autonomy. While the shift in language seems psychologically empowering, in fact it can increase the burdens on the working self.

In turn, the sense of failing personally to be of much value in this economy has great sociological implications. What Michael Young feared in his prophetic essay *The Rise of Meritocracy* (1959) has come to pass: as the economy needs ever fewer, highly educated people to run it, the "moral distance" distance between mass and elite widens. The masses, now comprising

people in suits and ties as well as those in overalls, appear peripheral to the elite productive core; the emerging economy profits by shrinking its labor base. The economy's emphasis on personal agency helps explain why welfare dependency and parasitism are such sensitive issues for people whose fortunes are now troubled in the world.

Enthusiasts for the new economy are, as they say in California, "in denial" on the subject of disposable labor. In a popular classic about modern corporations, *Re-engineering the Corporation* (1993), the authors Michael Hammer and James Champy defend "re-engineering" against the charge that it is a mere cover for firing people by asserting "downsizing and restructuring only mean doing less with less. Re-engineering, by contrast means doing *more* with less." The "less" in the last sentence reverberates with the denials of an older Social Darwinism: those who are not fit will somehow disappear.

Some tough-minded economists argue that current forms of unemployment, under-employment, deskilling, and parasitism are incurable in the emerging order, since the economy indeed profits from doing "more with less." What I wish to emphasize is that the modern economy, no more than the classical capitalist economy, offers a solution to Smith's Paradox, to the problem of impoverished work experience. The sheer increase of jobs, the reorganization of the division of labor, are not forms of growth that increase the quality of laboring experience. Instead, this qualitative impoverishment makes increasing numbers of people feel that they personally have no footing in the process of economic growth. And that lack of footing poses a profound political challenge: can we, through political means, provide people with a sense that they are worthwhile and necessary and consequent human beings?

*Durable Time*

In the modern economy, management gurus preach growth through metamorphosis, that is, the willful remaking of institutions from the top down; it is a rupturing form of growth. Social democrats have also resorted to this image of growth, from the bottom up, to cope with Smith's Paradox. We call this practice variously "auto-gestion," "self-management," or simply "change from within"—all strong variants of social democracy. Though the aim is admirable, the act of change needs to be looked at more closely. It supposes the reform of work, and more largely social justice, achieved through a decisive act of collective will.

The model of growth on which these efforts are based harken back to Ovid's declaration in the *Metamorphoses*: "My purpose is to tell of bodies which have been transformed into shapes of a different kind." You will recall Ovid believed that the world came into being when a god first sorted into distinct forms a primal "shapeless, uncoordinated mass . . . whose ill-assorted elements were indiscriminately heaped together in one place." Change from within supposes order can be made out of chaos by an act of will; in political terms, the polity is self-creating. The social difficulty with this model arises, though, from the framing of time in this act of will.

Basic social bonds like trust, loyalty, and obligation require a long time to develop; you cannot instantly create loyalty the way you can form a new government corporation—by an act of will, by sheer metamorphosis. And time equally develops the sense of personal worth, which is founded on the conviction that one's experience is more than a series of random events. Personal time, like civic time, must possess duration and coherence. You form a sense of subjective strength, of your positive agency, through making things last, but will alone is insufficient to accomplishing that task.

In the previous capitalist era, duration became a precarious dimension of time. The progress of nineteenth-century

capitalism was anything but steady and linear, lurching instead from disaster to disaster in the stock markets and in irrational capital investment. A certain kind of character type—appearing in the pages of Balzac but also in the more mundane annals of finance—fed on these crises, thrived on disorder, and most of all possessed a capacity for disloyalty. For every responsible capitalist like Andrew Carnegie, there were hundreds of Jay Goulds, adept at walking away from their own disasters. Less powerful or more responsible human beings, though, could hardly flourish under these conditions.

Max Weber's famous image of modern life confined in an "iron cage" slights stability as a positive event in the lives of ordinary people. For instance, the service ethic of steady, self-denying, lifelong effort Weber evoked in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930) aided his less-favored contemporaries in purchasing a home, and home ownership in the nineteenth century became one of the few bulwarks against the capitalist storm, as well as a source of personal and family honor.

Weber again feared the rise at the beginning of the twentieth century of large national bureaucracies and corporations that made use of the service ethic, earning the loyalty of those whom they made secure; Weber doubted that loyal servants make objectively minded citizens. Yet petty bureaucrats, time servers, and the like derived a sense of status and public honor from their stations in bureaucracies. T. H. Marshall, the intellectual father of the modern British welfare state, understood this well: however static big institutions may be, however resistant to change from within, they provide their members a scaffolding of mutual loyalty and of trust that events can be controlled, which are prerequisites of citizenship. The bureaucrat as good citizen is not a pretty picture, but then, Jay Gould had no interest in the subject at all.

