NEIL BRENNER

NEW URBAN SPACES

URBAN THEORY AND THE SCALE QUESTION

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Openings: The Urban Question as a Scale Question?

For much of the twentieth century, the field of urban studies defined its research object through a series of explicit or implied geographical contrasts. Even as debates raged regarding how best to define the specificity of urban life, this realm was almost universally demarcated in opposition to two purportedly nonurban zones—the suburban and the rural. Labels have changed for each term of this opposition, as have researchers' understandings of how best to conceptualize its basic elements and the nature of their articulation. Yet, across otherwise divergent epistemological, methodological, and political traditions, most of twentieth-century urban studies rested upon the underlying assumption that cities represent a particular type of territory that could be defined in opposition to other, differently configured territories that lay beyond or outside its boundaries.

This vision of the urban was famously and precisely crystallized in Ernest Burgess's classic concentric rings diagram from 1921, in which "the" city (actually a cipher for early twentieth-century Chicago) was defined as a series of neatly delineated territorial zones stretching outward from a geometrically positioned center into suburbia and, ultimately, toward an empty horizon of the countryside.[1] Beginning almost immediately after its publication,

[1] Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, eds., *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967 [1925]).

Burgess's model was criticized and reformulated. Some scholars redrew the contours of the diagram to capture more accurately the internal spatial patterning of city life; others questioned the theory of human ecology on which it was grounded. Nonetheless, even amid these variegated research initiatives, Burgess's vision of urban space epitomized the metageographical unconscious—a hidden yet nearly all-pervasive framework of assumptions regarding spatial organization—that underpinned much of twentieth-century urban studies. Across otherwise divergent politico-intellectual traditions, the city was conceived, at core, as a bounded territorial area whose specificity could be most effectively grasped by contrasting it to other areas from which it was presumed to be distinct. Until relatively recently, this underlying assumption served as an epistemological bedrock for the entire field of urban studies, not only within the venerable Chicago school tradition that Burgess helped to establish, but even within more radical or critical scholarly traditions, including Marxism, that sought explicitly to transcend this tradition.[2]

In effect, this amounted to a *horizontal* cartography of the urban question. Modern capitalism was envisioned as an extended territorial landscape on which different types of settlement space (urban, suburban, rural) were juxtaposed, with greater or lesser degrees of coherence, discretenesss, and boundedness, to create a patchwork quilt of areal differentiation. This mapping can be understood as territorial in the specific sense that, like the political jurisdictions of the modern Westphalian interstate system, its components were assumed to be bounded, contiguous, nonoverlapping, and encompassing.[3] The demarcations separating urban, suburban, and rural spaces were understood to shift historically, but the spaces themselves

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[2] Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, "Towards a New Epistemology of the Urban?," *CITY* 19, no. 2–3 (2015): 151–82; Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, "The 'Urban Age' in Question," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 3 (2013): 731–55; Neil Brenner, "Urban Revolution?," in *Critique of Urbanization: Selected Essays* (Basel: Bauwelt Fundamente/Birkhäuser Verlag, 2016), 192–211; and Neil Brenner, ed., *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization* (Berlin: Jovis, 2014).

[3] The classical theorization of this Westphalian conception of territory is John Gerard Ruggie, "Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations," *International Organization* 47, no. 1 (1993): 139–74. See also, foundationally, John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory, and International Political Economy* (New York: Routledge, 1995). For further elaborations on the rich, polyvalent, and contested concept of territory in modern social, political, and spatial theory, see Stuart Elden, "Land, Terrain, Territory," *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 6 (2010): 799–817; Stuart Elden, "Missing the Point: Globalisation, Deterritorialisation and the Space of the World," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30 (2005): 8–19; Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, "Henri Lefebvre on State, Space, Territory," *International Political Sociology* 3, no. 4 (2009): 353–77; and Christian Schmid, "The

were assumed to remain discreet (defined with reference to their internally specific features), distinct (geographically separated from one another), exclusive (encompassing the entirety of a zone), and universal (abiding, transcontextual features of human settlement).

During the mid- to late twentieth century, as the field of urban studies matured and evolved, several subterranean theoretical explorations began to unsettle the prevalent metageographical unconscious of urban studies, and thus to suggest the possibility of alternative conceptualizations of the field, its research focus, and its methods. One of the most important strategies to this end, which had been pioneered as early as the 1930s but which was not broadly consolidated until the early 1990s, entailed demarcating the urban not as a territory, but as a *scale*. In this alternative approach, urban space was delineated not through a horizontal contrast of cities to other (suburban or rural) settlement zones, but instead through a *vertical* positioning of urban scales within dynamically evolving, multitiered organizational-geographical configurations. In addition to the urban scale, such configurations were generally assumed to include at least three other key scales—the regional, the national, and the worldwide or global. Sometimes other scales were also considered—for instance, the body, the neighborhood, the local, the metropolitan, the supranational, and the continental.

In each case, the urban was conceptualized less as a bounded areal unit—the container of the city—than as a sociospatial *relation* embedded within a broader, dynamically evolving whole. It was constituted not through the demarcation of a territorial area, but through the crystallization of a sociospatial *positionality* within a broader, multiscalar framework of relationships. As such, the urban was understood to entail determinate sociospatial operations, practices, contours, and parameters, but these were thought to evolve fluidly, sometimes dramatically, within the larger framework of interscalar relationships in which they were enmeshed. The relationships in question—economic, institutional, political, cultural, ecological—encompassed many scales while also provisionally weaving them together to forge historically specific, temporarily stabilized interscalar configurations. To be sure, these emergent scalar explorations diverged, sometimes drastically, in their specific definitional framings of the urban phenomenon. Despite this, they shared a basic concern to conceptualize the urban not as a unit or type of settlement space, but as a vibrant force field of sociospatial practices defined through its relational embeddedness and shifting positionality within

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Urbanization of the Territory: On the Research Approach of ETH Studio Basel," in *Territory: On the Development of Landscape and City*, ed. ETH Studio Basel (Zurich: Park Books, 2016), 22–48.

a broader, interscalar framework of patterned, regularized sociospatial interdependencies.

Early experiments with a scalar approach to urban questions, articulated from diverse politico-epistemological standpoints, were implicit within several heterodox traditions of midcentury and postwar urban geography, planning, and regional science, from Walter Christaller's central place theory, Robert Dickinson's studies of urban settlement systems, and Jean Gottmann's approach to megalopolis formation to the wide-ranging studies of urban boundaries, systems, and hierarchies produced by scholars such as Brian Berry, John Friedmann, and Allan Pred.[4] Whatever their differences of conceptual grammar, methodology, and research focus, such approaches shared a concern to transcend narrowly territorialist, areal, or localist understandings of the urban, and thus to explore the broader sociospatial configurations produced through the dynamics of urbanization. However, even as they tentatively began to explore the implications of a scalar *problematique*, the spatial imaginaries of these broadly heterodox postwar explorations were mainly focused on other dimensions of urbanization processes—nodality and agglomeration, for instance, or connectivity and networking, or the functional differentiation of territories. It was only in the 1980s, with the development of a new "lexicon of geographical scale" (Neil Smith) in the field of historical-materialist geopolitical economy, that scholars began directly, systematically, and reflexively to elaborate the elements of a "scalar turn" for urban theory.[5]

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[4] See, for example, Walter Christaller, *Central Places in Southern Germany*, trans. Carlisle W. Baskin (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966 [1933]); Robert E. Dickinson, *City and Region: A Geographical Interpretation* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964); Jean Gottmann, *Megalopolis: The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961); Brian Berry and Frank E. Horton, eds., *Geographic Perspectives on Urban Systems* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970); John Friedmann and Clyde Weaver, *Territory and Function: The Evolution of Regional Planning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); and Allan Pred, *City-Systems in Advanced Economies* (London: Hutchinson, 1977).

[5] Neil Smith had begun to elaborate the elements of this scalar turn in his classic volume, *Uneven Development Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (New York: Blackwell, 1984). He subsequently elaborated some of its key elements in a series of essays and articles, including Neil Smith, "Homeless/Global: Scaling Places," in *Mapping the Futures*, ed. Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, and Lisa Tickner (New York: Routledge, 1993), 87–119; Neil Smith, "Geography, Difference and the Politics of Scale," in *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences*, ed. Joe Doherty, Elspeth Graham, and Mo Malek (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 57–79; Neil Smith, "Remaking Scale: Competition and Cooperation in Prenational and Postnational Europe," in *Competitive European Peripheries*, ed. Heikki Eskelinen and Folke Snickars (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1995), 59–74; and Neil Smith and Dennis Ward, "The Restructuring of Geographical Scale: Coalescence and Fragmentation of the Northern Core Region," *Economic Geography* 63, no. 2 (1987): 160–82. Another early engagement with scale questions in historical-geographical materialist social theory was by Peter J. Taylor, especially in his book, *Political*

Scale had, of course, long been a key concept in human geography, but its intellectual foundations were reinvented as of the 1980s in conjunction with emergent concerns with worldwide capitalist restructuring and associated debates on "globalization."[6] Within this emergent literature on the "new political economy of scale," all scales, whether urban or supraurban, were understood to be socially produced, politically contested, and thus historically malleable.[7] Moreover, such scaling and rescaling processes were now shown to be closely intertwined with broader processes of political-economic restructuring, including geoeconomic integration, the remaking of statehood, and the production of new patterns of urban and regional development. This meant that any scalar hierarchy—and, indeed, any putatively fixed unit, level, stratum, or tier within it—had a rich historical geography that was (1) mediated through power relations, state regulatory strategies, and sociopolitical struggles and (2) potentially mutable through sociopolitical contestation. Deciphering such volatile scalar geographies of power and struggle was thus an essential task for critical research, not least within the field of critical urban studies. Subsequently, alongside recently reinvigorated notions of place, territory, and space, the new lexicon of geographical scale came to offer urbanists a powerful new conceptual tool through which to investigate, in rigorously relational terms, the changing geographies of urbanization, both historically and under contemporary conditions.

The explosion of interest in the new political economy of scale dovetailed with the development of what is today known as global city theory and, more generally, with the elaboration of critical approaches to globalized

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Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality (New York: Longman, 1985). See also Peter J. Taylor, "A Materialist Framework for Political Geography," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 7 (1982): 15–34; and Peter J. Taylor, "Geographical Scales within the World-Economy Approach," *Review* 5, no. 1 (1981): 3–11.

[6] See, for example, Erik Swyngedouw, "The Mammon Quest: 'Glocalisation,' Interspatial Competition, and the Monetary Order: The Construction of New Scales," in *Cities and Regions in the New Europe,* ed. Mick Dunford and Grigoris Kafkalas (London: Belhaven Press, 1992), 39–68; Erik Swyngedouw, "The Heart of the Place: The Resurrection of Locality in an Age of Hyperspace," *Geografiska Annaler B* 71 (1989): 31–42; Erik Swyngedouw, "Neither Global nor Local: 'Glocalization' and the Politics of Scale," in *Spaces of Globalization,* ed. Kevin Cox (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 137–66; Alain Lipietz, "The Local and the Global: Regional Individuality or Interregionalism?," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 18, no. 1 (1993): 8–18; and Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, "Searching for a New Institutional Fix: The *After*-Fordist Crisis and the Global-Local Disorder," in *Post-Fordism: A Reader,* ed. Ash Amin (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 280–315.

[7] For a useful overview of this literature and associated debates, see Roger Keil and Rianne Mahon, eds., *Leviathan Undone? The New Political Economy of Scale* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010).

urbanization.[8] Insofar as the connections between geoeconomic restructuring and the remaking of urban space have figured crucially in studies of globalizing cities, questions of scale have been central to key aspects of theory, methodology, and concrete research in this field of inquiry. Initially, this took the form of investigations of the so-called global/local nexus, in which scholars debated how best to conceptualize and investigate the changing modes of insertion of urban spaces into global circuits of capital, commodities, and labor. Subsequently, more differentiated approaches to scalar questions, rescaling processes, and the politics of scale were developed. In contrast to then-prevalent discourses predicting the end of geography and the construction of a borderless world, the process of "globalization" was now recast as an uneven, contested, and ongoing rearticulation of interscalar relations in conjunction with the destabilization of historically entrenched, nationally organized formations of capitalism and their associated regulatory institutions. This conceptual reorientation enabled scholars to investigate how cities and urban systems were being (re)inserted into worldwide divisions of labor and their changing positionalities in relation to a broad range of political-economic rescaling processes, including the restructuring of national states and national economies. Questions of territorial regulation—a key terrain and medium of rescaling—were thus now also systematically integrated into debates on emergent scalar geographies of urban life. Against this background, scholars of contentious politics also began to explore the implications of ongoing rescaling processes for patterns of sociopolitical mobilization and, more specifically, for the dynamics of urban social movements.

