Creating Space
An Interview with Warren Magnusson

By the Editors of Interstitial Journal

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Globalization has catalyzed a rethinking of urban space, as we become more accustomed to the idea of living in a "global village." At the same time, the processes of globalization are a continual site of contestation, impacting different populations in sometimes inegalitarian ways. To your mind, how has urban space changed as a result of globalizing processes? Has globalization revitalized the politics of space?

There are moments like the Olympics or 9/11 when people feel like they are living in a global village that includes everyone, but it's hard to sustain a sense of universal connectedness for long. Of course, many of us have relatives, friends, acquaintances, and collaborators scattered all over the world. As a result, there are probably millions of global villages of different sorts: imagined communities that are at once intimate and global, which overlap with one another in complicated ways. That's possible because most of the world is integrated into the same urban system: in a sense, we all live in the same city, which encompasses the globe and transcends any particular country, society, or religious community. Most people have only a hazy sense of this, but it's surprising how many people who seem to be quite parochial are nonetheless strongly connected to people on the other side of the world.

I don't know how much of a rethinking of urban space has occurred as a result of globalization *per se*, but what's happened to cities since the nineteenth century has forced people to think about the urban differently. For various reasons, cities began to spread out into the surrounding countryside and to grow enormously in population. The most advanced industrial countries were already predominantly urban more than a century ago, and every country that hasn't yet reached that point is going in the same direction rapidly. The pattern is not just that cities have been getting bigger and spreading out into the countryside; they have been linking up with one another regionally and globally. Global integration began about five hundred years ago when the Europeans broke out of their

little corner of the world, established global trading routes, conquered new territories, and formed them into global empires. We have been living in the era of globalization since 1492. It was in and through cities and the connections established between them that a new world order was created. The latter has evolved and changed over the last five hundred years, but it has become more completely and obviously urban at every stage. At one point, the most notable aspects of globalization were agrarian–tens of millions of people crossed the Atlantic as settlers to create new farms or were carried there in slavery to work on plantations, and everywhere else local agriculture was completely re-organized, all of which was in the service of markets organized in and through cities. Once agriculture was re-organized on industrial principles, most of the rural labor force became redundant. The effect, as Marx pointed out a long time ago, has been to create a huge reserve army of the proletariat. It's not just that people have been flooding into the cities, but that the cities have spread out and linked up with one another so that "urban space" is present everywhere. Even in the most remote villages, people are using cell phones, checking things online, and participating not just in a globalized economy, but also in globalized cultures, religions, and politics.

Although there is still a tendency to identify "urban space" with big cities and to consider it purely in terms of the built environment, that seems anachronistic to me. Think of the iconic American entrepreneurs of our time: Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, Steve Jobs, and Mark Zuckerberg. Not one of them lives in Manhattan or works there. If you wanted to analyze the "urban space" in which they built their businesses, you'd have to begin with places like Redmond, Washington, or Omaha, Nebraska–not the sort of places many people have in mind when they start talking about urban space. Even Jobs and Zuckerberg operated in Silicon Valley rather than San Francisco, an area which is about as "suburban" in the American sense as you can get. The truth is that the sort of urban space we can see in Manhattan or Shanghai is only one of its contemporary forms: important to be sure, but not necessarily typical. If we want to understand urban space as a whole we have to think of it globally, and once we do that it seems obvious that we have all been drawn into the same urban system, which occupies the whole of the earth. Remote villagers are living in urban space just as much as Manhattanites. It's just that the local character of that space and the terms of access to it differ from what Manhattanites think of as normal.

Globalization is just one aspect of what has been going on over the last five centuries. That should be obvious, but we need reminding. Things are always being reorganized for the benefit of some people at the expense of others. Of course, there is often the promise that we will all benefit in the long run–which is sometimes true–but the short- and medium-term costs fall heavily on those whose lives have been disrupted by the arrival of new settlers or *conquistadores*, the spread of new diseases and toxic pollutants, the commercialization of traditional social relationships, and so on. Not only is globalization a continual site of contestation, but the impacts on different populations are *always* inegalitarian. We are aware today of the suffering that stimulates migration in and from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania. The migration generally has an urban direction and it is broadly similar to earlier migrations from the European countryside. For those

who are *forced* to migrate, which is the typical thing, the terms on which they move are always very difficult. We can see the effects everywhere in the world today.

To ask how urban space has changed as a result of globalizing processes is really to ask how the modern world has evolved. You can't understand changing spatial relations in abstraction from everything else, and urban space is ultimately equivalent to the space of human civilization. It's hard to separate the impact of globalization from the effects of technological change, changing patterns of production and consumption, shifts in political loyalties and so on. Many people think of the driver of recent changes in terms of the reorganization of capitalist business since the 1970s: increasingly automated systems of production and distribution organized on a global scale; free flows of finance capital; global marketing of branded products; competitive sourcing of labor, raw materials, and technology. I don't dispute this, but I think that the reorganization has to be understood as a political project to break the power of organized labor in the advanced industrial countries and to create new markets everywhere else. Moreover, *that* political project has fit with the ambitions of various states and forced other states to fit their ambitions to it. It has also fit with the ambitions of certain political movements, notably the ones associated with neoliberalism and religious fundamentalism, but perhaps also with environmentalism, feminism, and human rights. When I think of all this in terms of the *longue durée* of globalization, I see another iteration of things that were happening back in the 1500s, which we understand in terms of imperialism, colonialism, and so on. If I go even further back in time, I begin to see patterns that were already in place when the first cities were established ten thousand years ago. The era of globalization is the most recent phase of the development and spread of urban civilizations. To put it a different way, globalization–like capitalism, scientific rationalism, and the modern state system–occurs in the context of the ongoing urbanization of human life. It's not something that happens *to* the urban, so much as something that happens *within* it.

