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City Life: Glorification, Desire, and the Unconscious Size Fetish

Adam Okulicz-Kozarynⁱ and Rubia R. Valente

Abstract: Urbanization is one of the most astonishing transformations in the history of our species. Social scientists have spilled much ink trying to understand what cities do to humans. While there has been some psychoanalysis of cities (e.g. Pile 2005a), there is certainly room for more given the enormous importance of the process. This chapter argues that an unconscious size fetish plays a key role in alluring people to the city. Although in many ways the city provides many freedoms to urbanites, it also entraps them in city dreams and illusions. Urbanization has been typically depicted as an overly positive phenomenon, especially by economists; there is, therefore, a need to highlight its shortcomings and problems, and to understand why people prefer it regardless. In addition, this chapter argues that cities have much in common with capitalism, and that perhaps both do more harm than good.

Keywords: Urbanicity, Urbanization, City, Fetish, Desire, Psychoanalysis

Introduction

In this chapter we conduct a psychoanalysis of the city, analyzing how people, propelled by unconsciousⁱⁱ size fetish, prefer city life to towns or rural areas where they would be much happierⁱⁱⁱ (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2015). The use of psychoanalysis is appropriate to understand people's attraction to the metropolis since the city, after all, is a state of mind (Park 1915). When discussing the allure for cities, Park (1915) argued that motives derive from "something more fundamental and primitive" that contributes to attract people from the security of their homes in small towns into the big, booming confusion and excitement of the city life. The importance of understanding this process is even more relevant today as the globe is rapidly urbanizing: its cities are swelling and their buildings are being erected beyond what is imaginable.

The lure to great cities is due in part to people's desire for power and status: to live in a city often carries a feeling of superiority over those relegated to live in the outskirts of town or rural areas.

City dwellers desire such elevated status and aspire to work in the tallest towers. There is therefore an unconscious size fetish at play: the city is desired because of the power and prestige represented by its size. The city makes urbanites feel more powerful and successful. Concurrently, there is also shame and guilt in the city: glowing towers stand next to working-class row houses; gentrification is pushing out the working class and poor. The city is thus full of inequalities and riven with a range of social desires. The tendency is that the greater the city, the greater the inequality and the size fetish. Size fetish emerges from imbalance: urban-rural and within-urban inequalities among people and built environment; and it remains largely unconscious. People do not really understand their attraction to the city, which is often attributed to amenities, opportunities, and quality of life. Consumers explain conspicuous consumption in a similar way: it's the craftsmanship, attention to detail, and high quality of the product that makes them buy it. Yet in both cases it is mostly about dominance-subjugation, demonstrating that by possessing it, one is superior to others.

Another force propelling urbanization is the accumulation drive (c.f., Chapters 8 and 11). Different than desire, which is impelled by consumption, drive involves the ultimate compulsion to repeat unceasingly and accumulate for the sake of accumulation (Kapoor 2015). The expansion of capital generated by such drive is often referred to as the "grow or die" or GOD imperative^{iv} (Schweickart 2009; Kallis 2011). As people move to the cities and accumulate capital endlessly, they are instrumental in the growth of cities. The bigger the city, the more the average citizen accumulates, produces and consumes, whether it is goods, resources, or ideas (Bettencourt et al. 2007). Interestingly, when cities grow they magnify the best and the worst of their residents by a factor of 1.15, i.e., when the size of a city doubles, the rate of everything in the city increases by 15 percent. This includes good indicators such as GDP, wages, patents, number of educational and

research institutions, but also negative factors such as crime, diseases, traffic congestions, etc. (Bliss 2014, Bettencourt et al 2010, Bettencourt and West 2010, Bettencourt et al. 2007).

Urbanization of the world is for the most part a new phenomenon — in 1950 only 30 per cent of the world population lived in urban areas, but by 2050, this number is estimated to be 80 per cent (Bettencourt and West 2010). Yet, most people do not realize why they urbanize — and our contention is that there is an unconscious size fetish and conscious city desire and glorification alluring people.^v Academics manifest these phenomena in their writing (Jacobs 1970, 1985, 1993, Glaeser 2011). Jacobs's (1970), for instance, glorifies the city and claims that cities play an essential role in the process of economic development. Moreover, she argues that cities ultimately create a healthy global economy. Glaeser (2011)'s book title says it all, "Triumph of the city: How our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier." The "greatest invention" of course is the city. Thus, while scholars write books of worship to the glorified cities, common people manifest their unconscious size fetish and desire for cities in their actions by recent mass urbanization.