With the further refinement of scalar concepts during the 1990s, major subfields of urban research—including studies of urban hierarchy, urban form, urban politics, urban governance, urban economic restructuring, gentrification, sociospatial polarization, urban social movements, and urban political ecology—were being recast in reflexively scalar terms. Scale was now recognized as a key dimension of urbanization, and meanwhile there was an impressive outpouring of research on cities as arenas and targets for diverse forms of rescaling. The classic concern with urban place-making and urban territorial organization remained robust, of course, and an emergent research agenda on worldwide interurban connectivity likewise began to generate considerable interest, perhaps most famously due to Manuel Castells's

[8] For a general overview of this literature, see Neil Brenner and Roger Keil, eds., *The Global Cities Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Key contributions to this literature are discussed at length in Chapter 4.

influential theories of the network society.[9] Nonetheless, by the early 2000s, the question of scale had become a pervasive conceptual and methodological reference point in major strands of urban theory and research, across otherwise quite diverse fields of investigation. Was the urban question being transformed into a scale question?

Threads of a Problematique

This book is devoted to a systematic exploration of the broad *problematique* associated with the reflexive mobilization of scalar narratives, scalar categories, and scale-attuned methods in the field of critical urban studies since the early 1990s. Its guiding questions are the following: In what sense can the urban question be reframed as a scale question? What conceptualizations of scale—and of the urban scale in particular—are most appropriate for such an exploration? What are the theoretical, methodological, and empirical consequences of such a scalar reframing? How does a scalar analytics transform our understanding of the unit, site, and object of urban research? To what degree, and in what ways, can and should "the city" remain a central analytical construct and empirical focal point in a scale-attuned approach to the urban question? What are the implications of scale-attuned approaches to urban theory and research for interpretations of contemporary patterns of urban restructuring? What are the implications of such approaches for the investigation of restructuring processes within specific places, regions, and territories? Finally, what are the appropriate conceptual parameters for scalar approaches to urban questions? In other words, are there limits to scale as an explanatory, interpretive, and descriptive category?

Aside from this opening chapter, earlier versions of the writings included in this book have been published previously, mostly in journals of urban studies, geography, sociospatial theory, and geopolitical economy, as well as in edited volumes devoted to those research fields. Chapters 2, 9, and 10 have been completely rewritten and significantly expanded. All other chapters have also been revised substantially to enhance analytical precision, to improve stylistic clarity, and to weave together more tightly the common threads of argumentation, conceptualization, and inquiry that connect them. New bibliographic references have also been selectively added to reflect more recent research and lines of scholarly debate. However, I have resisted the temptation to modify the main substantive arguments of the texts included

[9] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

here, to update the empirical investigations upon which they build, or to present them in the form of an encompassing theoretical synthesis. In thus proceeding, I have sought to preserve the analytical integrity and contextual specificity of each text while also highlighting the fluid, exploratory nature of my own, still-ongoing efforts to develop appropriate conceptual tools, scalar and otherwise, for deciphering emergent urban transformations and, more generally, for demarcating the relentlessly mutating terrain of the urban question.

This procedure reflects two intentions. First, this book brings together an otherwise widely dispersed series of writings that have explored a shared theoretical *problematique* on scale questions in contemporary urban theory while also seeking to reconceptualize the spatial parameters of urban research in ways that help illuminate the rapidly mutating landscapes of urbanization that have been crystallizing in recent decades. In so doing, my goal is to put into clear relief the main intellectual concerns, conceptual orientations, methodological commitments, and research agendas that have animated my explorations of this *problematique*, and that continue to guide my work. Accordingly, I have selected texts that most clearly articulate the key elements of my evolving approach to such issues in relation to specific terrains of investigation and arenas of conceptual experimentation. Many of these studies have involved more concrete modes of investigation, especially in relation to the remaking of urban, regional, and territorial governance in the North Atlantic zone. Others have involved engagements with parallel theoretical or methodological debates in urban studies on, among other topics, post-Fordism, territorial regulation, global cities, neoliberalization, comparative methods, the politics of space, the right to the city, and, most recently, planetary urbanization. All have entailed a systematic elaboration of scalar epistemologies, concepts, methods, and cartographies to decipher key aspects of emergent urbanization processes.

Second, the organizational architecture of this volume reflects my understanding, and my practice, of urban *theorizing*.[10] Consistent with the dialectical traditions of social theory in which I situate my work, I have never intended my contributions to debates on the urban question to "lock in" a fixed, complete, or comprehensive interpretive framework.[11] Indeed, because

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[10] On the practice, process, and stakes of theorizing in urban studies, see Jennifer Robinson, "New Geographies of Theorizing the Urban: Putting Comparison to Work for Global Urban Studies," in *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South*, ed. Susan Parnell and Sophie Oldfield (London: Routledge, 2014), 57–70.

[11] Neil Brenner, *Critique of Urbanization: Selected Essays* (Basel: Bauwelt Fundamente/Birkhäuser Verlag, 2016).

they are thoroughly enmeshed within the contradictory, restlessly mutating sociospatial relations they aspire to illuminate, dialectical conceptualizations of urban questions are not, and cannot ever be, a definitive "capture" of an ontologically fixed condition. Rather, they represent dynamically evolving, partial, and incomplete efforts to decipher the endlessly churning maelstrom of capitalist urbanization in which theorists, like all social researchers, are ineluctably situated. Consequently, as Jennifer Robinson explains, urban theory "should be practiced and conceptualized as radically revisable," not least because its site and focal point, the urban, is "a political and practical achievement . . . made through political contestation."[12] In precisely this sense, my writings on scale and the urban question are intended as part of what Robinson has appropriately characterized as a collective endeavor to "destabilize the terms of the urban and set in motion conversations towards its on-going reinvention."[13] They offer no more than an exploratory theoretical *orientation*—a basis for posing and investigating a range of questions related to conceptualizations of the urban, and for tracking their variegated methodological, interpretive, and political implications across sites, contexts, and territories. For this reason, it seems most consonant with my own particular way of "doing theory" to present some of its main results to date in the relatively fluid, open-ended format of this book.

Several chapters intersect in their articulation of certain core theoretical arguments—for instance, regarding the specificity of scale (or, more precisely, scaling/rescaling processes) as one among several key dimensions of sociospatial relations under capitalism; on the intensification of rescaling processes since the geoeconomic crises of the 1970s; on the limits and blind spots of methodologically localist or city-centric approaches to urban research; on the consequences of reflexively multiscalar epistemologies, concepts, and methods for the demarcation of urban studies as a research field; on the key role of state spatial strategies in mediating and animating the production of new urban spaces; on the dialectical interplay between post-1970s patterns of urban restructuring and the production of post-Keynesian state spaces; on the continued forward motion and ongoing, crisis-induced reconstitution of political strategies to rescale urban space; and on the methodological dangers of overextending scalar concepts beyond their proper domain of application. Rather than being merely repeated, however, these and other key strands of argumentation are interwoven across the

[12] Robinson, "New Geographies of Theorizing the Urban," 67.

[13] Ibid.

book's chapters, in relation to a range of scholarly literatures and research foci, in order to build—and to *apply*—a scale-attuned approach to contemporary urban questions. In this way, the book's main arguments emerge less through a linear unfolding than through the layering together of distinct yet interconnected critical investigations of a core *problematique*.

State Rescaling and the Urban Question

In exploring the centrality of scale questions in urban theory, this book devotes considerable attention to the role of state spatial strategies (and their changing scalar articulations) in mediating, managing, animating, and canalizing the remaking of urban space during successive cycles of capital accumulation and crisis formation. This analysis stands in stark contrast to influential strands of contemporary urban studies that bracket or background the state's pervasive, multiscalar role in shaping and reshaping the urban process under capitalism—whether due to a one-sided methodological localism (often connected to an empirical focus on municipal governance arrangements), an embrace of problematic "state decline" arguments (often derived from uncritical discourses on "globalization"), or an equally questionable belief in the neoliberal ideology of self-regulating markets (which still pervades much of mainstream global urban discourse). Against such "state denialist" approaches, the conceptual framework developed in this book treats urban space and state space as intricately entangled, mutually coconstituting and conflictually coevolving formations of scale-differentiated sociospatial relations under modern capitalism.[14] Building especially on the work of radical sociospatial theorists David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre, Chapter 2 develops this argument in abstract, theoretical terms while also broadly contextualizing it in relation to the historical geographies of capitalist development during the last 150 years, in which the institutional, infrastructural, and interscalar mesh connecting urban space and state space has been thickened considerably. Subsequent chapters explore the various ways in which state spatial strategies have shaped the production and transformation of urban space during the last four decades, in conjunction with multiscalar processes of neoliberal regulatory creative destruction.[15]

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[14] The concept of "state denial" is derived from Linda Weiss, *The Myth of the Powerless State* (London: Policy, 1998).

[15] David Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610 (2007): 22–44; Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, "Cities and the

This is a theme I have explored extensively in earlier work, particularly in a previous book, *New State Spaces*.[16] In that context, I was likewise concerned with the interplay between urban restructuring and state restructuring, but the main *explanandum* of my investigation was the rescaling of state space. Accordingly, urban governance was treated as an analytical window through which to decipher the changing spatial and scalar selectivities of modern state power during the Fordist-Keynesian period and, subsequently, with the development of what I termed Rescaled Competition State Regimes (RCSRs). Several texts included in the present volume (especially Chapters 4, 5, and 6) are closely connected to that line of investigation, but their analytical focus here is precisely inverted. As its title indicates, the central concern of this book is the production of new *urban* spaces. Accordingly, processes of state rescaling (the "new state spaces" of my previous work) are considered mainly with reference to their variegated impacts on the capitalist urban fabric. As several chapters of this book argue, these impacts have been profound. New urban spaces have been actively forged through the aggressive, and often socially and politically regressive, rescaling of state space during the last four decades. More specifically, the production of neoliberalized regimes of urbanization has occurred in large measure through spatial and scalar transformations of statecraft that have extended, institutionalized, and normalized market discipline across the urban fabric while also targeting certain strategic sites within each territory for intensified transnational investment, advanced infrastructural development, and enhanced global connectivity. This has permitted certain metropolitan "islands," as well as selected inter-metropolitan logistics corridors and enclaves of emergent hinterland industrialization, to be much more tightly interlinked across planetary space. However, it has also entailed an increasing splintering of the capitalist urban fabric as a whole, generally in ways that have eroded the isomorphic articulation of national territories and national urban systems that had been pursued within earlier regimes of spatial Keynesianism, national developmentalism, and urban managerialism.[17]

Geographies of 'Actually Existing Neoliberalism,'" in *Spaces of Neoliberalism*, ed. Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

[16] Neil Brenner, *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[17] The paradigmatic account of this "splintering" of the planetary urban fabric is Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

One major consequence of this tendential scalar disarticulation of state space and the capitalist urban fabric has been to destabilize the entrenched centrality of the national scale as the encompassing "power container" of modern political-economic life, leading to a situation Chris Collinge has aptly described as a "relativization of scales."[18] Under conditions of scale relativization, as Bob Jessop has explained, the taken-for-grantedness of national space is undermined as the relations between global, supranational, national, and subnational scales of political-economic activity are systematically reshuffled; there is no hegemonic or dominant scale of sociospatial relations.[19] Instead, the scalar configuration of key political-economic processes—including capital accumulation, territorial regulation, social reproduction, and political mobilization—becomes more fluid, more immediately subject to intense contestation, and thus more susceptible to the prospect of being reorganized, whether in incremental or in radical ways. This, in turn, undermines any isomorphism or convergence that may have, at least in tendential form, previously characterized the scalar geographies of such processes and associated patterns of uneven development, especially during the North Atlantic Fordist, national-developmentalist period in the second half of the twentieth century. Consequently, particularly since the 1980s, the vision of hierarchically structured, precision-nested scalar arrangements serving as a shared sociospatial meta-architecture for major political-economic processes has become increasingly obsolete. Instead, we have been experiencing a proliferation of more tangled, haphazardly intercalated, and unevenly patterned scalar arrangements across the planetary sociospatial landscape, each connected to specific political-economic operations, strategies, and struggles. Under these conditions, the capitalist urban fabric is no longer organized as an encompassing, worldwide grid of national city-systems, neatly subdivided into internal central place hierarchies, but is instead unevenly differentiated among variegated places, regions, territories, and landscapes whose mottled connective tissue more closely resembles that of an intricately stitched latticework than a simple pyramid, hierarchy, or grid.