Changes in urban space help to produce globalization, which in turn impacts the character of urban space. Some things are quite obvious, such as the decline of established industrial areas, especially in the rich countries: something that coincides with the development of new industrial areas elsewhere, and the creation of new spaces–mostly in the rich countries, but also in selected places in the poorer countries–for research and development, marketing, management, finance, recreation, and conspicuous consumption. The prosperous parts of cities are coming to look more and more similar, and they are linked with one another by means of a common infrastructure of transportation and communication. Moreover, there is a common culture of conspicuous consumption and display. There also are similarities in the conditions of life for the disadvantaged, who of course are the majority. That's why we can speak of a "planet of slums" and all know what that means. I don't have much to add to the descriptions of "the citadel and the ghetto" that are already out there, but I would want to emphasize that what we can see on the ground is only a small part of what is involved in the ongoing reconfiguration of urban space. If the urban is our milieu globally, as I think it is, then the economic, social, cultural, and political relations that characterize it are the most

important dimensions of the spatial order that we inhabit. What we see in the way of built form is not only a product of those relations, but is governed by them. We have to understand those relations if we are to make any sense of the way the built environment is inhabited, how people are affected by those forms of inhabitation, and how they respond to the people and things that they encounter.

Of course, as I have already indicated, urban space is not just what appears near the center of big cities. It is the space we inhabit globally. I think that we need to learn how to think of global urban space politically. It's not easy. We have to ask ourselves two sets of questions that are intimately related to one another. First we have to ask how we are governed. When we do, our attention is drawn immediately to the state, which claims ultimate authority over everything and everyone within its bounds. We have come to think of government as something that the state does in its various guises: local, regional, national, supra-national. From this perspective, the crucial political questions all seem to revolve around the state: How should it be organized? What authority should it have in relation to ordinary people or other organizations? How are the relations between states to be regulated? On the other hand, we don't get far with such an analysis before we recognize that how people are governed is not just a matter of how the state is organized or how it relates to other states. People are also governed by cultural, religious, educational and other organizations that claim authority over them. Businesses are especially powerful in this regard, because people depend on them both for employment and access to most of the goods and services that they value. On the other hand, strong loyalty to a cause or a group or just to an idea of some sort can lead to profound subordination. If we are to be better governed, it's not just a matter of changing the state. This leads to the second set of questions, which are about the way we can respond politically to the way we are governed. Again, the state looms large because it has been conceived and presented as the answer to our political dreams. A state is a continuing political order, which is supposed to allow for everything to be regulated in accordance with law and in principle can be organized as a civic republic or liberal democracy that allows us all to have our say in government and to be treated equally. That's the lure of the state and, hence, of *democratic* citizenship. The problem is that the state can never be what it promises to be. It can never order things in the way that we desire because there are always independent sources of power both within the state and outside it, and no one has complete control over the outcomes. As much as anything, the contemporary politics of space is about persuading us that the state is both the source of our problems and the solution to them: things aren't going right, it's said, because the state is doing the wrong things or is badly organized. We're supposed to mobilize to put the state right. If we follow that route, we are bound to be disappointed because politics is much more complicated. Fortunately, there are other opportunities that we can take.

Rarely is space as such an explicit political issue. When it does become an issue–as when the Nazis demanded *lebensraum* for the Germans–the consequences can be quite nasty. I'm not sure what it would mean for the politics of space to be "revitalized," but questions about territory–which are always political issues–have changed in important ways thanks

to globalization. The people who manage the state system and the global economy (who are not all the same people, although they collaborate closely) would like to manage population flows so that businesses get the workers they need, growth is stimulated without overburdening the housing stock or the transportation system, and states expand without losing their internal coherence. What's apparent, however, is that the most powerful states or blocs of states are having great difficulty in controlling their own borders and as a result their cities are becoming more diverse. Elsewhere the flows are even more dramatic, since it is hard to keep people from moving into cities within their own countries. It's an unstable situation. Many cities, especially in poorer countries, are almost overwhelmed by recent migrants. In the rich countries, there are some nasty reactions to the incomers, although fortunately there is also a more positive response in the form of an embrace of multiculturalism. It's hard to know how things will go.

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I think that the crucial question is political space. Ever since the modern state began to take shape, it has been presented as the privileged locale for politics: the place where our political attention should be directed and where our political ideals could, in principle, be realized. That's not simply an illusion. States are very important; they are not likely to go away and it's not clear that they should go away, since they do enable things that would otherwise be difficult to accomplish. And yet states are not the be-all and end-all politically. We are not governed entirely by states and our political problems and opportunities cannot be fully understood if we adopt a state-centric perspective on everything. The political space that confronts us is actually very complicated. In many ways, it is extremely constrictive, but it is not fixed in the way that many people imagine. Every new political movement creates a new space for itself, and in so doing reconfigures political space more generally. That's one of the crucial lessons of modern politics. It is not static. I have always been impressed by the way people invent new modes of political activity. New identities are created, problems are redefined, connections are opened up, challenges are articulated–nothing remains entirely the same. The question now is: can we respond positively and creatively to the opportunities that a globalized urbanism presents or will we surrender to atavistic authoritarianism and crude commercialism?

The environment is a frequent topic of globalization discourses, with many theorists and activists expressing concern about the relationship of development to sustainability and the protection of natural resources. Can we continue to draw a sharp distinction between "urban" and "natural" space in an era of heightened mobility?

I wouldn't want to draw a sharp distinction between the urban and the natural, but I don't see how we can do without the idea of a natural world, a world that existed long before humans did and that will never be entirely under human management and control. We have to remind ourselves that we are relative newcomers on this earth and that human efforts to manage the natural environment for our own benefit have often had deleterious and utterly unexpected consequences. People were trying to control things long before they became urbanized–for instance, by burning off forests–but that effort has become more and more intense and truly global in scope in the last few hundred years. It seems that every day we are learning about forests being destroyed, deserts created, habitats for plants and animals erased, toxic chemicals spread about, and global epidemics and infestations triggered. Climate change is just one aspect of the human impact on the biosphere. We can't get a handle on the impact of what we are doing unless we retain a strong sense of a natural world that was there before us. So-called "nature reserves" are important as a means of understanding how things were or could be in the future.

Of course, we can't get around the fact that we have now occupied the whole of the earth and that even the nature reserves are under our oversight. What we reserve or preserve is, up to a point, up to us. Although we can't control everything, we can decide to leave some things alone and to restore some of the things we have already destroyed. We can also make an effort to open areas of human settlement to greater natural diversity. Having more greenery in cities is a good thing, but we also have to think carefully about the relation between plants and wildlife there and in the surrounding countryside. I am not expert on these matters, but I share the sense that we have to keep thinking about the way things would be without us (or before we started doing the things we are doing now) in order to regulate our activities appropriately. That involves using some concept of the natural. I think we can do that without falling into the trap of thinking that human life–and urban civilization–is somehow unnatural. Cities are now a natural and necessary part of the human habitat, but we ought to be wise enough to realize that we need to control ourselves if we are not to precipitate even more species destruction or adverse changes in the biosphere than we already have.