The current rush to take apart this institutional architecture is undoing the social, civic dimensions of durable time. Take loyalty, for example: in the emerging political economy, as

people increasingly do shifting, task-centered jobs, loyalties to institutions diminish. This generalization of course needs all sorts of qualification; for instance, one study of dismissed IBM programmers found that the people with more than twenty years of service remained enthusiastic about the company, while accepting their firing as a matter of fate. A more diminished sense of loyalty appears among younger workers, who have more brutal dealings with the new economic order; many of these younger workers view the places where they work mostly as sites to make contacts with people who can get them better, or simply other, jobs.

In this, the young have not failed to do their duty, since new economic institutions make no guarantees in return, replacing permanent workers whenever possible with temporary workers, for instance, or “offshoring” work. Loyalty requires that personal experience accumulate in an institution, and the emerging political economy will not let it accumulate. Indeed, the profitable ease with which international capital today assembles, sells, and reassembles corporations erases the durability of institutions to which one could develop loyalty or obligations.

Time, then, is everything in reckoning the social consequences of the new political economy. And as a cultural value, rupture—that favored child of post-modernism—is less politically challenging than the assertion that people ought to have the right to develop loyalty and commitment within institutions. If the dominant powers of the political economy violate durable time, could individuals provide for themselves or informally amongst one another the time frame institutions deny them?

This question is less abstract than it might first seem. The modern economy did not simply wipe out the social struggles and personal values formed in an earlier phase of capitalism. What has been carried into the present from the past are a set of subjective values, values for making time coherent and durable, but in entirely personal terms. This personal, durable

time intersects with the new economy of work in particularly disturbing ways.

### *A Coherent Self*

The Victorians founded their sense of self-worth on life organized as one long project: the German values of *formation*, the English virtues of purpose, were for keeps. Careers in business, military, or imperial bureaucracies made the lifelong project possible, grading work into a clear sequence of steps. Such expectations devalue the present for the sake of the future—the present, which is in constant upheaval and which may tempt an individual into byways or evanescent pleasures. Weber thus described future-orientation as a mentality of delayed gratification. Yet this Victorian experience of cohering time has another side, which they subsumed under the ethical category of taking responsibility for one's life. Will enters into that act of taking responsibility for one's life, though in a way quite opposite from the innovatory character of the will to change from within.

In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* Nietzsche wrote, “powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards.” But Nietzsche's contemporaries did bend the will backwards in time. The Victorians bent consciousness backwards to compose out of the dislocations, accidental changes of direction, or unused capacities of a life a record for which one had to take personal responsibility, even though these events might be beyond the actual control of the person who experienced them. Freud's early case histories, like his study of the “Wolf-Man,” revolve around costs of organizing time in this cohering fashion—particularly the act of taking responsibility, with its consequent feelings of guilt, for past events beyond one's control. The poet Senancour combined the subjective time of future and past in declaring that “I live to become, but

I carry the unshakable burden of what I have been.” Freud remarks that such feelings of responsibility are modern sentiments, in contrast to earlier ages when people felt their life histories in the hands of the gods, God, or blind fortune.

Today, these late Victorian values of personal responsibility are as strong as a century ago but their institutional context has changed. The iron cage has been dismantled, so that individuals struggle for security and coherence in a seemingly empty arena. The destruction of institutional supports at work, as in the welfare state, leaves individuals only their sense of responsibility; the Victorian ethos now often charts a negative trajectory of defeated will, of having failed to one’s life cohere through one’s work.

Twenty-five years ago (for the book *The Hidden Injuries of Class* [1973], I interviewed workers in Boston who knew work was beyond their control, like Nietzsche’s “angry spectators,” yet took responsibility for what happened to them. In that generation, a catastrophe in the economy that caused a worker, say, to lose his home, roused this double consciousness of being an angry spectator and a responsible agent. Today, exactly the processes that expand the economy put workers in this double bind.

Take what happens when career paths are replaced by intermittent jobs. Many temporary workers have a dual consciousness of their work, knowing such work suits obligation-resistant companies, yet nonetheless believing that if only they had themselves managed their lives differently, they would have made a career out of their skills, and so be permanently employed. The new economic map that devalues lifelong career projects has shifted the optimal age curves of work to younger, raw employees (it used to be late twenties to middle fifties; now it’s early twenties to early forties), even though adults are living longer and more vigorously. Studies of dismissed middle-aged workers find them both obsessed and puzzled by the liabilities of age. Rather than believing themselves faded and over the hill, they feel they know what to

do, that they are more organized and purposeful than younger workers. Yet they blame themselves for not having made the right moves in the past, for not having prepared. Their work histories are like Senancour's burden, heavy memories.