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[18] See Chris Collinge, "Spatial Articulation of the State: Reworking Social Relations and Social Regulation Theory" (unpublished manuscript, Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, Birmingham, 1996). On the notion of the national state (and thus the national scale) as a power container, see Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

[19] Bob Jessop, "The Crisis of the National Spatio-Temporal Fix and the Ecological Dominance of Globalizing Capitalism," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, no. 2 (2000): 323–60.

Despite their apparently unstructured complexity, their intense institutional differentiation, their spatially fragmenting impacts, and their aggressively polarizing, market-disciplinary logics, these processes of scale relativization have not been associated with a diminished role for state institutions in the shaping and reshaping of the capitalist urban fabric. The scalar geographies of state power have shifted in epochally significant ways, but state spatial strategies continue to mediate, animate, and canalize urbanization, and its associated crisis tendencies, in pervasively powerful ways, across contexts and territories, worldwide. A key challenge for urban theorists, therefore, is to develop new conceptual frameworks through which to decipher the state's intensive, if perpetually evolving, roles in the structuration of urbanization processes under the scale-relativized worldwide conditions of the post-1980s period. This requires not only a spatialized, scale-attuned reconceptualization of statehood—a task to which I devoted much of *New State Spaces*—but also, as I contend in what follows, a rather fundamental retheorization of urbanization itself.

The Fabric of Urbanization

One of the most essential, if also controversial, epistemological implications of the combined scale-theoretical and state-theoretical approach developed here is further to decenter what geographer Terry McGee concisely described nearly a half century ago as "city dominant" approaches to the modern urban condition.[20] In more recent years, such approaches have been aptly characterized under the rubric of "methodological cityism": their hallmark is (1) to presuppose unreflexively the "city"—generally understood as a territorially bounded, sociologically distinctive spatial cluster—as a pregiven, self-evident, or universal unit of analysis and, concomitantly, (2) to conceive the entirety of non-*city* space, by definition, as a non-*urban* or "rural" zone.[21]

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[20] Terry McGee, "The Urbanization Process: Western Theory and Third World Reality," in *The Urbanization Process in the Third World* (London: Bell and Sons, 1971), 12–34.

[21] The concept of methodological cityism was developed by Hillary Angelo and David Wachsmuth in their critical reformulation of recent work in urban political ecology. See their foundational article, "Urbanizing Urban Political Ecology: A Critique of Methodological Cityism," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39, no. 1 (2015): 16–27. As conceived here, this methodological tendency entails not only a naturalization of the "city" as a unit of analysis but the unreflexive separation of that unit, both in analytical and in geographical terms, from a putatively exterior, "non-city" domain. For additional reflections on the ideological dimensions of the city concept, see Hillary Angelo, "From the City Lens toward Urbanisation as a Way of Seeing: Country/City Binaries on an Urbanising Planet," *Urban Studies* 54, no. 1 (2016): 158–78; David Wachsmuth, "City as Ideology: Reconciling the Explosion of the City

One of the more unorthodox, if not downright heretical, arguments of this book, which builds strongly upon a thesis proposed by Henri Lefebvre in the 1970s, is that the urban condition—and, more generally, the process of urbanization under modern capitalism—cannot be reduced to the sociospatial entities that are conventionally labeled as "cities."[22]

The city, I argue, is only one element within, and expression of, the multiscalar, polymorphic, and restlessly mutating geographies of capitalist urbanization. These are constituted through the relentless *implosion* of sociospatial processes into dense centers of population, infrastructure, and economic activity and through the equally dynamic *explosion* of sociospatial relations across vast territories, landscapes, and ecologies that are likewise being perpetually enclosed, operationalized, industrialized, and creatively destroyed in support of capital's voracious, profit-driven metabolism, whether for purposes of industrialized agriculture, extraction, energy generation, logistics, waste processing, environmental management, or otherwise.[23] Consequently, especially with the intensifying, accelerating, and increasingly worldwide industrialization of capital during the course of the twentieth century, the city and the urban—two of the foundational keywords of urban studies—must be analytically distinguished. Doing so, I submit, permits a more theoretically precise, historically and contextually nuanced understanding of both terms of this relationship and its ongoing historical evolution under modern capitalism.

While several chapters of this book devote extensive attention to the globally networked metropolitan islands of the "world city archipelago," the scalar analytics thereby developed also subvert the conventional definitional equation of urbanization with the growth of cities as specific, distinct, bounded, and localized spatial units, as well as the ontology of "naïve objectivism" that

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Form with the Tenacity of the City Concept," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, no. 1 (2014): 75–90; David Cunningham, "The Concept of Metropolis: Philosophy and Urban Form," *Radical Philosophy* 133 (September/October 2005): 13–25; and Kanishka Goonewardena, "The Urban Sensorium: Space, Ideology and the Aestheticization of Politics," *Antipode* 37, no. 1 (2005): 46–71. More generally, on the production of spatial ideologies, see Henri Lefebvre, "Reflections on the Politics of Space," in *State, Space, World*, ed. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009 [1970]), 167–84.

[22] Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003 [1970]).

[23] See Brenner and Schmid, "Towards a New Epistemology"; Brenner, "Urban Revolution?"; Brenner, *Implosions/Explosions*; Martín Arboleda, "In the Nature of the Non-City: Expanded Infrastructural Networks and the Political Ecology of Planetary Urbanisation," *Antipode* 48, no. 2 (2016): 233–51; and Martín Arboleda, "Spaces of Extraction, Metropolitan Explosions: Planetary Urbanization and the Commodity Boom in Latin America," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40, no. 1 (2016): 96–112.

is generally presupposed within such definitions.[24] To the degree that studies of urban questions focus primarily or exclusively on these metropolitan islands and their translocal connections, they tend to bracket the broader, politically mediated transformations of interscalar relations from which such apparently localized spaces have been wrought, and which they have, in turn, actively accelerated and intensified. Crucially, however, the point of this critique of methodological cityism is not to deny the importance of agglomeration economies, nodal connectivity, spatial density, or local politics to the dynamics of urbanization, or to suggest that large, dense metropolitan areas do not exist or do not matter for political-economic processes under capitalism. The claim, rather, is that such conditions, processes, and terrains of struggle can only be understood adequately within a broader, multiscalar field of sociospatial relations that constitutes and continually reweaves the capitalist urban fabric as a whole. We need, in other words, a multiscalar yet territorially differentiated conceptualization of urban space itself, and of the geographies of urbanization, to decipher (1) the variegated patterns and scales in which the sociospatial relations of agglomeration are produced, contested, and reworked and (2) the evolving supralocal crystallizations, parameters, and consequences of urbanization processes under capitalism.

The Lefebvrian notion of the capitalist urban fabric (*le tissu urbain*), which is elaborated at length in Chapter 2, offers a solid foundation for such a multiscalar reconceptualization, one that includes agglomeration processes (the moment of *implosion*) as well as the construction and continual reorganization of operational landscapes that support and, quite literally, metabolize such processes (the moment of *explosion*). Subsequent chapters investigate the fluidly mutating, constitutively uneven geographies of the capitalist urban fabric in the North Atlantic zone and beyond since the 1970s and the role of state spatial strategies in mediating and animating those mutations. In thus proceeding, I also critically engage some of the major strands of methodological cityism that have infused prominent approaches to contemporary urban studies, especially within the scholarly literatures on global cities, urban entrepreneurialism, informational cities, the new regionalism,

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[24] On the world city "archipelago," see Peter J. Taylor, *World-City Network: A Global Urban Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2004); and, more recently, David Bassens and Michiel van Meeteren, "World Cities and the Uneven Geographies of Financialization: Unveiling Stratification and Hierarchy in the World City Archipelago," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40, no. 1 (2016): 62–81. On the problem of naïve objectivism in social science, see Andrew Sayer, *Method in Social Science*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1992). As Sayer explains, such approaches ignore the conceptual mediation of social life and presuppose the capacity of social researchers to capture the "facts" through pure induction.

urban regimes, and urban growth machines. Those explorations reveal that each of these terrains of research and debate contains contradictory methodological tendencies, some of which reinforce the localist, territorialist, and naïve-objectivist precepts of methodological cityism, while others open up alternative, potentially productive methodological horizons for broader, relationally multiscalar imaginaries of urbanization processes, their variegated geographical crystallizations, and their fluid, contradictory metabolism. Through a series of critical readings of these approaches, I develop a more reflexively scale-attuned, state-theoretical approach to the capitalist urban fabric, with particular reference to the tumultuous, if constitutively uneven, sociospatial transformations of the last four decades. This approach is intended to help illuminate emergent patterns and pathways of urban restructuring, both within and beyond the sites of agglomeration (and associated settlement "units"), that have long monopolized the attention and imagination of urban researchers.

Contours of an Exploration

In sum, then, this book charts the contours of a multifaceted, open-ended, and still-ongoing exploration. Its chapters follow a pathway of focused questioning, defined by the scalar *problematique* outlined previously, and by the concerted search for conceptual tools and methodological strategies adequate to deciphering emergent rescalings of the worldwide urban fabric under late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century capitalism. They offer a variety of concepts, methods, and analytical openings in relation to specific sites, patterns, and trajectories of urban transformation, and they propose some interpretive inroads through which to decipher the latter, particularly in the North Atlantic context but also, potentially, in other global regions. They also present an alternative vision of urban studies that destabilizes the naturalized emphasis on the "city" as the field's exclusive, self-evidently necessary geographical focal point, offering instead a reconceptualization of capitalist urbanization as a process that includes the moments of city building and city *un*building, as well as the production and ongoing transformation of a multiscalar, territorially variegated urban fabric: an unevenly extended matrix of sociospatial relations, territorial configurations, infrastructural relays, and metabolic circuits that support or result from capitalist industrialization.[25] In thus proceeding, these writings also trace the process of theorizing

[25] The concept of unbuilding (*Abbau*) is derived from Lewis Mumford's classic analysis of the "paleotechnic" city in *The City in History* (New York: Harcourt, 1961), 446–81. This key concept

that grounds and animates my work—its abiding commitments, but also its continuous adaptation, mutation, and reconstitution in relation to ongoing urban transformations and shifting terrains of scholarly debate regarding the latter.

When I first began exploring the rescaling of the capitalist urban fabric in the mid- to late 1990s, debates on "globalization"—a "geographical euphemism" par excellence, as Neil Smith then observed—were in full bloom across the social sciences.[26] In that context, nascent conceptualizations of rescaling and reterritorialization, along with the more general notion of capitalist uneven spatial development inherited from previous decades of historical-geographical materialist theorizing, offered powerful methodological antidotes to then-popular visions of an increasingly borderless world economy, dominated by deterritorialized, putatively hypermobile capital whizzing across the "hyperspace" of postmodern capitalism. The elegantly simple yet far-reaching insight, initially developed by Neil Smith and Erik Swyngedouw, was that emergent forms of geoeconomic integration actually entailed new scalar crystallizations of capitalist territorial organization, and a new pattern of worldwide uneven spatial development, rather than the death of distance, the end of geography, the consolidation of a borderless world, and the smoothing out of entrenched sociospatial inequalities, as many academics, journalists, and policymakers were then proposing. My own subsequent theorizing about the shifting scalar dimensions of urbanization under capitalism built upon those intellectual foundations, and has been strongly energized by a concern to deconstruct some of the closely related spatial ideologies that have proliferated across the field of urban studies, planning, and policy in the wake of the globalization debates. These include a variety of ideas, assumptions, and narratives about global cities, urban regeneration, place marketing, the new localism, the new economy, interurban competition, the new regionalism, and the urban age.[27] As with any critique

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underscores a far-reaching insight that also lies at the heart of David Harvey's approach to capitalist urbanization (discussed at length in Chapter 2): the same forces that construct large-scale urban sociospatial configurations may also deconstruct and destroy them, thus laying the groundwork for subsequent rounds of urban development. As I argue in subsequent chapters, this observation is also highly salient for exploring the scalar construction and deconstruction of the capitalist urban fabric.