The concept of "natural resources" is problematic. It's part of the tendency to treat the natural world as what Heidegger called a "standing reserve" for human activities. It's better to think in terms of natural limits rather than natural resources because we remind ourselves that our capacity for controlling things is very limited, that our actions are bound to have adverse consequences that we do not anticipate, and that we have to be quite cautious when we undertake new activities or extend our activities into territories where humans have not done those particular things before. Obviously, we have to worry about the sustainability of our own way of life, but we also have to think about the sustainability of other species and ecologies. In this context, it is an important and valuable feeling that people have when they get away from other people and are in an environment where the human presence is scarcely noticeable. I think that experience is extremely valuable and it's one that we should be trying to make more readily available, although how we can do that without using even more fossil fuel than we do now is not apparent.

One of the more familiar ways of talking about mobility is in terms of accelerating economic transactions and the so-called "flattening" of space. Another mode of thinking critically about changes in spatial formations involves remapping power relationships. Given that multiple trajectories exist for rethinking space and place in today's world, what can you say about the common tendency to think of space in terms of fixed spatial locations and concatenations thereof, as well as our capacity to craft meaningful boundaries to demarcate sovereign territories?

I don't find the concept of "flattening" very helpful, but it's obvious that the speed at which we can do things now is much greater than what it was when I was young. It's not only economic transactions that have sped up. Everything is faster and the physical distance between places is a much less important factor in what can be accomplished. People anywhere in the world can read this interview as soon as you put it up on the Web. I can follow events in real time–watch video and hear commentary–no matter where they are occurring. At least in cyberspace, we are all co-present–or at least we could be if it weren't for all the barriers that we throw up around ourselves and our activities. Again, I am not an expert on all of this, but it seems to me that the development of this space in which people can and do interact regardless of their physical locations is a sign that the global city is becoming *one*–not one country, but one city in a real sense.

That unification was already implicit in the globalizing processes that began in the 1490s, but it's something that we now experience on a day-to-day basis. It's hard to ignore, especially for young people who find themselves living more and more of their lives on-line. A city is a place where people who are very different from one another can go about their daily lives in close proximity without necessarily interfering with one another, or communicating in any meaningful way. A city normally is divided into many different neighborhoods, some of which are almost entirely self-contained, and it enables many different sorts of activities, which can also be quite self-contained. Nonetheless, people are sufficiently proximate that they can come together very quickly for good or ill. That's more or less what cyberspace, the space of everyday global life, is like. It has many different neighborhoods, some of which are like gated communities. Access to the good things available is by no means equal and some people–in fact, a large proportion of the world's population–are effectively excluded from most of the best things. The inequalities of the past have been replicated and extended in cyberspace. In that respect, as in others, the virtual space that we now inhabit as part of our daily lives is an extension of urban space, or, to put it otherwise, an extension of the global city in which all of us live.

As your questions suggest, any spatial relationship is a power relationship. Mapping power relationships is difficult, not least because "mapping" is at best an awkward way of analyzing things. We have to be careful not to make a fetish of spatiality. Trying to map my relations to all the people I interact with is an interesting exercise, but it's not as revelatory as some of the other things I could do, such as explaining the nature of my profession, the character of the university, the wealth and income to which my position

has entitled me, the nature of my family, the privileges associated with my Canadian citizenship, the way the market–including the land market–works to provide me with opportunities (and deny them to others), the prestige associated with my education and position, the public institutions established to assure my security and provide me with a variety of goods and services, and so on. Maybe a very clever person could put all this on a map, but I'm not sure how helpful that would be. We actually know quite a lot about the way power is configured in the modern world and the analytic tools that the various academic disciplines have developed are all useful to some degree. We just choose to ignore a lot of what we know because it makes us uncomfortable. It's good for me to remind myself that I am in a very privileged position that I would be loathe to give up.

The processes that are bringing us all closer together don't necessarily lead to greater harmony and solidarity. We know that from our experience of cities, yet that experience is also a source of hope because cities work much better than we might expect, given that they throw so many strangers together. If people were as nasty and selfish as some commentators suggest, no city would ever work, but most of them do–after a fashion, at least. If I were into mapping, that's what I would try to map: how do people manage to make things work and what forms of government and self-government do they develop when they are confronted with difficult problems, including profound differences with their neighbors? There's much to be learned from the mundane history of particular cities: how clean water was made readily available, proper drainage achieved, wastes disposed of, the risks of fire and chemical contamination controlled, safer markets, workplaces, and streets established, facilities for the sick and the elderly provided, better care offered to children. If we paid more attention to this, we would have a better understanding of what's required for a high quality of urban life and of the sorts of initiatives that have improved things in the past.

I tend to think of the world as a global city, and one of the advantages of that is that it helps me to see the political possibilities of the present more clearly. Exercises of state authority affect cities, but cities have their own dynamics–cultural, social, economic, and above all *political*. There are always opportunities to accomplish things politically, no matter how the state or states concerned are disposed. Such political accomplishments are a matter of government and self-government: governing ourselves so that we think and behave differently, and extending some measure of "government"–which might just be a matter of setting an example and exerting some gentle social pressure–over others. I think especially of the way gender relations and environmental sensibilities have changed during my lifetime. There have been hugely beneficial effects of those changes, at least in my part of the world, and what we usually call "governments" have not been the leaders. To the extent that they have acted, traditional governments have just been responding to popular pressures. When I think of those achievements in relation to the longer history of cities, I become aware of how much has been achieved as a result of initiatives that originated outside the state–ones that gave us schools and kindergartens, hospitals and health clinics, parks and playgrounds, wilderness reserves, public health and safety regulations, and so much else. I am not arguing against state action; state action is often the culmination of

such initiatives, and rightly so. Nevertheless, the long history of cities is a reminder that much can be achieved, indeed has to be achieved, by means other than state action.