In what follows, we start with a brief overview of the notion of freedom as it applies to urbanization and the development of the city. Then, we turn to psychoanalysis and size fetish in the city. Finally, we discuss the implications for specific cities.

The City and Freedom: Illusion of Freedom and Dream Factory

One of the fundamental contrasts between rural, small towns, and metropolitan areas relates to the increased perception of freedom experienced in the cities (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2015). The small town sense of community, with the intimate face-to-face personal contact and neighborliness is replaced

by impersonal and tenuous ties in the cities (Wirth 1938). Concurrently, the cities' inherent variety of people, occupations, opinions, and interests generates intellectual disputes which lead to broader and freer judgment and a greater inclination to and appreciation of new thoughts, manners, and ideas (Weber 1899). Whereas rural, small towns tend to favor more conservative views, cities favor liberal thinking and tend to be more progressive and accommodating. In recent decades, cities have become an oasis of freedom for blacks, women, LGBTQ people, and any subjugated or nonconformist types (Fischer 1982). An old saying, "city air makes men free" (Park et al. 1984, p. 12) remains relevant today.

The city is also a dream factory, where most dreams emerge from unconscious size fetish (Pile 2005a). Such dreams often capture the imaginary of power, dominance, success, wealth, and social status. Concretely, they manifest as aspirations of having an office space at the Empire State Building or owning an apartment at 432 Park Avenue. Other urban dreams also stem from size fetish—materializing into the pursuit of intellectual superiority, physical perfection, and aesthetic beauty. These dreams can be achieved, or at least felt, by simply living in a great city, or better yet, experiencing life at its very core. Cities foster dreams and phantasies of status and prestige (c.f. Chapter 9). Dreams often boil down to superfluous accumulation of money and goods. A notable example is conspicuous and wasteful acts of consumption, typically exercised to flaunt prosperity and success (Veblen and Banta 2009). Consumption dreams are instigated by billboards and shopping windows abounding in cities (Pile 2005a), while marketing campaigns incites and commoditizes dreams for the masses (Roberts 2011).

The city is also a money making machine. Modern cities were started by capitalists who were trying to squeeze as many workers as possible near their factories with the purpose of maximizing their profits

(Engels 1987). The urbanite is but a tiny cog in the enormous machine called city.^{vi} Incidentally, the industrialization period that gave rise to the modern city has been labeled the “machine age.”

Currently, we are witnessing the “2nd machine age” where the steam engine is being replaced by the computer (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014). Urban sweatshops were moved to Asia and replaced by sanitized towers. The conditions of the working class, however, remained the same: workers are still squeezed in tiny spaces and labor long hours. Psychoanalytically, the contemporary city is a result of the old accumulation drive and new consumerist desire. Many urbanists (Jacobs 1993, Zukin 2009) and psychoanalysts (Pile 2005a) romanticize the city life. City dreams are elusive, however. Since most urbanites do not fulfil their ultimate dreams, fantasizing may lead to depression, frustration and disappointment (Oettingen et al. 2016). More fundamentally, city dreaming is an illusion, an escape from the brutal reality of urban life. Urbanites are therefore easy prey to this delusion and do not realize that they are no longer free.

The city is also antithetical to sensuousness, or the liberation of senses. Sensuousness is sensations plus affection (Marcuse 2015). Simmel (1903) observed that city destroys sensuousness by overloading the senses and leading to a *blasé attitude*. In the city, sensuousness is obliterated by excess information (e.g., ads), noise, light, and air pollutions. Thus, industrialization and labor specialization, exemplified in cities, can extinguish spontaneity and joy (Park 1915, Park et al. 1984; in contrast, see Chapter 7).

Size Fetish

If city life subjugates its people to capitalism, entrapping them in city dreams and in a false sense of freedom, one may ask, “Why are people still attracted to the city?” The lure to great cities is in part a

result of unconscious size fetish—an inanimate object of worship. For Freud, fetish is a form of substitution for the male genitalia (Freud 1927). Fetish emerged from *verleugnung*, or disavowal, a reaction caused by psychological emasculation or castration (Freud 1929). The young male experience shock upon discovering in the presence of young female differences in genitalia and disavows it. Thus, disavowal denotes “a specific mode of defense which consists in the subject’s refusing to recognize the reality of a traumatic perception” (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1974, 118; see also Chapter 3). In the city, urbanites do not have actual power (except capitalists), and hence, they may fetishize the city to disavow their subjugated status.^{vii} Like Freud’s patients (1927), urbanites seem to be satisfied with their fetish and even praise it. One of Freud’s patients had as fetish the luminous shine on the nose, for urbanites, the fetish is often the luminous shine of city towers (see Chapter 9).