[26] Neil Smith, "The Satanic Geographies of Globalization: Uneven Development in the 1990s," *Public Culture* 10, no. 1 (1997): 174. For a useful synthesis of critical approaches to the *problematique* of globalization, see Richard Appelbaum and William L. Robinson, eds., *Critical Globalization Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[27] Other currently popular urban spatial ideologies include contemporary discourses on smart cities, creative cities, eco-cities, urban sustainability, and urban resilience. While not explored

of urban ideology, the key task of such explorations is to deconstruct the claims to economic, cultural, and spatial hegemony that define, naturalize, and reproduce a particular urban condition or project and, in so doing, to demarcate the possibility for alternative forms of urbanization that inhere within, but are suppressed by, existing sociospatial arrangements, practices, and modes of understanding.[28]

Just as importantly, my pathway of theorizing has also been forged through a range of critical engagements with some of the diverse scholarly approaches to the urban question that have crystallized in recent decades, including those produced by other critically oriented urbanists. Whatever differences of epistemology, conceptual apparatus, methodological orientation, and analytical program have underpinned such exchanges, they have generally been animated by a shared concern to confront the wide-ranging challenges associated with deciphering emergent patterns and pathways of urban restructuring.[29] In my own work, this historically embedded, sociopolitically positioned understanding of critical urban theory is grounded upon a specific understanding of the relationship between (urban) theory and (urban) historical change.[30] Critical urban theory, I have long argued, develops in significant measure through the continual reinvention of its own concepts, methods, and concerns, in direct relation to the restlessly mutating spaces of urbanization in which it is embedded. Crucially, however, the radical revisability of critical urban theory stems not from some fixed ontological property of urban space—for instance,

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in this book, these discourses likewise require careful critical deconstruction—see, for instance, Adam Greenfield, *Against the Smart City* (New York: Do projects, 2013); Jamie Peck, "Struggling with the Creative Class," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, no. 4 (2005): 740–70; Timothy Luke, "Neither Sustainable nor Development: Reconsidering Sustainability in Development," *Sustainable Development* 13 (2005): 228–38; Lawrence J. Vale, "The Politics of Resilient Cities: Whose Resilience and Whose City?," *Building Research & Information* 42, no. 2 (2014): 191–201; and Susan Fainstein, "Resilience and Justice," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39, no. 1 (2015): 157–67. For further elaborations on the critique of spatial ideology as a key element within the project of critical urban theory, see Brenner, *Critique of Urbanization*, and the works cited in note 21.

[28] See Neil Brenner, "The *Problematique* of Critique" and "Critical Urban Theory, Reloaded? Dialogue with Martín Arboleda," in *Critique of Urbanization*, 16–24, 268–89.

[29] In this sense, my approach resonates with Ananya Roy's recent engagement with Edward Said's concept of "traveling theory" to situate the heterodox, heterogeneous projects of critical urban studies: they emerge and evolve as embedded yet oppositional responses to historically specific sociopolitical formations of urbanization. See Ananya Roy, "Worlding the South: Toward a Post-Colonial Urban Theory," in Parnell and Oldfield, *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South*, 16; and Edward Said, "Traveling Theory," in *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[30] See Neil Brenner, "What Is Critical Urban Theory?," in *Critique of Urbanization*, 25–41.

as being too complex or indeterminate to grasp in conceptual terms—but from the relentless sociohistorical *dynamism* of the "urban phenomenon" itself.[31] In other words, urban theory must be constantly reinvented because the geographies it seeks to illuminate, and in which it is itself situated, are continually being transformed. Hegel's famous early nineteenth-century invocation of the "owl of Minerva" in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right* (1820) presumably refers to this same dilemma: abstract concepts are always already outdated, because the dynamism of modern life continually transforms their conditions of possibility and fields of application by reworking the social worlds from which they emerge, and which they aspire to grasp.[32] In characterizing our urbanizing planet as a "virtual object," Henri Lefebvre evidently had something similar in mind: the field of urban theory is derived from historical geographies which it must constantly transcend in order to grasp emergent sociospatial transformations that continually appear on the horizon of practice, representation, thought, and imagination.[33]

One of the abiding challenges of critical urban theory is to chart an intellectual course that productively combines these distinct yet interwoven epistemological imperatives: (1) to maintain maximal reflexivity regarding the sociohistorical situatedness of all urban concepts, narratives, and representations; (2) to deconstruct dominant ideologies of urbanism that naturalize hegemonic sociospatial arrangements and the forms of domination, exclusion, marginalization, and social suffering they support; and (3) to anticipate emergent urban conditions, practices, and transformations and their wide-ranging implications for knowledge formations, everyday life, and the politics of space. This anticipatory epistemological orientation represents a notable, if generally overlooked, point of intellectual convergence between the Lefebvrian vision of the urban as a virtual object and contemporary postcolonial critiques of hegemonic urban knowledge formations.[34] Both

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[31] The phrase is from Lefebvre, *Urban Revolution*, 45–76.

[32] On this reading of Hegel, see Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Verso, 2014). The Minerva reference is from G. W. F. Hegel, "Preface," in *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. Alan White (Indianapolis: Focus-Hackett, 2002 [1820]), 10: "As the thought of the world, [philosophy] always appears only in the time after actuality has completed its process of cultivation, after it has finished. . . . When philosophy paints its grey in grey, then has a shape of life grown old . . . it cannot be rejuvenated, it can only be known; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the falling of dusk."

[33] Lefebvre, *Urban Revolution*, 16–17.

[34] On the latter, see Jennifer Robinson, "Comparative Urbanism: New Geographies and Cultures of Theorizing the Urban," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40, no. 1 (2016): 187–99; Ananya Roy, "Who's Afraid of Postcolonial Theory?," *International Journal*

positions require precisely an openness to—and, indeed, a reflexive anticipation of—the obsolescence and thus transcendence of the very conceptual frameworks upon which emergent urban processes, formations, and contestations are understood.

The studies presented in this book illustrate one analytical pathway through which such an epistemological orientation may be mobilized to track the vicissitudes of the urban question during a period of particularly tumultuous planetary transformation. Indeed, the following chapters endeavor not only to assemble the elements of a scalar approach to critical urban theory, but to critically assess the limits of such an approach. On this basis, especially in the book's final chapters, I also explore the possibility of further reinventing, and even superseding, the scalar concepts and methods initially proposed. The guiding question that animates these explorations—*Is the urban question a scale question?*—thus leads not only to a critique of city-centric approaches to the urban, to a series of closely associated conceptual recalibrations and methodological realignments, and to an alternative, constitutively multiscalar conceptualization of urban space, but eventually, to a fundamental reformulation of that initial framing of the urban question itself. Specifically, my explorations of the *problematique* of scale in urban theory generate a series of autocritical reflections that bring into focus some of the limitations of scalar—or, more precisely, scale-*centric*—interpretations of the urban question. This leads, on the one hand, to a respecification of the proper conceptual parameters for scale-attuned modes of interpretation in the face of the rich variegation, unevenness, and polymorphism of contemporary sociospatial transformations, including those associated with place-making, reterritorialization, and networking. More radically still, these autocritical reflections open up a new horizon of epistemological exploration that is embodied in a dramatically rescaled formulation of the urban question itself: *Is the urban question a scale question?* thus mutates into *Has urbanization become planetary?*

The reframing of the urban question outlined in the book's final two chapters is closely connected to a collaborative investigation of planetary urbanization with Christian Schmid.[35] This approach systematically builds upon, and yet in some ways also supersedes, the scalar framing that underpins the foregoing analyses. However, my supersession of scale in

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of Urban and Regional Research 40, no. 1 (2016): 200–209; and Ananya Roy, "The 21st Century Metropolis: New Geographies of Theory," *Regional Studies* 43, no. 6 (2009): 819–30.

[35] See, especially, Brenner and Schmid, "Towards a New Epistemology"; Brenner and Schmid, "The 'Urban Age' in Question"; as well as the contributions to Brenner, *Implosions/Explosions*.

the book's final chapters must be understood not as a simple negation, but in the Hegelian-Marxian sense of an *Aufhebung* that at once preserves *and* transcends the framework from which it was formed. The book's main line of argumentation is thus configured as a spiral movement across levels of abstraction and several interconnected terrains of inquiry. It flows from a relatively abstract, reflexively scalar formulation of the urban question under modern capitalism (Chapters 2 and 3) toward a series of critical engagements with several major approaches to contemporary urban studies in conjunction with more concrete-complex pathways of investigation of post-1980s urban transformations in various zones of Euro-America (Chapters 4 to 7). This leads to a series of autocritical maneuvers that produce a relativization and *Aufhebung* of my initial scalar formulation of the urban question (Chapter 8) and that, finally, facilitate a reformulation of that question around the *problematique* of planetary urbanization, which simultaneously builds upon and transfigures the scalar analytics that were forged and deployed in earlier chapters (Chapters 9 and 10). The main elements of this spiral movement are summarized in Figure 1.1.

Outline of the Argument

Following this introductory overview, the subsequent two chapters assemble the theoretical foundations for an exploration of the urban question as a scale question. Chapter 2 excavates the distinctive scalar analytics that are embedded within several key ideas of David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre, with particular reference to the fixity/motion contradiction under capitalism, the concept of the urban fabric, the scalar intermeshing of urban space and state space, and the process of rescaling. This analysis generates a scale-attuned theorization of the capitalist urban fabric, as well as a state-theoretical understanding of the process Lefebvre famously described as the "planetarization of the urban." Chapter 3 considers the ways in which, especially since the 1990s, the scalar dimensions of global urban restructuring have been reflexively explored within several major streams of critical urban studies. Against the background of earlier rounds of debate on the spatiality of the urban question, I take stock of this apparent scalar turn in urban studies. What, I ask, is the theoretical specificity of a scalar approach to the production of new urban spaces? What are potential contributions and hazards of such an approach? A relatively narrow, but analytically precise, definitional proposal is offered, which destabilizes methodologically localist, city-centric understandings of the urban while also distinguishing processes of scalar structuration from other key dimensions of sociospatial relations related to

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS</th><th>CRITICAL ELABORATIONS AND APPLICATIONS</th><th>AUTOCRITIQUE AND THEORETICAL RENOVATION</th></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td rowspan="3">The urban question as a scale question: debates on scale and the urban question; foundations for a scale-attuned, state-theoretical approach to the capitalist urban fabric</td><td rowspan="3"></td><td rowspan="3"></td></tr>
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<tr><td>4</td><td rowspan="4"></td><td rowspan="4">Political and economic geographies of rescaling: studies of the interplay between state rescaling and the rescaling of the capitalist urban fabric; critical engagement with the scalar imaginaries of major approaches to contemporary urban restructuring; critique of methodological cityism via the development of a relationally multiscalar, state-theoretical approach to capitalist urbanization</td><td rowspan="4"></td></tr>
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<tr><td>8</td><td rowspan="3"></td><td rowspan="3"></td><td rowspan="3">Toward a polymorphic theorization of urbanization and uneven spatial development; contemporary mutations of the urban question; debates on the variegated and uneven geographies of urbanization; critique of scale-centrism and city-centrism via an emergent theorization of extended/planetary urbanization; new rounds of rescaling related to “mega-urbanization” strategies</td></tr>
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FIGURE 1.1 Organizational structure and logic of the book.

place-making, territorialization, and networking. This relatively abstract definitional foray is the first of several efforts in this book to demarcate and investigate the proper conceptual parameters of scale in relation to specific terrains of urban studies.

The core scalar explorations of this book are elaborated over the next four chapters, which seek to illuminate the interplay between urban restructuring and rescaling processes, particularly the rescaling of state space, during the post-1980s period (Chapters 4 to 7). These studies build upon the conceptual foundations developed in the opening chapters in order (1) to critically interrogate and, in some cases, to respecify and rework the scalar assumptions articulated within several major fields of contemporary urban theory and research; (2) to develop scale-attuned, state-theoretical analyses of post-1980s patterns and pathways of urban restructuring in the North Atlantic context; and (3) to demarcate some of the specific interpretive consequences that flow from approaches to the urban question that transcend inherited city-centric framings.

Chapter 4 interprets debates on global city formation through a reflexively scalar, state-theoretical lens. As a critical counterpoint to canonical metanarratives of global city formation, which have generally been grounded upon the proposition that state power is eroding under global capitalism, I argue that (rescaled) state institutions have figured centrally as animators and mediators of post-1970s urban sociospatial restructuring, including within putatively "global" or "globalizing" cities. The so-called new localism is, therefore, not the outgrowth of endogenous, bottom-up economic development but, in an important respect, the political expression of multiscalar state spatial strategies that seek to (re)position metropolitan regions in relation to emergent transnational spaces of accumulation. On this basis, I explore various ways in which the proliferation of multiscalar state strategies to reorganize the capitalist urban fabric has, in turn, engendered significant post-Keynesian, neoliberalizing transformations of state spatial and scalar organization. In this way, I present one of the key theses of this book: new urban spaces are produced through the rescaling of state space, and vice versa. This chapter also destabilizes the deeply entrenched assumption that cities represent the necessary, proper, or default unit of analysis for approaches to the urban question. The scalar units of urbanization processes are themselves produced and continually rewoven through the creatively destructive forward motion of capital and the intricate mediations of the latter through state spatial strategies and sociopolitical mobilization.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 continue this line of argumentation with reference to several key terrains of debate on contemporary urban governance restructuring. Chapter 5 develops a scalar reinterpretation of contemporary political strategies to promote urban regeneration through the clustering of so-called new economy industries specialized in the production and deployment of advanced informational and communications technologies. In contrast to

much of the hype and hyperbole that has surrounded the new economy concept, this analysis of European trends suggests that urban growth strategies oriented toward such firms and sectors have generally involved rescaled, broadly neoliberalized approaches to the regulation of uneven spatial development that seriously exacerbate, rather than resolve, the crisis tendencies of contemporary capitalism. However, despite their destabilizing macroeconomic consequences, and the often vague, ideologically slippery spatial visions attached to projects to promote a new economy, such neoliberalizing regulatory rescalings continue to play a key role in the production of new urban spaces and new forms of urbanization.