It is in this context that I worry about what you describe as the tendency to think of space in terms of fixed spatial locations and concatenations thereof. The most obvious effect of this politically is to see the world in state-centric terms: France is here, Russia is there, China is farther, South Africa or Brazil is off in the corner, and of course the United States is always at the center. That's how we tend to map the world and more often than not we read our political problems and opportunities off that map. We follow the games, or more serious armed struggles, in which people contend for control of states, and then we track the twists and turns of inter-state relations. Once you catch the bug, it's easy to spend your life following such things. It's what most political scientists and political junkies do. They are not entirely deluded. This stuff is important and it has a huge impact on our lives, but it's not the be-all, end-all of politics. You just have to ask different questions to see that. What's being done to address the AIDS epidemic and by whom? What measures are being taken to control deforestation in the tropics and prevent desertification? Who is addressing the widespread destruction of ocean life? What's being done to provide for people displaced by war, famine, and unemployment? How are the poor managing to survive and create new economic opportunities for themselves? What measures are being taken to protect children and provide them with an education? How is the use of toxic chemicals being regulated? What is being done to reduce, reuse, and recycle the wastes we produce? How is the spread of dangerous weapons being controlled? What is being done to discourage violence and encourage more peaceful ways of life? The questions are endless, but they all lead us–or should lead us–to recognize that the relevant actors are varied and that things are being accomplished despite the fixities of the modern world. There's more mobility, more flux than we often imagine. Stuff gets done in cities despite many obstacles. The same is true on the scale of the global city, the urban civilization that encompasses the whole world.

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Where am I in relation to, say, AIDS or the Marburg virus or the latest flu that emerges? In a way, I am in the same place as everyone else in the world, a place of vulnerability. Of course, I am protected in ways that a person in a Congolese village is not, but we share a common interest in controlling whatever disease is threatening people generally. If the relevant authorities and health professionals are to mobilize effectively, it's more a matter of them coordinating their actions than of issuing orders. The orders, which are of course necessary, flow from the coordination, rather than the other way around. In this context, people have to recognize that we live in one world, we share a common space, and people– and other animals and organisms–move about in innumerable ways that can only be

partially controlled. There has to be cooperation and coordination that goes very deep, which involves people governing themselves and one another in appropriate ways. In such a context, thinking of ourselves as living in fixed spatial locations rather than in what Castells called a "space of flows" is likely to be disastrous.

I don't think that the problem of our time is to craft meaningful boundaries to demarcate sovereign territories–or if it is, it's only so in a negative way. Modern nationalism is all about crafting meaningful boundaries so as to create sovereign territories. It hasn't run its course, but I think that our experience of the global city allows us to see that there are other ways of being together and achieving things politically. One of the movements I find hopeful is the one that suggests that people's nationality should not be a factor in whether they should be allowed to participate in the government of the cities where they live. If you live some place, you should have the same rights as everyone else. That's a good democratic principle. On the other hand, it challenges the claim of nation-states to define citizenship. Something similar happens on a global scale when people claim the right to address problems regardless of national boundaries. Again, I think this is healthy. We need to be reaching out to other denizens of the global city and making common cause with them, so that we can push the authorities to do the right thing.

*In your **Politics of Urbanism (2011)**, you problematize the idea that politics must be premised on the state, where hierarchical structures of authority and action are taken as a given. In its place, you argue for the multiplicity of "seeing like a city." How might this paradigm shift be accomplished and what type of politics emerges when we view the world as composed of cities, metaphorically and realistically? Are there places in which such a politics is being practiced?*

In a way, a politics of this sort is being practiced everywhere, but people rarely understand what they are doing in those terms. For instance, there has been a lot of emphasis on "civil society" since the 1970s. This takes many forms, but the common idea is that the key to a good politics is a robust civil society, understood as one in which there are many voluntary organizations that address themselves to public issues and services, and where people are engaged in pursuing the public good apart from the state. This goes back to earlier notions of a "civic culture" or a "public" that were in wide circulation earlier in the twentieth century and that echo discussions that we can find in thinkers like Tocqueville and Mill. Where people are torn is on the question of the state. Many of the analyses that stress the importance of civil society are really about how to organize people–or how people organize themselves–to secure the sort of state they deserve and keep it functioning properly. That's how Tocqueville and Mill thought about these matters, and that's how many of the contemporary advocates of civil society think of things. Yet, we all know, and it's the main point of most analyses of civil society. that what happens in and through the state is only a small part of what is required for a beneficial public order. People also have to do things on their own and through various collaborative activities, some of which may be mediated by the state but others of which are meant to bypass the state or create alternatives to it. This leads to the thought developed by anarchists and libertarians that we might be able

to do without the state or, to follow a Marxist line, that we might somehow be able to incorporate state functions into a revolutionary new society in which the state withers away and everyone is fully self-governing.

My problem with these analyses is that they replicate our obsession with the state. Society or civil society is always conceived as the "other" of the state and blessed with the virtues the state lacks. In particular, there is the supposition that what happens in society is more natural, freer, more in tune with what people actually want than what happens in the state. This is the delusion that modern liberalism has fostered. It leads us to celebrate civil society, keep worrying about how to make it more robust and self-sufficient, and look suspiciously at any sign of the growth of the state. The underlying assumption is that if the state is not the solution, then it must be the problem. In my view, that is the wrong way of thinking about things.

One of the advantages of "seeing like a city," as I put it, is that it draws our attention away from the problem of the state and forces us to think about the concrete issues we face without using the crutches offered by a state-centric analysis. The concept of "civil society" is one of those crutches. We use it when we want to hobble around in a place that is outside the state and yet not governed by the capitalist economy. That's an imaginary place where all sorts of good things can be conjured into existence. The trouble is that the state, the capitalist economy, and many other things–powerful religions, established and evolving cultures, old and new forms of kinship and loyalty–are everywhere present, including in the places that we like to imagine as separate and apart. So, if we want to think realistically, we can't go on imagining that the state is here, the economy is over there, family life is in a third place, and so on. That way of thinking of things is another aspect of what you refer to as "the common tendency to think of space in terms of fixed spatial locations." If instead you keep the city foremost in your consciousness, you can begin to get a better sense of the co-presence of everything: the involvement of the state in society, the social in the economic, the economic in the cultural, the cultural in the international, the international in the national, the national in the local, the local in the global, and more. All of these pairs can be spun and recombined endlessly. That reflects the fact that what appear to be separate spaces are only separate in our imaginations.