How does the unconscious size fetish externalize and materialize in the city? A delusional feeling of fulfillment and success can be felt in the city, which is clearly exemplified by incredibly powerful people (e.g., Bill Clinton, Oprah, Pope Francis^{viii}) whose presence resonates across the city space—fulfillment and success is felt just by being spatially close to them. Famous and successful people seem to shine with their power: it feels empowering to be close to them because of the association of oneself with that power. This energy, however, seems to stem from common people in the first place, as powerful people nurture their energy from other people’s admiration. Some of this process may be situational—if one meets a person and does not know that person’s status or value, there is less energy difference between them. For instance, in university settings, there is a power distance between professors and students. During lectures, professors shine and glow with power, but when professors leave the classroom to perform ordinary tasks, such as buying coffee at a Starbucks (where students might work) there may be a lower energy difference. Cities and their

towers are less situational – their statuses and values are fixed in one place—they tend to consistently glow with energy and power. Being spatially close to the city, especially in its core, has a similar effect to meeting a celebrity: it creates feelings of awe, excitement, and even ecstasy. Approaching the city, when you see its skyscrapers dominating the horizon, and its area spreading as far as the eye can see, is similar to the excitement you feel when approaching a powerful person. There is (delusional) fulfillment, too.

Size fetish can be experienced as *jouissance*, or enjoyment-as-excess. There is a certain euphoric, brute, mechanistic, and possibly neurotic joy (see Chapters 3, 6, 7 and 8). Similar pleasure stems from hoarding and profit-making. Another materialization of urban size fetish is having a feeling of pride and superiority (Martinson 2000, Balducci and Checchi 2009). Citizens of New York, Toronto, Milan and Beijing, are consistently proud of their cities, irrespective of their conditions (in terms of income, education or health status) and irrespective of indicators of quality of urban life (Balducci and Checchi 2009). Their perception is arguably shaped by unconscious size fetish, and although they feel proud of living in these great cities, their actual life conditions are less satisfying.

What do urbanites disavow? Their own limitations, notably their lack of power—they deny their smallness and insignificance—and they fetishize city size as a substitute for their own lack of power. Sense of empowerment and the aversion to the real lack of power co-exist in the urbanite's mind, being a tiny cog in the city machine. The problem is that the power derived from the city size is illusory, or rather delusional—alike the power derived from working for a large corporation—deriving power from its size and wealth as a substitute for one's insignificance and poverty. Part of the illusion is the belief that one will achieve success. This belief is especially vivid in the US—Americans disavow

inequalities believing they will eventually fulfill the fallacy of the American Dream (Corak 2013, 2011, 2004).

What do urbanites disavow collectively? City problems, notably poverty (Jargowsky 1997). These problems are hidden in the shade of glowing city towers. The common imaginary of cities like New York, Tokyo, and London, is their spectacular skyscrapers, status and glamour, and not their social problems such as inequality or homelessness. If anything, city problems by means of contrast, may amplify city greatness: towers shine brighter against working slums and wealth is felt more strongly against poverty (Firebaugh and Schroeder 2009).^{ix} In addition to common city problems, the “smallness” of places outside of the city is also disavowed.

Cities attract people, partly because many people strive for power and status. Size fetish is actually similar to Marxian commodity fetishism or domination by things (Marx 2010). As if the big size of a city has any intrinsic value and bestows its value upon urbanites. Big cities have long been centers of broadly understood power (economic, political and cultural), and if anything, the prominence of cities has been increasing recently (Khanna 2016, Hanson 2015). Therefore, going to the city in search of power seems to make sense. For instance, people often boast about living in Washington DC, because they can meet powerful people, and hence, feel powerful by association. All power centers are found in cities. Fashion center, for example, is in New York or in Milan, the second largest city in Italy. Entertainment centers are in Los Angeles and in Las Vegas (both the largest cities in their respective states). Fundamentally, people seem to embrace large cities in a similar way—they treasure status-conferring or status-signaling things like SUVs, McMansions,^x and other grandiose material possessions; their size often confers or suggests potential power, prestige, strength, success, and prosperity. Not surprisingly New Yorkers are proud to be New Yorkers (Balducci and Checchi 2009).