Chapter 6 presents a critical perspective on the "new regionalism" debate that has swept through important streams of urban and regional studies and economic geography since the 1980s. As in Chapter 5, I here mobilize a scalar analytics to question mainstream political metanarratives regarding the prospects for putatively endogenous, bottom-up political strategies to stimulate urban industrial regeneration. My analysis suggests that, at core, new regionalist programs have entailed a scalar recalibration of local financial, institutional, and regulatory failures, but without significantly impacting their underlying macrospatial causes, within or beyond major cities. Consequently, rather than counteracting the crisis tendencies and contradictions of post-Keynesian, neoliberalizing capitalism, the competition-oriented, market-disciplinary spatial politics of the new regionalism have perpetuated or exacerbated the latter. Its enduring consequences, to date, have been deepening economic crises, a further splintering of urban governance arrangements, intensifying territorial polarization, and pervasive regulatory disorder, rather than stable capitalist industrial growth or coherent territorial development.

Chapter 7 builds upon the scalar analytics developed in earlier chapters to decipher contemporary debates on urban growth machines and the post-1980s "entrepreneurial" remaking of local economic governance. In what sense, I ask, are urban growth machines, in fact, *urban*? Is it really "the city," as most of the scholarly literature suggests, that serves as the optimal or natural spatial locus for urban regime formation and growth machine strategies? To address such questions, I excavate several key arguments from John Logan and Harvey Molotch's seminal work on this topic. This analysis raises some doubts regarding an influential contemporary critique of Logan and Molotch's work for its putative methodological localism, suggesting instead that their framework is, in fact, explicitly attuned to the role of interscalar politico-institutional relays in the construction and transformation of local (or urban) governance systems. This leads to a dynamically multiscalar

reading of the national institutional frameworks that have facilitated the formation of growth machines at the urban scale during the course of US territorial development, including during the post-1980s period. While this chapter focuses on the US case, its argument has broader methodological implications for the comparative-historical investigation of urbanization, territorial alliance formation, and urban governance in other contexts as well.

Chapter 8 presents a series of metatheoretical reflections on the scalar framework of analysis developed in the preceding chapters while also outlining several major challenges for subsequent rounds of research on the spatialities of urbanization. Here I return to the definitionally narrow conceptualization of scale proposed in Chapter 3 and further elaborate some of its implications for investigations of uneven spatial development, a *problematique* that has long been a key focal point for urban researchers. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's striking metaphor of social space as a *mille feuille*, a flaky dessert pastry composed of "a thousand layers," this chapter argues that the geographies of uneven development and, by implication, those of the capitalist urban fabric are best conceived as a multifaceted superimposition and interpenetration of sociospatial relations. In contrast to scale-centric or methodologically territorialist approaches, I thus propose that the morphologies of sociospatial relations under capitalism are too densely and intricately interwoven to be represented through a single geometrical image or spatial metaphor, whether scalar, territorial, or otherwise. From this point of view, scalar approaches to urban theory will be most productive when their conceptual and explanatory parameters are precisely circumscribed in the context of a multidimensional, polymorphic approach to critical geopolitical economy that also systematically explores processes of place-making, territorialization, and networking.

These metatheoretical reflections on uneven spatial development and urbanization preserve the core elements of a scalar approach to the urban question, but they also present some strong methodological cautions regarding the hazards of overextending or underspecifying scalar concepts. To be sure, especially in the context of contemporary patterns of worldwide sociospatial restructuring, which are profoundly transforming inherited interscalar configurations, it has proven hugely productive to frame emergent urban questions through a reflexively scalar theoretical lens. Nonetheless, it is essential to avoid applying that lens beyond its proper domain of application, either (1) by treating scale as a generic conceptual metaphor for sociospatiality as such or (2) by conflating scale with other dimensions of sociospatial relations, such as place, territory, or networks. Proceeding otherwise risks embracing a problematic scale-centrism in which all aspects

of sociospatial relations are subsumed under, or interpreted through, an undifferentiated, overgeneralized scalar analytic. Certainly, in the relational, processual sense elaborated in this book, the urban *is* a scale, and this aspect of urban space is indeed today being fundamentally reconfigured. Nonetheless, scalar categories require very precise specification in order to remain coherent analytical tools of theorization, investigation, interpretation, and critique.

In a final argumentative maneuver, Chapters 9 and 10 connect these metatheoretical reflections to a new round of theorizing on the urban question that, much like previous cycles of debate on such issues, has been provoked by the challenge of deciphering emergent patterns and pathways of urban restructuring. It is here that my guiding question regarding the possibility of a scalar reframing of the urban question is transformed into a more explicit, systematic concern with the *problematique* of planetary urbanization. These chapters propose such a reframing through a critical assessment of contemporary "urban age" discourses, which are viewed as narrowly city-centric simplifications of a constitutively uneven, territorially differentiated, and spatially extended landscape of planetary urbanization. Through a series of critical reflections, epistemological reorientations, conceptual proposals, and conjunctural arguments, an alternative vision of urban theory is presented that transcends such universalizing, homogenizing spatial ideologies while directing attention to the intensely variegated new geographies of urban-industrial, infrastructural, and ecological transformation that are emerging beyond major population centers, in close conjunction with new spatial strategies of large-scale industrial resource extraction, agroindustrial land-use intensification, logistical acceleration, marketized techno-environmental management, and territorial enclosure. The consolidation of such mega-urbanization strategies has been manifested in a bewildering array of colossal spatial configurations designed to support the metabolism of the global metropolitan network, as well as the planetary supply chains and industrializing hinterlands upon which the latter depend. In this way, the dialectical interplay between concentrated and extended urbanization—agglomeration processes and the construction/transformation of industrialized operational landscapes in support of the latter—comes to occupy center stage in a reformulated framing of the contemporary urban question.[36] The concept of the capitalist urban fabric—elaborated in previous chapters with reference to the scale question, scale relativization processes,

[36] The distinction between concentrated and extended urbanization is developed at greater length in Brenner and Schmid, "Towards a New Epistemology"; and in the contributions to Brenner, *Implosions/Explosions*.

and the evolution of state spatial strategies—now acquires new layers of meaning, and additional sociospatial dimensions, in relation to emergent investigations of the operational landscapes of extended urbanization.

This theoretical reframing of the urban question directly builds upon, yet in some respects also transcends, the scalar analytics developed in earlier chapters. On the one hand, my approach to the study of planetary urbanization is firmly grounded upon many of the same conceptual foundations and methodological orientations that have long underpinned my studies of the rescaling of urban space:

- It involves the rejection of localist, city-centric approaches to the urban, emphasizing instead the relationally multiscalar, variegated, and uneven geographies of the capitalist urban fabric.
- It emphasizes the key role of state spatial strategies in constituting, stratifying, and reorganizing the capitalist urban fabric across places, territories, and scales.
- It is concerned with the contradictory dynamics of sociospatial creative destruction—the production and deconstruction of territorial organization—that animate and mediate the capitalist form of urbanization.
- It further elaborates upon the planetarization of the urban, a process that is initially explored in Chapter 2 with reference to the state-theoretical and interscalar dimensions of Henri Lefebvre's influential hypothesis regarding the contemporary urban revolution.
- It theorizes emergent forms of urban restructuring as a medium and expression of political strategies to construct new, rescaled urban spaces in a geoeconomic context of deepening, if intensely variegated, processes of scale relativization and neoliberalization.
- It emphasizes the polymorphic character of urban geographies under capitalism—their differentiation and stratification by scale, but also through processes of place-making, territorialization, and networking.

My endeavor to develop and deploy a scalar approach to urban theory has thus flowed directly into my more recent explorations of planetary urbanization, at once as a new way of theorizing the capitalist form of urbanization and as an emergent historical-geographical configuration of the capitalist urban fabric that requires further investigation.[37] Indeed, in an important sense,

[37] There are, of course, many other routes into such explorations. For Christian Schmid's account of his own intellectual itinerary in relation to the latter, see his "Journeys through Planetary Urbanization: Decentering Perspectives on the Urban," *Environment and Planning*

planetary urbanization represents the latest in a series of market-disciplinary rescaling projects that have been reshaping the capitalist urban fabric since the global economic crises of the 1970s. As such, it encompasses not only the globalizing cities, metropolitan regions, and regional growth alliances that were analyzed in previous chapters as force fields and outcomes of rescaling processes but also a variety of emergent mega-territorial formations of infrastructure investment, land-use intensification, and metabolic transformation that crisscross erstwhile hinterlands, rural zones, and even wilderness areas, and which now appear to have become strategic new spatial frontiers for combined urban transformation, regulatory reorganization, and rescaling. In short, as I argue in the final two chapters, the construction of these significantly upscaled zones of extended urbanization, which now encompass entire continents, as well as diverse intercontinental, interoceanic, and even planet-spanning infrastructural configurations, has become a major (geo)political strategy of capitalist expansion and state developmentalism under contemporary conditions. A scalar analytics thus remains an essential methodological tool for any effort to decipher such spaces, their politico-institutional mediations, their crisis tendencies, and their consequences, across the variegated landscapes of both concentrated and extended urbanization.

In other ways, however, the reflections on planetary urbanization presented in the book's final chapters also entail a significant autocritique, relativization, and indeed a kind of *Aufhebung* of the specific scalar analytics mobilized in this book and elsewhere to frame the urban question. The key issue here involves the meaning(s) attached to the concept of the "urban" itself, whether as an adjectival label qualifying other terms (urban space, urban restructuring, urban development, urban governance, and so forth) or as the differentiating lexical element in the superordinate concept of urbanization. In my scalar explorations of the urban question, the main critique of city-centric, localist approaches involves the elaboration of a conceptual framework that embeds cities, and agglomeration processes more generally, within broader, multiscalar configurations of sociospatial relations, institutional organization, and territorial regulation. However, despite my explicit concern to supersede city-centric approaches to urban studies,

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D: Society and Space 36, no. 3 (2018): 591–610; as well as "The Urbanization of the Territory." Other possible intellectual pathways into such an investigation are presented in Brenner, *Implosions/Explosions*, as well as in Michelle Buckley and Kendra Strauss, "With, against, and beyond Lefebvre: Planetary Urbanization and Epistemic Plurality," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 4 (2016): 617–36; and Stefan Kipfer, "Pushing the Limitations of Urban Research: Urbanization, Pipelines and Counter-Colonial Politics," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 36, no. 3 (2018): 474–93.

and my persistent insistence on the Lefebvrian distinction between the city and the urban, much of that work remains, in concrete-historical and empirical terms, focused on relatively familiar, methodologically conventional research sites: large population centers, densely settled built environments, and metropolitan systems of infrastructure development, capital investment, and governance. To be sure, throughout my investigations, these terrains of urban life are reframed in consistently relational, multiscalar terms, as arenas and outcomes of urbanization processes, rather than being circumscribed within discrete, bounded settlement units. Nonetheless, it may be argued that, insofar as they are still largely focused upon the dynamics of (what I would now term) concentrated urbanization, such scalar explorations entail no more than a partial transcendence of entrenched urban epistemologies: they involve an expansively multiscalar framing of city-building and agglomeration processes, but they tend to avoid excavating what is arguably a more foundational layer of the urban question—namely, the first-order, ontological problem of demarcating exactly what kind of process or phenomenon the urban actually *is*. This fundamental question can be helpfully illuminated through scalar explorations, but the latter might also have the unintended consequence of masking it, insofar as they risk reducing the urban to a theoretically self-evident entity, whose "complexity" consists chiefly in its shifting, variegated sociospatial patterns and scalar articulations.[38]