One of the effects of "separate spheres" thinking is that it obscures the political motivations, political impacts, and political forms of the activities that we encounter in daily life or in which we engage ourselves. If you are caught up in state-centric thinking–as all of us are, at least some of the time–then you suppose I am referring to the way various activities affect or are meant to affect the state. Clearly, there are such effects and intentions, but even in their absence the activities concerned are still political: they relate to the conditions of possibility for people's lives. When some company shuts down a factory in one place and expands its operations somewhere else, it is making what it will call a business decision, free from political motivations. Such a description is legitimated by the idea that business is one thing and politics is another. There are separate spheres, according to this ideology. When the people who are adversely affected object to what is

being done, they politicize the issue, drawing attention to the way their families are being hurt, their community destroyed, and so on. In effect, they deny that business decisions can be made in a vacuum, with just the bottom line and shareholder value to be considered. What makes the decision political is not that it affects the state–it may or may not. It's that it will affect the lives of people who are dependent on the factory for employment. To say that what is presented as a business decision is actually *political* is to open things up and raise all sorts of relevant issues about who has the right to make such decisions, in accordance with what process, and with what aims in mind.

When people become more engaged politically, it's rarely because they want to run for public office. There are issues that concern them and they want to work with others on those issues. In a way, we are always engaged politically, whether we are aware of it or not, because we do things individually and with others–in our families, on the job, amongst friends and neighbors–that have an effect on the way life is for people, including ourselves. In this broadest sense, politics is all-pervasive, and it conditions social, cultural, and economic activity. On the other hand, that is not usually how we think of what we are doing. Part of my argument is that we need to become more self-conscious about what we are and what we do politically. The state-centricity of our political thinking gets in the way of any realistic sense of how we and others actually engage with the world politically, and how we and others find solutions to our problems. The whole weight of liberal ideology, which encourages us to think of ourselves as individuals with narrowly circumscribed motivations operating in distinct spheres of activity, blinds us to the ways in which we are connected to one another and how our distinct spheres of activity overlap and interact. To make sense of the world we actually live in, we have to shake these illusions and address problems in more appropriate terms.

I think many people do this, but often in a confused and rather apologetic way. One thing I find interesting about municipal politics is that it often draws people in who claim to be non-partisan and lacking in higher political ambitions. They just want to solve problems or help their community. Sometimes this is just a façade, but often it expresses something genuine–a wish to get beyond artificial political divisions and find practical solutions to the problems at hand. There's often a similar spirit among people who get involved in social movements of one kind or another, or who are activated by some crisis or highly oppressive situation in a neighborhood, workplace, profession, community, activity, or country. An interesting consequence is that people who thought of themselves as apolitical (if not anti-political) can become highly politicized, but often not in the way that they identified as political before. Sometimes they just go on denying that they are political beings when it is quite apparent that they are. I suppose that part of what I am saying is that people shouldn't be afraid of being political: it's a good thing. What's worse is when people who have great political power–like the ones who control companies or great pools of capital–deny that they are making political decisions when they evidently are. We shouldn't let them get away with that ruse; however, to call them to account we need to recognize that our own actions are also political.

To think of the city rather than the state as the object and milieu of our political activities is to be faced with some immediate challenges. The contemporary city is unbounded and seemingly disempowered, in that it seems to be detached from or subordinate to the state, capital, and a variety of other organizations and movements that call themselves cultural, religious, or social. Many people are frustrated by the fact that municipalities and other local authorities are strictly subordinated to the state, and so have little capacity to address big problems. There is a way of turning this around, however. If we think of a municipality as an organ of local self-government that exists in a qualitatively different political space–one that cannot be mapped onto the state, the economy, civil society, or anything else–then we can begin to get a sense of a new and larger set of possibilities. From the perspective of the state and its courts, the municipality is simply a creature of the state that gets to do as much or little as the state allows. Yet, we don't have to adopt that perspective. To cope with the challenges of urban life, we need many organs of local self-government, big and little. The state holds itself out as the organ of local self-government that must have authority over all the others. This is an idea that we need to resist by using organs of local self-government, including municipalities, more creatively. Nongovernmental organizations, social movement organizations, civil society organizations–all of them have done some great things, but they are too self-limiting. We need to develop organizations that claim more of the powers that have been reserved to the state, powers of regulation and taxation especially. Municipalities offer a model for that. Progressives generally have been afraid of action of this sort because they like the idea that the state has the power to crush reactionary local authorities and provide for the rights of minorities or extend more services to the poor. There is a rather touching faith in an institution that is normally under the control of the reactionaries themselves. We need to have a little more faith in democracy itself–that is, in people's capacity to organize themselves to address their own problems, and, in so doing, to set an example for others.

If the paradigm shift to which you refer is to happen, it will be in the way that Thomas Kuhn suggested: the old paradigm just doesn't seem to work anymore. There are signs of that now, in that there is great popular restlessness that finds expression in a profound alienation from the state and its supposedly democratic institutions. Many people refuse to vote or to take an interest in the state and its politicians and governments because they think that the whole process that supposedly lets ordinary people have control over the direction of things is just a fraud. Why bother when the fix is already in? The banks will be bailed out and everyone else will be asked to tighten their belts to pay for it. We'll be asked to give up our "entitlements"–unemployment insurance, pensions, health care, education, and all the other things that are required for social welfare–in order to ensure that capital is secure and that it has the conditions and opportunities for investment that it wants. So far, the reaction to this has been mainly for the benefit of the right, as movements and parties have emerged that lash out at a variety of imagined enemies: migrants, foreigners, bureaucrats, do-gooders, lazy-good-for-nothings, and anyone or anything that seems at odds with traditional cultural and religious norms. Such irrationalism is to be expected when there is so little to offer on the other side. The great political projects of the twentieth century–the welfare state and planning in the public

interest–have been largely abandoned and what has emerged to replace them does not have the same widespread popular appeal. A great deal of work will have to be done to get people to see that there are other possibilities.