Similar pride is found in other countries' largest cities. Countries often compete to boast the world's tallest buildings, while their people compete for space in such buildings. For example, the temporal satisfaction of having an office at the Empire State Building in New York City elicits a sense of omnipotence, power, and superiority. Figure 1 better exemplifies this idea—imagine having an office suite at the One World Trade Center, the tallest skyscraper in the western hemisphere. This rationale can extend to one's desire to live in cities—isn't it a status symbol to live in Manhattan or in San Francisco?



Figure 1: One World Trade Center, New York.

The tower is, in Freudian terms, a gigantic phallus. In psychoanalysis, the 'Phallus' is a symbol of authority and omnipotence (see Kapoor 2014), and so are arguably city towers.^{xi} Psychoanalysis sees the unconscious manifested in slippages of language or "bloopers" (Kapoor 2014). For example, in a Republican presidential debate after being challenged by Sen. Marco Rubio about the small size of his hands, businessman Donald Trump confidently reassured that the insinuation about the size of his manhood was false, "And he referred to my hand, if they're small, something else must be small, I guarantee you there's no problem." It would certainly be unfitting for the owner and builder of so many great towers, to have a small or even average manhood. Although, unconsciously, he might indeed be compensating for something he feels insecure about. On September 11, 2001, when the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center came down, Donald Trump was quick to tell a radio interviewer that his 71-story building in 40 Wall Street was now the tallest tower in downtown Manhattan (WWOR-TV, 2001).

Buildings like the One World Trade Center (shown in Figure 1) may make economic sense because people are often willing to pay to have access to its space due to size fetish. In general, building up large scale towers is much more visually impressive than constructing a low building or than building down (underground construction): towers are phallus-like and underground constructions are womb-like. Thoreau wrote about pyramids, an ancient version of towers:^{xii}

"As for the Pyramids, there is nothing to wonder at in them so much as the fact that so many men could be found degraded enough to spend their lives constructing a tomb for some ambitious booby, whom it would have been wiser and manlier to have drowned in the Nile, and then given his body to the dogs. [...] whether the building be an Egyptian

temple or the United States Bank. It costs more than it comes to. The mainspring is vanity[...]”

Human obsession with towers is ancient. The Tower of Babel in the Book of Genesis of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) was also about power—humans tried to organize themselves and become more powerful, so they built a city and erected a tower: “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves” (Genesis 11, New International Version).

When first meeting someone from a big city, pride is often heard in their voices announcing that they are from London, New York, São Paulo, Shanghai, or some other great city — their face glows and their eyes are wide open. Psychoanalytically, they are experiencing *jouissance*. Conversely, when meeting a person from a little town, an apologetic tone is noticed in their voices. To illustrate, imagine a person from New York meeting a person from rural South New Jersey. Figure 2 shows some possible facial expressions displayed at this hypothetical meeting. On the far left, we see the ecstatic, pleasant, and proud look of a New Yorker, while on the far right, the embarrassed, guilty look of a person from rural South New Jersey. The urbanite feels in many ways adored and admired by the village dweller who seems to be enchanted by the urbanite’s city glow. Obviously, these illustrations are exaggerations, as most people try to conceal their emotions.