During my early studies in urban theory, it was my interest in scale questions that drew my attention to Lefebvre's theorization of the urban fabric, which I appropriated as a basis for developing a relationally multiscalar, state-theoretical approach to urban restructuring under conditions of deepening scale relativization. Today, however, I would not reduce the concept of the urban fabric to its function in reframing the urban question as a scale question, even though it has proven quite salient for that purpose. Perhaps more important, the concept of the urban fabric points toward what is arguably a more radical conceptual reorientation in urban theory, one that entails a

[38] As Ross Exo Adams has brilliantly argued in a series of provocative writings, this problem is pervasive within both historical and contemporary urban discourse, from the social sciences to planning, urban design, and architecture: "Indeed, as it happens in many discourses . . . wherever the urban is raised as the site of inquiry, the problem always tends to be something else that it contains. Assumed to be a transhistorical background of human life, the urban appears never to constitute a problem in and of itself." See Ross Exo Adams, "The Burden of the Present: On the Concept of Urbanisation," *Society and Space*, February 11, 2014, http://societyandspace.org/2014/02/11/the-burden-of-the-present-on-the-concept-of-urbanisation-ross-exo-adams. See also Ross Exo Adams, "Natural Urbans, Natural Urbanata: Ecological Urbanism, Circulation and the Immunization of Nature," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, no. 1 (2014): 12–29.

foundational rethinking of the historically specific content of the "urban" itself under modern capitalism.[39] It is precisely such issues that recent reframings of the urban question around the *problematique* of planetary urbanization productively open up for further theoretical debate and concrete exploration. This requires us to revisit, on a rather foundational level, the nature of urbanization itself as a specific kind of spatiotemporal, metabolic, and political process under capitalism. Indeed, as Christian Schmid and I have argued elsewhere, such considerations generate the need for a "new epistemology of the urban," a framework of analysis that can more directly confront the urban question as such, without reducing it to the permutations of urban spatial form, morphology, or typology while also providing a conceptual basis on which to decipher emergent, early twenty-first-century patterns and pathways of urban restructuring.[40]

The book's concluding chapters suggest, then, that a purely scalar reframing of the urban question can only partially address that challenge. The major theoretical imperative that flows from such autocritical arguments is to reconceptualize the capitalist urban fabric not simply as a territorially differentiated, multiscalar geography of urban centers and agglomeration processes embedded within broader, dynamically evolving interscalar configurations, but as the medium and outcome of the relentless processes of implosion/explosion that, as I would now argue, represent the spatiotemporal core of the capitalist form of urbanization. It should be emphasized, however, that the scalar analytics developed herein may also be readily integrated into studies of planetary urbanization. Much like the geographies of concentrated urbanization on which I focus much of my attention in this book, the terrain of extended urbanization can be productively investigated through a relationally scale-attuned, state-theoretical mode of analysis—albeit one that must also be equally concerned with the role of place-making,

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[39] This is an argument that Stefan Kipfer, among others, has been making for a long time, and which has been strongly reinforced in recent "third wave" readings of Lefebvre's urban theory, for instance, by Kanishka Goonewardena and Christian Schmid, among others. See, in particular, Stefan Kipfer, "Why the Urban Question Still Matters: Reflections on Rescaling and the Promise of the Urban," in Keil and Mahon, *Leviathan Undone*?, 67–86; and Christian Schmid, "Henri Lefebvre, the Right to the City and the New Metropolitan Mainstream," in *Cities for People, Not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City*, ed. Neil Brenner, Margit Mayer, and Peter Marcuse (New York: Routledge, 2012), 42–62. See also, more generally, Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom, and Christian Schmid, eds., *Space, Difference and Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre* (New York: Routledge, 2008). These highly suggestive interpretations and appropriations of Lefebvre's approach to the urban question assume renewed significance, I believe, in the context of contemporary debates on planetary urbanization.

[40] Brenner and Schmid, "Towards a New Epistemology."

territorialization, and networking processes in its construction and ongoing transformation. In this sense, the scalar explorations elaborated in the main body of this book are intended to help form the methodological and conceptual groundwork for the research agenda on planetary urbanization that is outlined in the concluding chapters.

The Location of Theory

The pathway of theorizing forged in this book offers only one set of strategies through which to confront the challenges of deciphering the production of new urban spaces under early twenty-first-century capitalism. My intention in these studies is hardly to resolve such challenges; I certainly do not believe that any single theory, framework, or methodology could do so. My more modest goal here is to put forward some potentially useful epistemological perspectives, conceptual proposals, and methodological strategies, the results of my own explorations in a series of interlinked research endeavors, through which at least some dimensions of emergent geographies of urbanization might be illuminated.

Looking back on my intellectual pathway since the late 1990s, I can immediately recognize a number of significant limitations, missing links, and blind spots connected to the theoretical framework I have been elaborating. For instance, my approach to urban questions—whether as scale questions or, more recently, in relation to the emergent *problematique* of planetary urbanization—is very much focused on the dynamics, contradictions, and crisis tendencies of capitalism, primarily through the analytical lens of spatialized political economy and state theory. There is no doubt that such methodological orientations may be productively connected to a range of closely interrelated *problematiques* within the broad fields of radical geography, critical urban studies, and spatial humanities that are not effectively explored here—for instance, the structuration of urban scalar configurations through diverse sociospatial positionalities (especially of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and citizenship); the role of colonialism, war, geopolitics, and empire in the production and deconstruction of scalar fixes; the scalar logics and illogics of social reproduction, financialization, accumulation by dispossession, territorial enclosure, depeasantization, transnational migration, and informalization; and the politics of scale associated with patterns of social mobilization, political insurgency, and struggles to (re)appropriate the city (and the urban) as a commons. Would engagement with such essential issues require a comprehensive deconstruction or even abandonment of the theoretical approach elaborated in my writings? Could at least some of the

latter agendas be further explored in productive directions in relation to the scalar analytics and lines of interpretation I have proposed? To what degree, and in what ways, would other analytical, empirical, locational, or political entry points into the urban question and/or into the scale question transform the specific conceptual, methodological, and interpretive commitments elaborated here? These are questions on which, for the moment, I can only speculate; they are certainly legitimate ones to pose of any approach to critical social theory, urban or otherwise. My hope is that at least some of the heterodox theoretical offerings assembled here might prove fruitful in terrains of conceptualization and investigation beyond those on which I have focused my efforts.

Another urgently important but underexplored *problematique* in this book concerns the interplay between the rescaling of the capitalist urban fabric and the evolving scalar geographies of the "web of life"—the nonhuman life forms and material geographies of the so-called earth system upon which capitalism depends, and which capital has relentlessly transformed throughout its *longue durée* world-historical ecology.[41] To some degree, this set of issues is brought into more reflexive focus in the book's final chapters, in conjunction with my incipient reflections on planetary urbanization as an uneven and combined process of rescaling and politico-territorial, infrastructural, and ecological creative destruction. For the most part, however, the analytic lens developed here is so concertedly focused on the challenges of superseding unreflexively localist, city-centric approaches to the urban question that it neglects to engage the parallel, and indeed tightly interconnected, methodological hazards associated with inherited conceptions of the city (and of the urban) as being ontologically separate from a putatively external realm of nonhuman "nature."

Of course, there is now an entire field of critical urban studies, urban political ecology (UPE), that has been systematically exploding such Cartesian dualisms since the early 2000s.[42] Much recent work in UPE has been explicitly concerned with questions of scale and rescaling processes, and there have certainly been ample opportunities for conceptual cross-fertilization regarding scale questions across various terrains of urban and ecological

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[41] On which, see Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2016); Noel Castree, "The Anthropocene and the Environmental Humanities: Extending the Conversation," *Environmental Humanities* 5 (2014): 233–60; and Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika, and Erik Swyngedouw, eds., *In the Nature of Cities: Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[42] See, above all, Heynen et al., *In the Nature of Cities*.

research.[43] However, despite its broadly effective transcendence of the city/nature divide and its consistent embrace of a relational conception of scale, key streams of UPE research have been framed in ways that privilege cities as sites of analysis and equate the urban with processes of sociospatial concentration.[44] Consequently, the broader implications of a UPE approach for rethinking the variegated, uneven geographies of planetary urbanization, and of the "capitalocene" more generally, have only just begun to be systematically explored.[45] Clearly, the relation between the capitalist urban fabric and the web of life under the capitalocene requires further exploration, at once as a problem of social ontology, as a question of conceptualization, as a focal point for historical and contemporary investigation, and as a terrain for future politico-institutional experimentation. Perhaps, in facing such wide-ranging challenges, some of the scalar analytics developed here may also help facilitate a more systematic transcendence of inherited and still deeply entrenched Cartesian dualisms—including urban/rural, society/nature, city/nature, interior/exterior, and human/nonhuman—that continue to obscure our understanding of, and our ability to shape, the wide-ranging, planet-transforming sociometabolic transformations that have been unleashed under the capitalist form of urbanization.[46]

To what degree, finally, is the approach to urban theory presented in this book limited in its sphere of application to the regionally specific (North Atlantic) research context in which many of its major elements were elaborated? Can there be—indeed, *should* there be—a more general theorization of the urban question, whether as a scale question or otherwise, under modern capitalism? Or, does the endeavor to develop such an approach

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[43] See, paradigmatically, Erik Swyngedouw and Nik Heynen, "Urban Political Ecology, Justice and the Politics of Scale," *Antipode* 35, no. 5 (2003): 898–918; and Nathan Sayre, "Ecological and Geographical Scale: Parallels and Potential for Integration," *Progress in Human Geography* 29, no. 3 (2005): 276–90.

[44] Angelo and Wachsmuth, "Urbanizing Urban Political Ecology." See also Martín Arboleda, "In the Nature of the Non-City: Expanded Infrastructural Networks and the Political Ecology of Planetary Urbanization," *Antipode* 48, no. 2 (2016): 233–51.

[45] See, for example, Erik Swyngedouw, *Liquid Power: Contested Hydro-Modernities in Twentieth Century Spain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015); Matthew Gandy, *The Fabric of Space: Water, Modernity and the Urban Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016). On the capitalocene, see Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*; Jason W. Moore, ed., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press/Kairos, 2016); and Jason W. Moore, "The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of our Ecological Crisis," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 4, no. 3 (2017): 594–630.

[46] For further reflections on such issues, see Martín Arboleda, "Revitalizing Science and Technology Studies: A Marxian Critique of More-Than-Human Geographies," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 2 (2017): 360–78 as well as Brenner, "Critical Urban Theory, Reloaded?"

always require "provincialization"—that is, contextual embedding and locational particularization?[47]

At first glance, this book's commitment to developing a theorization of *the* urban question—a formulation that is, of course, derived from the work of Marxian authors such as Manuel Castells, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey—may appear to stand in flagrant contradiction to the project of developing locationally inscribed, contextually embedded, epistemologically situated approaches to urban theory and research. Surely, one might object, the insistence on theorizing "the" urban question, apparently as a singular *problematique*, exemplifies the very form of universalizing, totalizing, and "metrocentric" thought (whether of a Eurocentric, neocolonial, masculinist, or heteronormative variety) that has been critically deconstructed by urban theorists working in postcolonial, feminist, and queer-theoretical traditions.[48] How could any conceptualization of "the" urban illuminate the extraordinary multiplicity of sociospatial conditions, processes, life worlds, and struggles that underpin contemporary urbanization processes?

Such questions are fundamental; they have important epistemological and political stakes. The emphasis on situated knowledge—the sociohistorical embeddedness of ways of knowing, including those used in all forms of theory and research—offers an appropriately strong counterpoint to hegemonic knowledge formations, urban and otherwise, that assert, and often attempt to impose, universalizing, normalizing truth claims. The latter are problematic not only because they homogenize the complexities of social life based upon generic "legibility projects" but because the simplifications they promulgate are operationalized in spatial practice to consolidate, reproduce, and naturalize forms of domination, oppression, exclusion, and social suffering: neoliberalism, colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, authoritarianism, xenophobia, and various combinations thereof.[49]

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[47] Debates on such questions have been intensifying in recent years, in significant measure due to the productive politico-epistemological questions posed by postcolonial urban scholars regarding the limits of inherited Western, Euro-American, or North Atlantic approaches to urban theory. For key contributions and overviews, see Susan Parnell and Sophie Oldfield, eds., *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* (London: Routledge, 2014), as well as the works cited in note 34. Another useful recent reflection on such issues is Helga Leitner and Eric Sheppard, "Provincializing Critical Urban Theory: Extending the Ecosystem of Possibilities," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40, no. 1 (2016): 228–35.

[48] The concept of metrocentrism is productively developed in Tim Bunnell and Anant Maringanti, "Practicing Urban Research beyond Metrocentricity," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34, no. 2 (2011): 415–20.