For me, the great hope is in democracy itself: the slow, patient work to develop our own, and everyone else's, capacities for self-government. The multiplicity that I see in the city– both in particular cities and in the city writ large, the world as a whole–is one in which there are innumerable efforts on the part of different sorts of people in different kinds of places to tackle the problems they confront. This happens regardless of whether there is any sovereign authority to bail people out. When people are activated in this way, they begin to colonize the state or to resist the way the state has already been colonized by other forces. I am most sensitive to the way that the state has been colonized by capital, but I realize that other modes of colonization are also at issue. Exercising our right to the city means exercising our right of self-government and that right has to be localized in ways that are consistent with the principle itself. If democracy has any meaning, it is that the people have to organize themselves so that they become self-governing, in the double sense of making their own decisions and acting responsibly toward everyone and everything else. Democracy is about empowering the people, not lording over them, and it's certainly not about enabling some people to lord over others. When I look back at the development of the welfare state in the twentieth century–or indeed at efforts to use state power to contain, regulate, or displace private capital–I am conscious of all the problems of excessive bureaucracy, but I am even more impressed by the way in which an expanded public sector that was sensitive to people's needs began to develop. What we need is not a smaller public sector, but a much bigger one that allows for profound democratic engagement with the issues that concern people, like health care, education, public safety, environmental protection, housing, transportation, and recreation. These are the kinds of tasks that have long engaged people in cities, and we need to address them without regard to the strictures of neoliberal ideology.

"The ruse of neoliberalism is the claim that restraining what the state can do in relation to capital will somehow enhance the capacities of ordinary people. That is nonsense, a lie told so repeatedly and so forcefully that it begins to sound like the truth."

Let me stress this. Neoliberalism is anti-democratic. It is also statist. What it demands of the state is that it disallow or undercut any form of democratic self-government that threatens the rights of capital. The rights of capital are fundamentally inconsistent with democratic rights. They are clearly the most important of existing "entitlements." Thanks to these entitlements, a tiny minority of people are empowered to decide on everyone else's fate. The ruse of neoliberalism is the claim that restraining what the state can do in relation to capital will somehow enhance the capacities of ordinary people. That is

nonsense, a lie told so repeatedly and so forcefully that it begins to sound like the truth. We begin to shake free of this illusion when we see that the size and scope of the state is not the issue. The issue is what we require to live better than we do now. That may mean more taxes and regulations, but those things are secondary to what we want and need to accomplish. For instance, anyone who thinks seriously about the issues realizes that the pattern of urban development in North America is not a good one. Our cities should be more compact. We should rely more on public transportation–and on walking and biking– and less on private automobiles. We should have more and better housing opportunities for people on low to moderate incomes. We should control the amount of waste we produce and recycle and reuse as much as possible. The tasks are apparent and what's pernicious is the claim that we can't do these things because any form of action will trench on existing property rights, involve more taxes and regulations, or challenge the authority of governments that want to act in the interests of private capital. A more robust assertion of our democratic rights is required to break through these strictures and realize our right to the city.

You describe cities as "self-organizing," in that the emergence of order for a city is not predicated upon the actions of a sovereign authority. If cities are complex systems, does the self-organization of the city ever conflict with the attempted ordering of a sovereign? If so, does this help to explain the urban and political challenge posed by movements like Occupy Wall Street?

Assertions of sovereign authority are always in and against practices of democratic self-government. The claim to sovereignty, which we now associate with the state, also occurs in many other guises. People claim that the rights of the individual or that the rights of property are sacrosanct, or that any and every exercise of religious authority is legitimate. They also say that every nation is sovereign. Sovereignty claims take many different forms, and they are often disguised as assertions of absolute right. The thing about democratic self-government is that it always involves a delicate balance between one person's or group's rights and another's–or, to put it otherwise, between everyone's rights and responsibilities. To be self-governing does not mean getting to do exactly what you please. It means assuming both the right and the responsibility for governing yourself. What that involves is always subject to reconsideration and the reconsideration cannot be just about what I think. It's also a matter of what other people think. There are no hard and fast rules about any of this because the order in which we live is neither static nor predictable. Everything is always in flux and we often have to act before we have a full understanding of the situation. Sovereignty claims are always premised on the idea that things are given and that, therefore, this or that person or group of people has the right–in fact, the duty– to decide what should be done. The move from, "This is the way it is," to "This is who gets to decide" is always strained–God may exist, but does it follow that the Pope or some preacher, mullah, or guru gets to tell us what to do? But I want to make a more fundamental point, which is that we never actually know what we are dealing with because things are constantly changing in unpredictable ways.

The delusion from which most of us suffer is that things would be fine if only the right people were in charge. As I have already noted, we tend to have a touching faith in sovereign authority. The sovereigns we now confront may not be doing much for us and may in fact be oppressing us, but some day, somehow, we are going to have the right sort of sovereign (or at least the right sort of constitutional order, which amounts to the same thing). That's the illusion that's fostered by much contemporary political theory, as well as by many of the practices of contemporary politics. What I have found interesting about the Occupy movement is the apparent willingness to set most of the assumptions of modern politics aside–assumptions about the sanctity of private property, the rights of capital, and the duties of the state with respect to law and order–in order to address issues more directly. Among other things, this means re-posing the problem of democracy in terms of how decisions are to be made, what rights and duties people are to have, how the streets and squares are to be used, what provisions are to be made for food and housing. The fragility of the occupations and their limited appeal to people in the workaday world indicate how much work there is to be done to develop sustainable democratic practices. Nevertheless, the movement is significant in that it touches a chord with everyone who is frustrated by a "democracy" that is not really a democracy at all.

The self-organization of the city is not the same as democratic self-government. When I use the term "self-organization," I am simply referring to the fact that some sort of order will emerge as the result of the interaction between different organizations, authorities, and movements, no matter how diverse or antagonistic their purposes are. People adjust to one another and to the situations they face. The order that emerges may not be what anyone wants and may not conform to any principles that we might want to lay down, but it's likely to allow some people to get at least some of what they want. What's interesting about cities is that the proximate diversity that they enable–and in fact require for many purposes–seems to facilitate various forms of cooperation. This is not a hard and fast rule; it's easy to think of many contrary situations. Nonetheless, it happens often enough in a variety of situations to encourage the thought that people will work a lot of things out for themselves if they are allowed to do so. Sovereignty plays are just that: attempts to overcome differences by imposing an order of some sort. Sometimes, the plays work after a fashion, but often they complicate a situation by generating new resentments, stifling initiatives, and putting a façade of order over something that is actually quite different. If the price of democratic self-government is that we have to rely more on self-organization than on sovereign authority, then I am not too worried. What emerges is likely to be more a matter of self-organization than anything else anyway and the more we can encourage *democratic* self-government, the better.