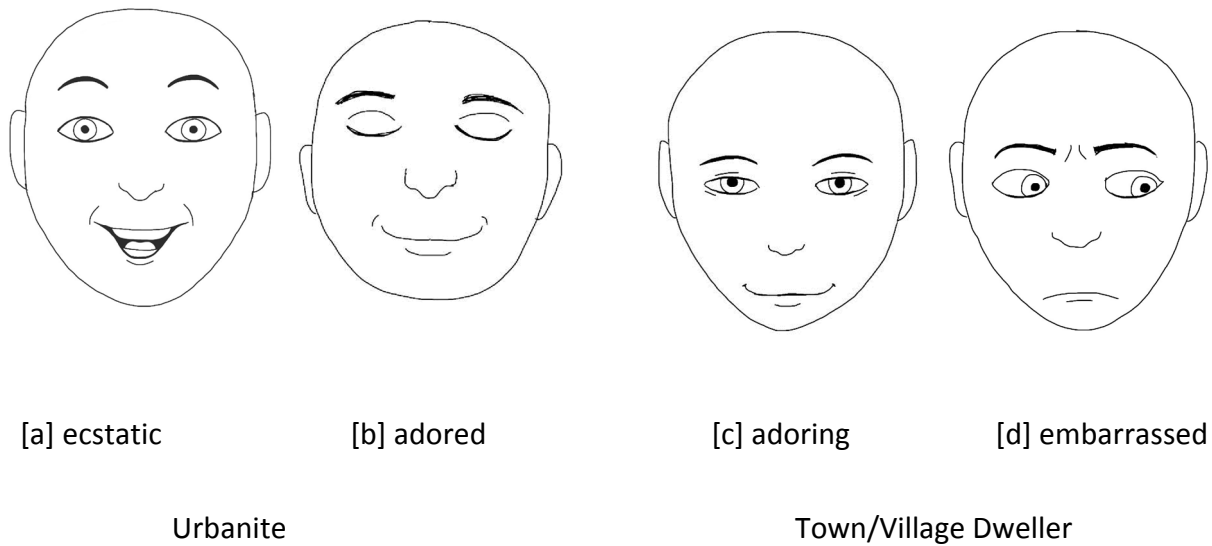


Figure 2. Emotional facial expressions of urbanites versus small town residents.

In addition to feeling pride for place of living, urbanites often feel superior to people from smaller areas (Martinson 2000). This phenomenon stems from our human identity formation and stability: we not only form our identity through others, but achieve a deluded sense of unity and stability by projecting or displacing our inadequacies onto others. This is exemplified by how some Americans look down on Mexicans, Russians look down on Ukrainians, New Yorkers look down on Kentuckians, Shanghainese look down on Nanjingites, Varsovians look down on Lublinites, and so forth. In addition to the inherent bias that urbanites might feel towards rural folks, urbanites' sense of belonging is usually associated with the city rather than their country of origin, such that a New Yorker would rather ascribe to being from "the Big Apple" than from the United States. Similarly, we've heard several accounts of people who live in Amsterdam (largest city in the Netherlands) and who think that "the Netherlands is Amsterdam," and of people who live in São Paulo (the largest city in Brazil) who often boast that São Paulo is Brazil's beating heart.

In the movie “Gladiator,” the city of Rome is equated with power — it is the seat of the Roman Empire — Rome is large in size with a massive population, an enormous Coliseum, and other grandiose monuments like the Pantheon, the Roman Forum and Circus Maximus— the substantial size of things is what makes one feel power in Rome. Incidentally, the idea of sizable monuments like Rome’s Coliseum is in many ways, similar to the notion of towers today, especially the tallest ones like the Empire State Building or the One World Trade Center. Rome was an imperial city, as are today’s greatest cities like New York, London and Shanghai. In addition, Rome was the epicenter of an empire that controlled a lot of land and extracted rents from many workers. Similarly, the great cities of today are the command post of corporate empires that extract rents from their workers, often in a predatory fashion. According to Urry (2007, 137), “the transformation of many cities into places of spectacle is one of the most distinctive features of the contemporary world.”

Sanguisuge City

‘Capital is dead labor, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks.’ - Karl Marx, *Capital*

The unconscious size fetish urbanites have for the city can have serious implications. The allure people feel, and the city dreams they have of success or even glory, blindfolds them to the reality: the city is actually draining their lives. Just as in capitalism’s spatial materialization, the city offers an illusion of freedom and justifies its existence with the very idea of freedom. It offers some freedom, but also takes away freedom—just as capitalists offer some money to their workers in the form of salaries, but also take away money from them when making millions in profits. People fall

prey to the capitalistic profit factory that is the city. Ironically, in the process, their life seems more exciting and fuller in a way. Masochistic city living is exciting *jouissance* — and it is not really, or not only, about the goal or fulfillment of the desire, but also about the striving process.

The city is in a way Machiavellian. It appears welcoming and promising, but it is deceitful—it absorbs one's psychic and physical energies. Yet, most people do not fight against this paradigm, as if hypnotized by the city. In fact, urbanites do look very much as if hypnotized, like automatons following a daily routine, being sucked by swelling metros. Urbanites are often either worn down, blasé, or they become Machiavellian themselves: aggressively dominating mercenaries of the capital that created and controls the city.

The city has many striking similarities to the folklore character of a vampire. Both are seducing, attractive, and exciting. Yet, what they offer is merely a feeling or promise of success and power. They seduce with promise, but rarely confer. Both are doing the blood-work (sucking up energy), and dream-work (inducing desire) (Pile 2005a). What is often overlooked is that the city is immortal, just like vampires or capital. Nations disappear, companies disappear, but cities never disappear (West 2011). They may decline like Detroit, MI, or Camden, NJ, but they will never completely die, sooner or later they will be back again. Yet, metaphorically speaking, like vampires, cities are never fully alive—cities are full of ghosts of the past that still haunts the present; and when urbanites exit their urban lair and enter the urban social realm, especially at night, they may turn into werewolves (Pile 2005b). In short, the city provides an environment antithetical to life.^{xiii}

It is important to point out the negative side of city life not only because urbanists (Glaeser 2011, 2014) glorify the city, but because many scholars tend to paint an overly positive picture of the city (Meyer 2013, Fischer 1973, 1972, Veenhoven 1994), including psychoanalysts (Pile 2005a, 2005b).