This legacy of personal responsibility deflects anger away from economic institutions. The rhetoric of modern management indeed attempts to disguise power in the new economy by making the worker believe he or she is a self-directing agent; as the authors of *Re-engineering the Corporation* declare, in the emerging institutions "managers stop acting like supervisors and behave more like coaches." It is not false consciousness that makes such statements credible to those who are likely to suffer from them; rather, a twisted sense of moral agency.

In his *On the Dignity of Man* (1965), the Renaissance philosopher Pico della Mirandola declared, "man is an animal of diverse, multiform, and destructible nature"; in this pliant condition, "it is given to him to have that which he chooses and to be that which he wills." Man is his own maker; the chief of his works is his self-worth. In modernity, people take responsibility for their lives because the whole of it feels their making. But when the ethical culture of modernity, with its codes of personal responsibility and life purpose, is carried into a society without institutional shelters, there appears not pride of self, but a dialectics of failure in the midst of growth. Growth in the new economy depends on gutting corporate size, ending bureaucratic guarantees, profiting from the flux and extensions of economic networks. People come to know such dislocations as their own lack of direction. The ethics of responsibility becomes, ironically, and terribly, a subjective yardstick to measure one's failure to cohere.

This is why I'd like to see new discussions about social democracy enlarged beyond the frame of reference of worker self-management or collective participation. We have to think through social democracy in terms of this legacy of subjectivity, one in which time is deeply personal, in which self-

management of durable time becomes an ethics of responsibility. This subjectivity now coexists with capitalist practices of metamorphosis and rupture, as a terrible duet—or, if you like, dialectics—of continuity and change.

As I've listening to this duet, I've wondered if its strength might be weakened by easing the subjective voice; that is, by lightening the burden of self-responsibility and time that people bear in modernity. And that reflection brings me back to the question of place.

### *Place*

The city is democracy's home, Hannah Arendt declared; that meant to her it was a place for forming loyalties and responsibilities, relieved of the burdens of material circumstance and its subjective interpretation. However, the cities we know bear little relation to this ideal place, nor do smaller communities. Places instead are valued simply as refuges from dislocation, and they strengthen the cultural, subjective voice seeking stability and duration. In America for instance, I am convinced, though I couldn't prove it statistically, that the rise of the religious right in American suburbs, a movement now spreading toward the city from its traditional small-town base, correlates to an increased feeling of threatened economic fortunes. So does our emphasis on "family values" in an age when very few families can afford to practice the tradition of a single, male wage-earner supporting the home.

In terms of the modern urban, we are seeing in many advanced societies the appearance of building projects that are exercises in withdrawal from a complex world, deploying self-consciously "traditional" architecture that bespeaks a mythic communal coherence and shared identity in the past. These comforts of a supposedly simpler age appear in the New-English housing developments designed by the American

planners Elizabeth Platter-Zyberg and Andreas Duwany, among the architects in Britain working for the Prince of Wales to reproduce “native” English architecture, and in the neighborhood renovation work on the continent undertaken by Leon Krier. All these place-makers are artists of claustrophobia, whose icons, however, do indeed promise stability, longevity, and safety.

We need instead a different kind of urbanism, one attuned to public values and that avoids place-making on these conservative terms. In this sense, I agree with Jürgen Habermas that the public realm and the democratic realm have to be considered as identical—whereas in the past history of cities, they certainly were not. But, given what is now happening in the economy, a public and democratic city has to take form through three concrete principles.

First, it has to assert itself as a physical polity. Modern corporations like to present themselves as having cut free from local powers: a factory in Mexico, an office in Bombay, a media center in lower Manhattan—these appear as mere nodes in a global network. Today, localities fear that if they exercise sovereignty, as when a business is taxed or regulated locally, the corporation could as easily find another node, a factory in Canada if not Mexico, an office in Boston if not Manhattan.

Already we are seeing signs, though, that the economy is not as locationally indifferent as has been assumed: you can buy any stock you like in Dubuque, Iowa, but not make a market in stocks in the cornfields; the ivy cloisters of Harvard may furnish plenty of raw intellectual talent, yet lack the craziness, messiness, and surprise that makes Manhattan a stimulating if unpleasant place to work. Similarly, in Southeast Asia, it is becoming clear that local social and cultural geographies indeed count for a great deal in investment decisions. This is to say that communities can indeed challenge the new economy rather than defensively react to it. Put simply, place has power.