If I were trying to explain a movement like Occupy Wall Street, I would focus on the gap between what was done or what *could* be done by "the sovereign" and what many, if not most, people actually wanted. People certainly didn't want to give a lot of money to the banks–let alone to bankers getting multimillion dollar bonuses–to resolve the financial crisis. Yet, "the sovereign" claimed that was the only way out of the mess that the banks had created. The simplest person could perceive the irony. What the discourse of the

sovereign revealed was that the putative sovereign was *not* sovereign. Even in concert, so-called sovereign states could not resolve the crisis in a way that accorded with the wishes of their constituents. They had to act against those wishes in order to prop up the banks and they had to prop up the banks because there was no obvious alternative– certainly not one that could be put in place in a matter of days or weeks–to the financial system that was the lynchpin of the entire capitalist system. Another way of looking at it would be to say that the capitalist system, rather than the state or the state system, is the actual sovereign. But that's misleading because there is no center of authority in the capitalist system in the way that there is in a state. It dominates us because we can't quite figure out how to do things otherwise. We are worried about the upheavals involved in any transition and we can't quite see what the transition would involve. Thus, capitalism–which is always presented to us as this wonderful thing, and has the force of the state (and much else) behind it–is accepted as something that is better than nothing. Occupy Wall Street symbolized the general longing for something better, but its weakness also attests to a generalized attachment to the present order of things, which seems to many people to be better than nothing. For many people, Occupy actually symbolized the futility of politics because it illustrated that what people actually want cannot be secured by the states that are supposed to have sovereign authority in relation to capitalism. But this is to fall into the trap of thinking that politics is all about what can be secured through the state. The state is not the main problem and it cannot of itself generate the solutions we require. The Occupy movement showed that in the end, it's all down to us. We must assert our right to democratic self-government.

Relatedly, the concept of self-organization is often associated with free market economics, in which the marketplace is said to promote individual freedom by promoting best competitive practices and private interests. Yet, as we've seen with the most recent financial recession, deification of the market can have detrimental human costs. Are there other ways of conceiving of self-organization that foster human interaction? To that end, what implications might more democratic forms of self-organization have for urban planning?

I don't believe in so-called "free market economics," but I think that there is much to be learned from how the system works. The key point is that a market can order people's activities so that they cohere. Nobody has to decide on the ultimate goals or impose a plan that secures coordination. People will adjust to the realities of the market, to what can be bought and sold. Markets certainly work for some purposes. The mistake is to think that a market is the only mechanism other than authoritarian rule for securing social cooperation. That's simply not so. The examples are so ubiquitous that we hardly notice of them. I often remark to my students on the miracle of people getting on a bus in an orderly fashion. How does that happen? It's not a matter of market coordination, nor is it really a matter of the rules that the bus company or the municipality lays down or the authority that the bus driver has. The rules and the authority are there, but what makes them effective is that people are already of the view that there is a certain way to behave when getting on a bus. Taking your turn, accommodating the elderly and the disabled, making allowances for children and their parents–for the most part, people do these things

because they think that they are appropriate, not because the rules require them or the bus driver tells them. There is an ethic of bus use, as it were. Advocates of the market say that the basic principles of free exchange are understood by everyone, regardless of culture. That may be so, but I would say that there are other principles of social cooperation–like the ones that enable us to ride buses together–that also are generally understood and that enable us to live together in great numbers in cities.

In a way, cities are schools of social cooperation because they present so many different problems that people have to sort out, largely on their own. What you call the deification of the market only works when people forget about all the other ways in which they adjust to one another to facilitate common goals, arbitrate differences, make room for new things, preserve what's established, deal with threats and inconveniences, and generate new forms of solidarity and community. The market is there, but it's part of the taken-for-granted background of urban life. We have to make friends, find nice things to do, overcome problems that occur in many different settings, and generally work out how to live in a way that is personally satisfying, but nonetheless fits with what is going on around us. The adjustments we make to one another are continual. The more successful those adjustments, the more likely it is that we will trust other people sufficiently to make further adjustments and agree on common purposes. There is a benign cycle in this regard, which of course can be disrupted in many different ways. Some of the work that Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues have done on common property regimes is quite revelatory in this respect because it suggests that people can and do work things out in ways that are socially and environmentally beneficial. There is no magic solution, but there are good-enough ways of doing things that people work out, especially when they recognize that they are social beings and not just a bunch of selfish individuals. Selfish individualism is an attitude inculcated by market society, but it can be and often is offset by other attitudes that arise from our understanding of our need for one another.

If we want models of how to do things, we should look to the collaborative activities that actually produce social goods. How do people get a new recreational sports league going, for themselves or for their kids? How do they provide for the hungry or the homeless? Clean up a beach? Clear a new hiking trail? Encourage the use of local produce? Discourage pesticides and herbicides? Get people to clean up after their dogs? Sort out disputes between neighbors? Get teenagers involved in things other than drugs and trouble making? I'm using homely examples as a reminder that a lot of this is already being done, on principles that are quite familiar to us all. I don't have a comprehensive list, and I wouldn't want to say which principles are the most important, but even off-hand I can note a number of important things: toleration, mutual respect, openness, listening, negotiation of differences, collaborative decision-making, social equality. In some situations, hierarchical authority comes into play, but that often creates problems in the long-run. In terms of ongoing effectiveness, things seem to work best on inclusive egalitarian principles–*democratic* principles that suggest that one person is as good or as important as the next and that everyone is entitled to have a say in what is done collectively. That's the context in which people realize that, although much can be

achieved by voluntary action, problems can still arise because a stubborn few refuse to abide by agreed norms. Formal rules and enforcement mechanisms then seem like a natural extension of what is achieved by voluntary cooperation.

In a way, urban planning is what democratic self-government is about. We don't live as isolated individuals: we live in a global urban society. Our challenge is to figure out how to do that in a better way than we are doing now. "Planning" simply suggests that we ought to look ahead and try to be rational about what we do. With respect to land use, there is really no choice because there are so many different interests and values at stake with respect to any particular plot of land that there has to be some process to arbitrate the differences. In so far as the process encourages a long-term view and a broad perspective, that is good. Unfortunately, urban planning as it is usually practiced is just a supplement and a corrective to the main business of urban development, which is about private capital investment. The initiative rests with the investors, and the public authorities make their plans in light of what the investors want–something that the investors claim is just dictated by market realities. Again, there is a problem in that ordinary people may be reluctant to participate in a planning process because they sense, quite correctly, that the fix is already in. If what they want is different from what "the market" or the investors require, then it's unlikely to happen. Why bother to get involved? There is a further problem in that things never do go according to plan, even when the investors get their way. There are so many different sources of initiative and authority in a city, and things are always changing so rapidly, that it's impossible to get on top of everything and make things conform to a plan. On the larger scale of the global city, the situation is even more complicated, uncontrollable, and unpredictable.