[49] On legibility projects, see James C. Scott, "State Simplifications: Nature, Space and People," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 3, no. 3 (1995): 191–233.

In this context, the invocation of contextual specificity may have a powerful rhetorical, political, and substantive function: it signals a critically oriented researcher's concern to produce locationally inscribed ways of knowing that are more attuned to the underlying complexities of the social fabric, and which can thus serve a counterhegemonic purpose in academic research and public discourse alike. It is for this reason that debates on the status of what is often described as "general theory" in urban studies are often quite heated. Their stakes are at once scholarly and normative; they connect directly to the questions about positionality, knowledge, power, and possible urban worlds that animate so much of the most creative, politically relevant work being produced in this vibrant research field today.

My own commitments in such debates resonate strongly with such concerns, since they likewise emphasize the socially embedded, politically mediated character of all forms of urban theory and research, including those that are under critical examination or constructive development in this book. While my own theorization of epistemic positionality is more strongly rooted in heterodox Marxian frameworks (especially in the work of Frankfurt school philosophers and Lefebvre) than in poststructuralist or postcolonial traditions, there is arguably much intellectual common ground among them. Indeed, despite the proliferation of sometimes divisive debates that antagonistically counterpose Marxian-inspired geopolitical economists against poststructuralists (including feminists, neo-Foucauldians, neo-Deleuzians, postcolonial scholars, and queer theorists), I believe that their epistemological and political common ground springs into clear focus when their core concern with linking the critique of knowledge to the critique of power is contrasted to the instrumentalist, accommodationist, and triumphalist agendas of hegemonic forms of "authoritative" social knowledge, such as social science positivism, neoclassical economics, conventional approaches to geographic information systems (GIS), technocratic modes of policy science, or mainstream global urban policy discourse. This observation is not intended to deny, ignore, or dismiss the divergent understandings of positionality, knowledge/power, and critique, and the wide-ranging politico-normative concerns, that animate the field of critical urban studies today. The point is simply to suggest that internal divisions among critically oriented theorists, whether of an epistemological or political nature, are considerably less profound or consequential than those that distinguish them from mainstream, hegemonic approaches to social knowledge.[50]

[50] This is a broad generalization, but I believe it is a defensible one, both intellectually and politically. Clearly, the classical distinction between "traditional" and "critical" theory introduced by

At the same time, however, I reject the simplistic opposition between situated knowledges and so-called "general theory" that is still widely invoked or presupposed by many poststructuralist scholars who are concerned to deconstruct modes of interpretation that aspire, in some way, to transcend the immediate locational contexts in which they emerge. Some version of this binarism (along with several parallel dualisms: local/global, particular/universal, heterogeneity/homogeneity, fragment/whole, inside/outside, exception/norm) has framed or underpinned a variety of key debates in the field of critical urban studies over the decades, on topics such as post-Fordism, postmodernism, localities, gentrification, globalization, and neoliberalization, among others, and it continues to serve as an important reference point in many contemporary academic skirmishes around assemblage urbanism, feminist urban theory, postcolonial urbanism, planetary urbanization, and other emergent theoretical explorations. Four broad observations may serve to clarify further the specific epistemic position that grounds my investigations, arguments, proposals, and speculations in this book.

First, local and contextual conditions are not pregiven or self-evident, but are mediated through supralocal, intercontextual processes, interconnections, and interdependencies, which likewise require interpretation, conceptualization, and investigation. For this reason, the invocation of "specificity," whether with reference to locality, place, region, or context, requires systematic engagement not only with the particularities of a site but with its relational connections, articulations, and mediations, across various spatial scales. To proceed otherwise is to risk embracing an ontology of particularism in which experiential, localized, contextual, or socially embedded forms of evidence are taken for granted; viewed as privileged, uncontestable, and transparent windows into the real; or conceived as untheorizable singularities. As feminist social historian Joan Scott paradigmatically argued in the early 1990s, such neopositivistic methodologies actually weaken the project of developing histories (and, we might add, geographies) of difference, because

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Frankfurt school cofounder Max Horkheimer in the 1930s requires further elaboration in relation to contemporary constellations of social knowledge, but I believe it still offers an essential intellectual reference point on which basis to differentiate critically oriented approaches to urban knowledge from mainstream, technocratic, and market-triumphalist knowledge formations. See Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 1982 [1937]), 188–243. For a powerful contemporary reflection on such issues that also productively complicates Horkheimer's midcentury view of positivism, see Elvin Wyly, "Positively Radical," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 5 (2011): 889–912. For a strong indictment of contemporary formations of urban "science" and a concomitantly energetic call for a renewal of critical approaches, see Brendan Gleeson, "What Role for Social Science in the 'Urban Age'?," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 5 (2013): 1839–51.

they relegate the experiential, the contextual, and the local to a realm of putative facticity that is claimed to be insulated from the very processes of social (and spatial) construction and interpretive mediation that are under investigation.[51] Reflecting on the limits of purely immanentist, methodologically localist approaches to the urban question, Jamie Peck reaches a closely parallel conclusion, suggesting that they often rest upon highly problematic, naïve empiricist epistemic foundations that occlude a researcher's capacity to decipher the manifold ways in which apparently "local" and "proximate" conditions are in fact mediated through supralocal formations of power, strategy, and struggle:

> The primacy of the empirically observable and the locally proximate, at the expense of longer-distance, structural relations, can invite confusion or conflation with that class of endogenizing, internalist and victim-blaming accounts, say, of the local political "causes" of urban fiscal crises that inappropriately responsibilize or even pathologize those actors visibly on the scene. This means that recurrent urban processes—the kind that are realized, in a mediated and contingent fashion, in site after site—are unlikely to be understood or even recognized as such. Instead, the reluctance to trace common processes across multiple sites, or to acknowledge structural patterns (even in a non-structuralist way), is reflected in a tendency for such recurrent phenomena either to be (re)described, *de novo*, to be mistaken for endogeneously produced or *sui generis* formations, or to be characterized as deviations from a better-known norm. Rich description of individual city-sites substitutes for the tracing of urbanization processes across cases and places—a form of methodological isolation which can be likened to an attempt to understand fluvial dynamics by first removing a bucket of water from the stream.[52]

This is hardly to dismiss the local as an essential site and category of analysis; on the contrary, it remains, in principle, as fundamental as any other site or scale of inquiry into the capitalist urban fabric. The task, rather, is to decipher how experience, locality, and context are actively produced and understood as such, including through relationally multiscalar, intercontextual sociospatial processes that transcend the site under investigation, and that may also be generating parallel transformations, modes of differentiation,

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[51] Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–97.

[52] Jamie Peck, "Cities beyond Compare?," *Regional Studies* 49, no. 1 (2015): 177. For a closely parallel critique of localist epistemologies in science studies and social history, see Peter Galison's brilliant meditation, "The Limits of Localism: The Scale of Sight," in *What Reason Promises: Essays on Reason, Nature and History*, ed. Wendy Doniger, Peter Galison, and Susan Neiman (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 155–70.

and contestations elsewhere. In this way, scholars can more effectively avoid the methodological blind spots associated with what Saskia Sassen has aptly described as the "endogeneity trap," in which local (or regional, national, or global) outcomes are explained exclusively with reference to phenomena or processes considered to be internal to, or spatially coextensive with, that scale of analysis.[53]

Second, the notion of "general theory," especially when counterposed to an unreflexively affirmative notion of local difference or contextual exceptionalism, is an unhelpful simplification of the differentiated, dynamically evolving palette of epistemological strategies that have been mobilized by critical urban theorists to investigate the intercontextual geographies of urbanization, as well as their constitutively uneven, variegated, and restlessly mutating crystallizations across places, territories, and scales. To be sure, researchers as diverse as Geoffrey West, Edward Glaeser, and, most recently, Allen J. Scott and Michael Storper have prominently embraced orthodox, monist visions of urban theory as offering, or aspiring to offer, universally valid propositions regarding the intrinsic nature of urban processes and outcomes.[54] However, this rigidly nomothetic, monist conception of theory as a disembodied mode of scientific inquiry and as a means to produce universally valid covering laws hardly exhausts the quite varied terrain of epistemological positions through which intercontextual approaches to urban theory may be envisioned. On the contrary, across the Marxism/poststructuralism divide, there are rich seams of heterodox, nominalist, immanentist, and critical realist urban theorizing that, whatever their differences, (1) insist on the socially embedded, historically situated, and politically mediated nature of urban knowledge while also (2) aspiring to produce generalizable knowledge regarding historically constituted, constitutively uneven patterns and pathways of urbanization.[55] Historical sociologist Fouad Makki's dialectical reconceptualization of

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[53] Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[54] See, for example, Luis Bettencourt, José Lobo, Dirk Helbing, Christian Kühnert, and Geoffrey West, "Growth, Innovation, Scaling and the Pace of Life in Cities," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104, no. 17 (2007): 7301–6; Edward Glaeser, *Cities, Agglomeration and Spatial Equilibrium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Allen J. Scott and Michael Storper, "The Nature of Cities: The Scope and Limits of Urban Theory," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39, no. 1 (2015): 1–15.

[55] For useful overviews of diverse approaches to "theory" in contemporary critical urban studies, see Robert Beauregard, "What Theorists Do," *Urban Geography* 33, no. 4 (2012): 477–87; Ozan Karaman, "An Immanentist Approach to the Urban," *Antipode* 44, no. 4 (2011): 1287–306; Roy, "21st Century Metropolis"; Robinson, "New Geographies of Theorizing the Urban"; Gleeson, "What Role for Social Science"; and Peck, "Cities beyond Compare?"

combined and uneven development offers a concise summary of such a methodological orientation, which has extremely robust applications in the field of critical urban studies:

> As an explanatory procedure, this requires a back and forth movement from epochal analysis towards greater historicity and the grounding of variant patterns of social change in the inter-societal constellation of power relations. This is an approach that is inimical to schematic formulas that can be mechanistically applied everywhere against recalcitrant historical realities, or turned into fetishized abstractions that substitute the simplicity of an idea for the complexity of the world.[56]

There is, in other words, a fundamental difference between a universalizing theory and a generalizing one: the former denies its own sociohistorical positionality and claims to advance infallible, encompassing, transcendent truths; the latter, by contrast, may be grounded upon a perspectival realism that self-reflexively emphasizes its own embeddedness in sociospatial relations while simultaneously seeking to illuminate the emergent (that is, historically formed and always evolving) properties, regularities, and interconnections that structure sociospatial relations within *and* across contexts, territories, ecologies, and scales.[57] It is this latter, perspectival realist epistemology that underpins my explorations here: it insists upon the situatedness, immanence, incompleteness, and revisability of all knowledge claims while simultaneously seeking to develop historically specific concepts, methods, and modes of explanation that can illuminate the constitutively relational, structurally patterned dynamics, transformations, contradictions, and contestations associated with urbanization processes.[58]

Third, the approach to urban theorizing developed in this book is fundamentally committed to the need for abstraction—that is, to the elaboration,

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[56] Fouad Makki, "Reframing Development Theory: The Significance of the Idea of Combined and Uneven Development," *Theory and Society* 44 (2015): 491. For further reflections, see also Jamie Peck, "Macroeconomic Geographies," *Area Development and Policy* 1, no. 3 (2016): 305–22.

[57] For a productive explication of this key distinction in the context of a rigorously sociological approach to postcolonial theory, see Julian Go, *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). The distinction between universalization and generalization is also productively developed in Roy, "Who's Afraid of Postcolonial Theory?"

[58] The concept of perspectival realism is productively developed in Go, *Postcolonial Thought*. See also Gillian Hart, "Denaturalizing Dispossession: Critical Ethnography in the Age of Resurgent Imperialism," *Antipode* 38, no. 5 (2006): 977–1004; and Gillian Hart, "Relational Comparison Revisited: Marxist Postcolonial Geographies in Practice," *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 3 (2018): 371–94.

deployment, and continual reinvention of concepts that permit us to distinguish surface appearances (the empirically given; the world as it is immediately perceived) from the underlying mechanisms, relations, processes, and strategies that produce the latter. As Andrew Sayer explains, abstract concepts are an essential basis on which to "grasp the differentiations of the world . . . of individuating objects, and of characterizing their attributes and relationships. . . . Even where we are interested in wholes we must select and abstract their constituents."[59] In this sense, the process of abstraction is essential to any mode of conceptualization, since it is on this basis alone that the essential or defining elements of the entity, relation, process, or transformation under analysis can be specified as such. Crucially, as Sayer's formulation underscores, abstract concepts are not meant to provide a comprehensive description or complete "capture" of every concrete aspect of the social world that exists or that may be of analytic, political, or normative interest. Instead, such concepts offer a means of delineating the essential, constituent properties of the specific types of phenomena or sites that are being investigated.