Harvey (e.g., 2012) is a notable exception — he argues, as this chapter does, that capital is intrinsically related to urbanization. And we agree with Harvey’s call: we need to focus on cities rather than factories as the prime sites of exploitation.

Character Structure

The last two sections address differences across cities — a case is made that while cities clearly differ in just about anything, cities have universally the same character structure — they all carry size fetish and vampire-like qualities and the negative effects increase proportionally with geographical size or population density.

Many vices^{xiv} are most pronounced in the most urbanized regions, particularly in the coastal U.S. area. It has been long recognized that vice and city are correlated (Park 1915, Park et al. 1984, Wirth 1938). Character maps from Richard Florida’s “Who is your city?”^{xv} show that the majority of people with neurosis live in the New York City area, the largest American metropolis, and neurosis is also present in much of the Bos-Wash megalopolis (Boston-Washington urban area). Neurosis, like the city, isolates. As Henry Thoreau so well said, “city life is millions of people being lonesome together.”

We are strangers to ourselves (Wilson and Wilson 2009) — we do not have a direct access to our unconscious and need psychoanalysis to help us understand ourselves. Given the fast pace of city life and the multiplicity of stimuli fighting for our attention, urbanites have little chance for introspection. Given the inherent alienation of city life, and the importance of deep social ties to understand ourselves—to help us psychoanalyze ourselves—we are arguably much more strangers to ourselves in the city environment than in anywhere else.

While each city might have developed its own character organically or spontaneously, today it seems that cities are no longer developing, but losing its character. Cities are becoming more alike. Housing and food are good examples—both are vital to the character of a place—now largely mass-produced in a few capitalistic profit seeking factories, in a way that fakes character and essence in order to sell better. For instance, there are just few food factories that produce most of the meat for all of the United States (see <http://www.takepart.com/foodinc>) and this meat, along with other food products, is usually delivered by US foods/Sysco company to a phantasmagoria of “lOcal” and “authentic” restaurants, that just names the same food differently to fake character. Likewise, housing is also mass produced in the spirit of Le Corbusier and then sprinkled with lOcal elements to forge some character:

“We must create the mass-production spirit.

The spirit of constructing mass-production houses.

The spirit of living in mass-production houses.

The spirit of conceiving mass-production houses.” (Le Corbusier 1985, p. 228)

Mass production houses are easily seen from an airplane when approaching newer cities like Dallas or Las Vegas. Older cities are different—they were built at the earlier stage of capitalism, although their downtowns made of mass-production skyscrapers, are swallowing larger and larger swaths of land. Downtown towers are all essentially the same (if you strip the cookie-cutter decoration that fakes character). The downtowns of Chicago, London, New York City, and other largest cities still have some character seen in the façade of older buildings. Yet, their character is dying under Starbucks, H&M, and an Apple invasion (Zukin 2009) — increasingly, what remains are precious historic markers

that cannot be reproduced anymore. Thus, the city is in many ways a museum of character—its unique identity and character are relics of the past.

Dallas, Philadelphia and New York City

In this section we simply describe cities we know best.

I (AOK) grew up in suburbs or relatively small (~1m) metropolitan Poznan, Poland. I have spent half of my adult life in the Dallas metropolitan area (~6m) with mixed feelings. As in any big city (though relatively low density), I felt power, pride, even accomplishment just by being there. I also felt significantly more “free.” There was something very attractive; it just felt like a better place — more global, more developed, and freer. It felt like “progress” or “success.” I very much appreciated diversity, freedom, and the energy that Dallas offered. One great thing about American cities, especially perhaps those more to the West, is that they offer a great deal of freedom, even some kind of lightness, as if less gravity was there. Perhaps, as Pile (2005a, 2005b) argues, there are fewer ghosts of the past haunting the present. Dallas is more modern — it is not under the weight of history; it is freer, younger, and more spontaneous. Yet it is fake, as if manufactured by aliens and dumped on the face of earth with its cookie cutter housing and ocean of concrete and asphalt. Now I live in Philadelphia metropolitan area, and I see that it is even more “energetic” and “fast-paced” than Dallas. People think and act faster than in Dallas. Yet Philadelphia is also dirtier, and somewhat sad or even depressing. Perhaps, what is felt is the melancholia that old cities carry (Pile 2005b).