Second, a modern sense of place has to be internally structured by a geography of borders rather than boundaries;

a democratic community is not just diverse, diversities have to have a physical meeting ground, they have to grow into each other. Planning, especially in large-scale environments, can open groups up to one another by focusing on the borders of local subcommunities as active zones. For instance, “active edge” planners today seek to direct new building away from local centers and toward the boundaries separating communities: as in some experiments in East London, the aim is to make the edge a febrile zone of interaction and exchange between different groups. Another strategy is to diversify central spaces, so that different functions overlap and interact in geographic centers: planners in Los Angeles are seeking ways to put clinics, government offices, and old-age centers into shopping malls that have been formerly devoted solely to consumption activities; planners in Germany are similarly exploring how pedestrian zones in the centers of cities can regain light manufacturing.

In honor of Arendt, many of these planners call themselves members of a “new agora” movement. In the case of the active-edge planners, the animating belief is that the more people interact, the more they will become involved with those unlike themselves; in the case of the central zone planners, that the value of place will increase when it is of more than commercial value. Such planning is democratic in my own use of the word; the agora has a defined shape, and that shape aims to increase complexity rather than clarity of purpose or hegemony of use.

Third, a public, democratic city has to address the subjectivities of labor I have described. It can do so by creating spheres of impersonality, places where people can relate to one another positively as strangers. This may seem an abstract or cold proposition, but we experience it vividly whenever we plunge into a crowded street.

A hoary cliché views impersonal crowds as an evil; throughout the history of the city, people have voted otherwise with their feet. And one great theme in the literature of

modern urban culture—from Baudelaire to Aragon to Benjamin to Jane Jacobs—finds in crowds a peculiar antidote to selfhood with all its burdens, a release into a less personalized existence. When she moved to Washington Square in 1906, beginning an affair with another woman, Willa Cather declared, “At last I can breathe,” by which she meant that her erotic life no longer defined the terms of her social existence—at least in the dense, impersonal place to which she had moved. Impersonality does more than shelter outsiders or members of subcultures; it offers the possibility for what Stuart Hall calls “hybridity,” a mixture of social elements beyond any single definition of self.

Impersonal release has a particular value in terms of social class and material fortune. Various studies of existing mixed-class areas of big cities like New York and London yield an interesting portrait: intimate “neighborliness” is weak, but identification with the neighborhood is strong; the poor are relieved of social stigma, those richer—contrary to common sense, that most fallible of all guides—find daily life in a diverse neighborhood more stimulating than in places that serve as private mirrors. These studies exemplify the sociological proposition advanced by Durkheim that impersonality and equality have a strong affinity.

Modern planners are bad, the architect Rem Koolhaas has justly observed, in working on a large scale. Our urbanism is bedeviled by the desire for intimacy, as if only the small and the *gemeinschaftlich* is human. Moreover, there are many technical issues of urban design involved—with which I won’t try your patience—about how make impersonal large spaces, as well as live edges or mixed function spaces, durable sites. I want only to emphasize that the relief of self to be found in dense streets, mixed pubs, playgrounds, and markets cannot be treated as inconsequential. Such dense forms of civil society do affect how people think of themselves as citizens; as the late Henri Lefebvre put it, sensing one’s “right to the city” helps

people feel entitled to other rights, rights not based on personal injuries or on victimhood.

A democratic community as I understand it relieves people of certain burdens of identity that inhere in class, and in both identification with and representation of one's material circumstances. The impersonality of citizenship seems to me a stronger relief from the psychological damage people experience in the economy than class consciousness. Of course no one could argue that a democratic city life will extinguish either the reality or the sentiments aroused by economic failure. But "extinguish," like "rupture," belongs to the sphere of growth envisioned through metamorphosis. I imagine rather a kind of concurrent consciousness, in which a middle-aged supposedly over-the-hill worker can also think of him or herself in an entirely other way, by virtue of where he or she lives; this doubleness of self seems to me more practiceable than the striving for rebirth, as in a metamorphosis.

To conclude: whether we seek democracy in workplaces or in cities, we need to address the culture of the new capitalism. The economy does not "grow" personal skills and durable purposes, nor social trust, loyalty, and commitment. Economic practice has combined, however, with a durable cultural ethic, so that institutional nakedness coexists with the will to take responsibility for one's life. The forms of polity we need to invent must help people transcend both elements of that combination: we need a model of growth that helps people transcend the self as a burdensome possession. Place-making based on exclusion, sameness, or nostalgia is poisonous medicine socially, and psychologically useless; a self weighted with its insufficiencies cannot lift that burden by retreat into fantasy. Place-making based on more diverse, denser, impersonal human contacts must find a way for those contacts to endure; the agora has to prove a durable institution—the challenge that urbanists like myself must now confront.

Baudelaire famously defined modernity as experience of the

fleeting and the fragmented. To accept life in its disjointed pieces is an adult experience of freedom, but still these pieces must lodge and embed themselves somewhere, in a place that allows them to grow and to endure.

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