This is one important sense in which debates on "the" urban question are recurrently taken up. Rather than arbitrarily subsuming the manifold determinations, mediations, and manifestations of urban life under a universal definition, the preposition "the" in references to "the urban question" refers to the process of theoretical abstraction upon which such debates necessarily hinge. Across diverse politico-intellectual and locational terrains, explorations of this *problematique* involve precisely the attempt to delineate the concept of the urban on a level of abstraction that helps illuminate key dimensions of emergent sociospatial relations, patterns, configurations, and struggles, across contexts, territories, ecologies, and scales. The major stake, then, in divergent theoretical approaches to the urban question is not whether they grasp the full complexity of urban life or whether, due to their abstract generality, they neglect certain issues, elements, or dynamics that may be of intellectual, political, or normative significance. Insofar as the function of abstraction is precisely to differentiate the essential, primary, or necessary properties of a particular phenomenon from its superficial, secondary, or contingent elements, such a reproach is logically indefensible. Abstraction is, by definition, a partial, one-sided depiction of a constitutively multifaceted, overdetermined social world. The salient question, rather, is whether the specific kinds of conceptual abstractions proposed by urban

[59] Sayer, *Method in Social Science*, 86. See also, foundationally, Andrew Sayer, "Abstraction: A Realist Interpretation," *Radical Philosophy* 28 (Summer 1981): 6–15.

theorists offer a "practically adequate" basis on which to demarcate, in analytically precise yet situated, historically determinate, politically informative terms, the constituent properties of the urban question as it is expressed, contested, and transformed in and through sociospatial relations.[60]

This brings us, finally, to a fourth core element of the approach to the urban question elaborated in these pages. The abstractions proposed here to theorize the capitalist form of urbanization are understood not simply as ideal-typical proposals for more precisely delineating the constituent features of urban spaces, processes, transformations, and struggles; they also represent historically specific expressions of the abstract spatial practices that underpin, animate, and result from the capitalist form of urbanization itself. In this sense, the abstractions mobilized here to theorize the urban question as a scale question and the *problematique* of planetary urbanization are understood as "real abstractions": their emergence and intelligibility as modes of thought are directly connected to the de facto modes of sociospatial abstraction that are unleashed, generalized, and entrenched through the urbanization process under capitalism.[61] As Marx foundationally argued in the *Grundrisse*, a specific mode of abstraction associated with the commodity form is produced and naturalized through the value relations of capitalism; its hallmark is to impose a logic of calculation, quantification, interchangeability, and profit maximization upon diverse regimes of concrete social practice, whether in the sphere of production, reproduction, politics, science, or everyday life.[62] As Łukasz Stanek has expertly demonstrated, a parallel line of argumentation underpins Henri Lefebvre's theorization of the urban as a specific modality of *spatial* abstraction that is likewise consolidated and generalized under capitalism, especially in the wake of twentieth-century processes of global industrialization.[63] This entails not only the construction

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[60] The concept of practical adequacy is from Sayer, *Method in Social Science*, 86.

[61] On the concept of "real" or "concrete" abstractions, see Stuart Hall, "Marx's Notes on Method: A 'Reading' of the '1857 Introduction,'" *Cultural Studies* 17, no. 2 (2003): 113–49; and Alberto Toscano, "The Open Secret of Real Abstraction," *Rethinking Marxism* 20, no. 2 (2008): 273–87.

[62] See, classically, Karl Marx, "Introduction," in *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin Books, 1973 [1857]). For extensive discussion of this text and its possible uses for critical social theory, see Hall, "Marx's Notes on Method."

[63] See Łukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). See also Chris Butler, "Abstraction beyond a 'Law of Thought': On Space, Appropriation and Concrete Abstraction," *Law Critique* 27, no. 3 (2016): 247–68; and Alex Loftus, "Violent Geographical Abstractions," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33 (2015): 366–81.

of specifically capitalist forms of territorial organization to facilitate, accelerate, and expand the accumulation process, but the continual creative destruction of such territorial configurations as they are rendered obsolete through capital's own relentless pursuit of new horizons of profitability (see Chapter 2). In precisely this sense, as Lefebvre emphasizes, the spatial abstractions produced through the capitalist form of urbanization are not simply oriented toward homogenization, the obliteration of concrete differences; they also continually push toward the hierarchization, fragmentation, and (re)differentiation of the very sociospatial configurations that, at least under certain spatiotemporal conditions, permit expanded capital accumulation to occur. Indeed, the spatial abstractions that permeate the capitalist urban fabric actively feed upon and intensify sociospatial differentiation while dramatically, often violently, transforming the broader territorial frameworks in and through which local "specificity" and "differences" are articulated.[64]

Thus understood, the need for abstract (and, by implication, intercontextual) modes of conceptualization in the field of urban theory is not simply a methodological orientation or a generic ontological commitment; it flows directly from the monstrously complex challenges of deciphering the contradictory dynamics of urbanization under capitalism, which entail the production of a world-encompassing spatiotemporal grid for the production and circulation of capital while also accentuating the strategic importance of distinctive, place-based conditions and ongoing processes of territorial and scalar differentiation within the maelstrom of capitalist expansion. How to understand a regime of sociospatial practices that is, simultaneously, generalizing and particularizing, equalizing and differentiating, valorizing and devalorizing, explosive and implosive, connecting and fragmenting, assembling and yet pulverizing? How to decipher a mode of global territorial development that requires, simultaneously, the systematic consolidation of colossal, increasingly planet-spanning investments in relatively fixed, immobile infrastructures for the metabolism of capital *and* their recurrent dismantling and reconstruction in pursuit of the grim imperative of endless, profit-driven growth?

Abstractions are not the only methodological tool through which to analyze such tendencies and countertendencies, but they arguably represent an indispensable—necessary but not sufficient—basis on which to decipher

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[64] See Christian Schmid, "Specificity and Urbanization: A Theoretical Outlook," in *The Inevitable Specificity of Cities*, ed. ETH Studio Basel (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2014), 282–97. A version of this argument also underpins Neil Smith's classic analysis of capital's dialectic of equalization and differentiation in *Uneven Development*.

key dimensions of the capitalist form of urbanization and its kaleidoscopic, often catastrophic, sociospatial and ecological consequences. Clearly, abstract theoretical maneuvers must always be complemented through concrete-complex analytical strategies, including those that are attuned to place-based conditions, and that thereby illuminate the specificity and even contingency of emergent histories, strategies, and struggles. I would insist, however, that "real" or "concrete" abstractions, including those proposed in these pages, represent an essential, if constitutively incomplete, element within any critical approach to the capitalist urban fabric, its developmental tendencies and countertendencies, its explosive contradictions, and its variegated consequences. Without them, we risk losing sight of the broader "context of context," or *metacontext*, in which urban life emerges and evolves, and which co-constitutes its very conditions of possibility in the modern world through, as Jamie Peck notes, "substantive connections, recurrent processes and relational [modes of] power."[65]

Just as importantly, the real abstractions mobilized in these investigations are intended to underscore the historically specific, growth- and profit-oriented mode of industrial development that so powerfully animates and mediates the urban process under capitalism. As such, they are also meant to facilitate another important task of critical urban theory, that of demarcating the possibilities—extant, latent, anticipated, imagined—for what I have elsewhere termed "*alter*-urbanizations": alternative pathways for the production and collective appropriation of the urban worlds upon which planetary life now depends.[66] In this sense, perhaps paradoxically, my commitment to abstract modes of urban theorizing is intrinsically connected to a radical political project, that of envisioning the prospects for postcapitalist urban futures, even amid the continued consolidation of speculative, hyperfinancialized, aggressively profit-based and militarized patterns and pathways of urban restructuring across the planet as a whole.[67]

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[65] Peck, "Cities beyond Compare," 162. On the notion of a "context of context" and the systemic production of institutional and spatial variegation, see Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck, and Nik Theodore, "Variegated Neoliberalization: Geographies, Modalities, Pathways," *Global Networks* 10, no. 2 (2010): 182–222.

[66] See Brenner, *Critique of Urbanization*. Several powerful inroads into such a project are elaborated in David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012); Stavros Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons* (London: Zed, 2016); and Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (London: Zed, 2017).

[67] For a powerful meditation on the connection between abstract theorizing and the politics of emancipation, see Theodor Adorno, "Resignation," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 289–93.

What, then, is the location of theory? How can the vibrantly heterodox politico-intellectual currents that together constitute the field of critical urban theory illuminate the interplay between abstraction and specificity, patterned structuration and immanent emergence, path dependence and path shaping, across the capitalist urban fabric? From my perspective, the most generative contemporary approaches to critical urban theorizing occupy a space of contradiction: they strive to grasp, in immanent, historically specific ways, the generalizing, patterned dynamics of capitalist urbanization, across places, territories, ecologies, and scales, while also attempting to illuminate the intensely variegated, contextually embedded, and dynamically emergent sociospatial relations in which urban worlds are lived, imagined, contested, appropriated, and transformed. And, through the mobilization of diverse epistemological strategies, they seek to confront this task while also reflexively locating themselves—their core categories of analysis, methods, research questions, and politico-normative orientations—within the very fabric of urban history, struggle, and mutation they aspire to illuminate.

Certainly, as postcolonial urban theorists have effectively argued, the project of "locating" theory requires a relentless critical reflexivity regarding the ways in which even the most abstract categories of urban analysis are mediated through contextually embedded, place-specific experiences of urbanization.[68] It is for this reason that any reflexively located approach to critical urban theory must remain ever open to the prospect of conceptual destabilization and reinvention through the exploration of diverse urban "elsewheres," not as incommensurable particularities that somehow lie beyond the scope of theoretical analysis, but precisely as an impetus toward new modes of conceptual generalization and new spatial vectors of urban comparativism.[69] At the same time, however, the studies assembled in this book suggest that the challenge of locating urban theory is not exhausted by that endeavor, but requires parallel strategies of conceptual reinvention that critically interrogate the underlying metageographical assumptions that necessarily underpin all forms of urban research, no matter where they are situated in concrete locational terms.

Here, reflexivity entails locating a theoretical framework not only in relation to the specific contexts of its emergence but with reference to the abstract

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[68] For a parallel exploration of hidden, place-based influences on putatively "general" theory, see Thomas Gieryn's study of the Chicago school of urban sociology: "City as Truth-Spot: Laboratories and Field-Sites in Urban Studies," *Social Studies of Science* 36, no. 1 (2006): 5–38.

[69] This argument is forcefully articulated in Robinson, "New Geographies of Theorizing the Urban"; and Roy, "Who's Afraid of Postcolonial Theory?"

conceptual demarcations regarding the spatial site, imprint, and impact of urbanization that frame the very project of urban studies, whether in the social and ecological sciences, the spatial humanities, or the planning, policy, and design disciplines. In this sense, reflexive engagement with questions of location in urban theory is never simply a matter of revealing the contextual influences on processes of concept formation; it always also entails the ongoing critical interrogation of the modes of conceptual abstraction through which the urban is delineated, defined, visualized, mapped, and analyzed as a distinctive kind of space that requires sustained investigation.

From this perspective, then, a reflexively situated urban theory requires attention not only to an immense variety of locations around the world as potentially generative sources of theoretical innovation and comparative insight, but equally, a continued critical interrogation of the relentlessly churning, multiscalar geographies—economic, political, cultural, ecological—that underpin, animate, and result from the planetary metabolism(s) of capitalist urbanization. These dimensions of reflexivity in critical urban theory are not only compatible, but can mutually reinforce and animate one another in productive ways. As the location of urban theory continues to mutate in relation to the restlessly transformative, contradictory, and intensely contested dynamics of urbanization it seeks to decipher, we do indeed need to construct new geographies of urban theorizing. That project will clearly require the systematic exploration of diverse "elsewheres" that have previously been peripheralized, black-boxed, or ignored in debates on the historical and emergent geographies of our rapidly urbanizing planet, whether in the global South, the postsocialist world, or the planetary hinterlands to which I direct attention in this book's final chapters. Just as importantly, the project of critical urban studies will also require continued engagement with the urban question itself—whether as a scale question; a question of place-making, territorialization, or network formation; a *problematique* of implosion/explosion; or otherwise. The collective work of critical urban theory thus continues to hinge, in essential yet constitutively incomplete ways, on the development, deployment, refinement, and continual reinvention of abstract concepts—of the urban, of urbanization, of the urban fabric, and, ultimately, of *alter*-urbanizations.