I (RRV) have spent half of my life in Dallas, and share some of the same positive feeling towards Dallas as Adam stated. Being born in an “interior” city named Campinas (~1m), in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, I remember feeling ecstatic when my family moved to Dallas. I certainly felt pride, and

had many city dreams. Last year, my husband and I were in the academic job market and combined we were fortunate to have more than a dozen offers to choose from. Besides analyzing each of the offers we received, the cities where these jobs were located played a significant role in our decision. Although, the offer we finally accepted was by far the best of them all in terms of salary and employer benefits, the fact that the location was in New York City played a significant role in our decision process. We chose to live in White Plains, however, which is a small town in the suburbs, just close enough to the city if we want to enjoy it, and far enough to have a better quality of life. All of our friends in Dallas, were in awe (as visualized in Figure 2) when learning that we were moving to New York City, it was quite interesting to watch their reactions, as if when compared to NYC, Dallas became a small insignificant town.

Conclusion

A key human desire, at least in capitalism (Fromm 1992), is to be superior to others. This desire can be stronger than one's desire to be happy. Indeed, both cities and capitalism promise power and success, but rarely deliver them, while contributing to unhappiness in many ways (Lane 2000, Okulicz-Kozaryn et al. 2014, Easterlin 2009). Psychoanalytically, cities (like capitalism) are built by an accumulation drive and thrive on consumption desire, and lead to mere *jouissance* rather than genuine happiness or human flourishing.

City living can be masochistic in a way: it gives pleasure and pain, and perhaps some of that pleasure comes from pain (i.e. *jouissance*). City living can overload the senses (Simmel 1903, Lederbogen et al. 2011), while giving a certain kind of pleasure or joy, which slowly kills its residents. Approaching a city can be exciting, e.g., seeing towers rising over the horizon, and while energizing to

some, it can also confer illusion of power and success. Yet, the city is always defective: poverty, gentrification and luxury (this is the Real of the city). Much of social science is about fixing cities, and it is believed that cities can be fixed. But perhaps, like capitalism, cities cannot be fixed, and in the long run they might create more problems than advantages.^{xvi}

As cities continue to grow, these problems will magnify and become even worse. Rapid urbanization, capitalism and commercialization of space contribute to making the city more defective. In addition, cities are losing their character. They are becoming homogenized just like the food we consume (<http://www.takepart.com/foodinc>). Most downtowns of any large American city look the same: there are towers — some taller, some shorter, and there are some old buildings that will be soon replaced by towers without character. Worse, authenticity and character are now on sale in new towers containing Apple, H&M, and other stores.

Seemingly, city dwellers may appear happier than small area dwellers — just as a fetishist appears to be happy with her fetish (Freud 1927). Yet, city happiness is artificial. An urbanite might display a smile, or even show pride in her face, yet, she is typically unhappy — it is rather *jouissance* she experiences, not real human flourishing or happiness (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2015). The problem is that a poor rural person may think that the urbanite's happiness is real, and when she migrates to a city searching for that feeling, she will often end up feeling miserable too. In fact, there are many stories in novels, movies, or even real personal stories illustrating this scenario—a person is born and raised in a small place, but sometime in her teens or twenties wants to seek better opportunities and prove herself: she wants to climb up the social ladder. Thus, she moves to a large city. It might be some time before she realizes the city fetish; most will never fully understand that they were driven to the city lights because of size fetish and desire for the city.

Cities, like capitalism which they embody, lure its people by exploiting their passions. Cities promise or actually do provide momentary enjoyment and pleasure (as in shopping), but not life satisfaction or overall happiness. Ironically, the city emanates with pride and power. Perhaps, urban promise of success, pride, power, and superiority is the key psychoanalytic explanation of mass urbanization, despite urbanites being unhappy (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2015). When asked, whether a person would prefer to live in a world A where she makes \$100k and others make \$50k, or in world B, where she makes \$150k and others make \$200k, most people chose world A. That is, they would prefer to make less as long as they make more than others (Layard 2005, Scitovsky 1976, Frank 2012). There is a saying that goes, “a rich man is the one who makes more than the husband of his wife’s sister.” We tend to compare ourselves to others all the time; and many people when making these comparisons want to be better than others.