"The challenge in terms of democratic self-government is to resist colonization and open up new possibilities for public action that are not stifled by the artificial divide between state and society."

One aspect of the idea of the state is the claim that it ought, in principle, to be possible to plan for the development of an entire country: to figure out what kind of environmental protections are required, the kind of health and education systems needed, transportation and communication systems, a legal system, and so forth. The presumption is that the state has sufficient powers to organize its own activities without deferring to external pressures and make others adjust to it, rather than the other way around. Much of what the state does is urban planning writ large. If we reject the myth of sovereignty and the misleading debates about the growth of the state (or its retreat), we can begin to see what's important, which is that the state has been colonized by activists who want better education, health care, environmental protection, transportation, and solutions to other problems. There is an ensemble of crucially important activities under its umbrella, each of which has to be envisioned, planned, organized, and administered as well as possible under the

circumstances. All of these activities involve actors other than the state and the state itself is far from a unitary actor. In fact, it is an ensemble of authorities and movements. Although the state is typically colonized by capital–just as the ordinary urban planning process is–the degrees and forms of such colonization vary. The challenge in terms of democratic self-government is to resist colonization and open up new possibilities for public action that are not stifled by the artificial divide between state and society.

Too often people think of urban planning as something that has to be depoliticized. In fact, there are huge pressures in this direction, especially from those who want every plan to conform to market rationality and to put the rights of private property at the heart of every set of arrangements. Questions about the market and private property have to remain on the table if urban planning is to be democratic. A planning process can and should be one that enables poor and marginalized people to articulate their needs and suggest ways of improving things. What comes out of it may not be something that can or should be enforced to the letter, but it's possible to agree on various initiatives that will be viable, that will be sufficiently robust to survive as conditions change. That's the point of the exercise: not to gain complete control over the future, which is impossible, but to develop new practices and facilities that will improve urban civilization locally and globally.

Finally, critical political theory, to date, focuses heavily on discursive change as the primary mechanism of political change. One of the problems with this line of thinking, however, is that it recapitulates forms of domination it purports to critique by suborning ideological subjects to the constitutive authority of "master theorists," who reveal ideological problems to the masses. Does your proposition of a city-based politics that entails a multiplicity of authorities, both macropolitical and micropolitical, also refocus political analyses on the material relations that undergird systems of power?

There are many forms of critical political theory that spin off into strange places that are accessible only to the few, but I'm not sure that I would agree with your characterization of their theories of political change. If I had to generalize, I would say that most theorists are quite uncertain about how the changes they favor might occur. Some of them would say that fundamental change, at least of a positive nature, is quite unlikely. Others just have a vague sense of how things might get better and try to offer some ideas that they think would be helpful. A generation or two ago, there were plenty of people who had nice, tight theories of revolutionary change. Those theories were often at odds with one another, but they each had internal coherence. Now, people find it harder to believe in any particular doctrine and the theories that had purchase (in some quarters) in the 1930s or the 1970s have few adherents. What we get is not so much a dominant view among critical political theorists as an array of critical ideas that touch on one aspect or another of our current situation. I might add that relatively few of the critical theorists of note today think of themselves as critical *political* theorists, because they have come at issues through literature, psychoanalysis, historiography, moral philosophy, or something else that would have been conceived a generation ago as being quite removed from the main

political struggles of the day. People have turned increasingly to theorists of that sort because they despair of finding guidance in more explicitly political analyses.

If the masses have been suborned to the constitutive authority of master theorists, it's not been to Zizek, Butler, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, or anyone else I would identify with critical political theory. In the U.S., Ayn Rand, Milton Friedmann, and F.A. Hayek have been much more influential. Rawls and Habermas have also had their followers. Generalizing about other countries is difficult because the patterns vary so much, but the influence of seriously critical thinkers has been quite circumscribed, felt mostly among graduate students in the humanities and social sciences. What the graduate students complain about is that they don't know how to go from the abstruse theoretical debates to the concrete problems with which they want to engage. There's often a longing for a master who would say, "Do this, not that." It's to the credit of contemporary critical theorists, however they think of their work politically, that most of them draw back from offering such specific advice. The serious ones offer critical thought. They don't hold themselves out as today's Lenin. Or even as today's Marx.

That said, I do think there's a problem in that theorists have given far too little attention to politics as such. There is an arrogant assumption that politics does not require serious analysis, that we can work out what is most significant about it by doing some sort of psychoanalytical, linguistic, or philosophical analysis that treats politics as epiphenomenal. What happens in critical theory just mimics what happens in mainstream theory. There is a tendency there, as well, to treat politics as epiphenomenal and look to economics, sociology, geography, or history to explain it. I want to insist that politics is politics. It's always underdetermined by other things. If we want to understand it, we have to begin from the activity itself, which always involves multiple actors with widely varying interests and values and widely varying understandings of who they are and what their situation is. All these actors are operating in a situation that seems and is quite opaque and unpredictable. How things will work out in the end is anyone's guess, but everyone has to act regardless. It's never quite clear what principles of conduct are relevant in the situation, because it's not quite clear what the situation is or how anyone could get any better understanding of it. Unless a theorist appreciates that this is what politics is like, his or her theories are likely to be largely irrelevant. People will hear or read them quizzically and perhaps give them a respectful nod, but they will engage politically in terms that seem to them to be much more relevant to the matters at hand.

If there is any value in my own theoretical work, it is in the way it refocuses attention on politics generally conceived. For me, politics *is* a material relation. It's what undergirds the economy, culture, society, and all the rest. It's what enables capitalism, patriarchy, ethno-centrism, racism, as well as the things we think are good. But these things are not off there in some special place where we can deal with them at one remove from everyday life. They are in our everyday lives, and they are sustained politically. Coming to consciousness of how they are sustained, not least by our own activities, is the hardest thing. If we stop obsessing about the state, we can begin to see that the city in which we live is a political

order produced and contested in innumerable ways by many different actors, some of whom are immensely more powerful than others. To challenge these inequalities in the name of democracy or humanity as such is, for me, the main political task.