Civilization^{xvii} is, of course, based on the permanent subjugation of human instincts (Freud et al. 1930). The city is the cradle of civilization and its focal point. Yet, somehow this subjugation goes unnoticed—at least in some fundamental ways the city permanently subjugates instincts, more so than natural areas outside of the city. To be sure, the city frees in some ways, but it also subjugates in the form of longer labor (Rosenthal and Strange 2002, 2003), etiquette (Park et al. 1984, Park 1915), and various aesthetics. All these factors can repress people. Also, consider some anecdotal evidence — most people feel genuinely freer and more at ease in a small town, village, and especially in the wilderness. Yet, somehow the allure and appeal of city affluence trap us: “erotic energy of the Life Instincts cannot be freed under the dehumanizing conditions of profitable affluence” (Marcuse 2015, xxxiii).

Civilization, predominantly through the means of urbanization, has dramatically distorted the relationship between human and nature, and also between human existence and human nature. The city is a place where dominance and subjugation is greatest—nowhere else is inequality so pronounced and so spatially close—millionaires and beggars live next to each other, and bump into each other in public spaces, yet they live in opposite worlds. Psychoanalytically, they live on the opposite poles of the dominance-subjugation continuum. Cities and its towers perpetuate spectacle, while revealing their patriarchal, colonialist and imperialistic structures, and attracting conspicuous consumption (Bullock, this volume). Not only capital is centered in the city, but this is where its most pernicious form, monopolistic rent extraction, takes place at largest scale. Land, real estate, and other resources bring much higher rents in cities than elsewhere (Harvey 2012). We have had some urban revolutions (Harvey 2012), but it is striking that there were so few given the magnificent imbalance and inequality experienced in city life. One explanation is our unconscious size fetish.

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Figure 1, picture taken by author Rubia R. Valente

Figure 2, City: All faces: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Line_drawings_of_facial_expressions is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license

i I thank the psychoanalysis sessions at AAG 2015 in Chicago and AAG 2016 in San Francisco for inspiration.

iii Latin Americans are unique in this regard — there are no statistically significant differences in the happiness and unhappiness of urban and rural residents. See Valente and Berry (2016).

iv For an overview of the difference between desire and drive see Kapoor (2015).

v Marcuse (2015, p. xix) writes “Western civilization has always glorified the hero, the sacrifice for the city, the state, the nation” (emphasis ours).

vi “[H]e [the urbanite] is reduced to a negligible quantity. He becomes a single cog as over against the vast overwhelming organization of things and forces which gradually take out of his hands everything connected with progress spirituality and value” (Simmel 1903, p. 337).

vii Disavowal is simply turning away from the truth as a way of not coming to terms with loss (see Fletcher 2016 and Chapter 3).

viii Like religion, at least some aspects of capitalism and urbanization are opium for the masses — they keep people sedated with consumption, money, power, and urban fantasies.

ix On the other hand, there is generally no size fetish in the Kibbutz or the Amish community for example. Size fetish is most pronounced in the most capitalistic places on Earth: New York City, London, Chicago, etc. And there can be associated guilt and shame when, for example, approaching and entering the city — the closeness and play of its towers mimic sexual intercourse; see Chapter 9).

x SUV stands for Sport Utility Vehicle, which is typically large and flashy; McMansion is a cheap mansion, just as McDonald’s stands for cheap food.

xi There is considerable emphasis by Lacanian scholars (e.g., Zizek and Tim Dean) on how the phallus is fallible and signifies castration. We thank the anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

xii Thoreau (1854, p 37-38, our emphasis). Since Thoreau pointed to the degrading of pyramid builders, and some of the most spectacular contemporary towers, including the tallest one, are in the Middle East, let’s point out a similarity in exploitation. For instance, laborers at NYU campus in Abu Dhabi work and live in poor conditions (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/19/nyregion/workers-at-nyus-abu-dhabi-site-face-harsh-conditions.html>).

xiii Indeed, Fromm (1992, 165) writes, “the passion to destroy life and attraction to all that is dead (necrophilia) seem to develop in the new urban civilization.”

xiv The maps of vices are available at:
<http://www.nocaptionneeded.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/7-sins.png>.
There are more detailed versions of these maps with some description at:
<http://www.upworthy.com/7-deadly-sins-map-how-does-your-state-stack-up>.

xv http://www.creativeclass.com/_v3/whos_your_city/maps

xvi Some aspects of capitalism can be beneficial. For instance, free market and free enterprise, yet their accompanying negative socio-environmental impacts are not. If some form of capitalism is to stay with us, it is clear that a dramatic redistribution is necessary. Cities may be more difficult to dismantle than capitalism — we simply cannot get rid of cities due to the growing population on earth, and other socio-environmental reasons (see Meyer 2013).

xvii We use the term following Freud and do not mean that some people are “civilized” and others are not.