BURNOUT CITY

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WEALTH ENGINE

Among urban analysts, it is well-established knowledge that the wealth of nations is increasingly dependent on the productivity and innovativeness of cities (Jacobs, 1985; Sassen, 2000; Taylor, Derudder, Saey, & Witlox, 2007; Zhang, 2011). Urban propinquity affords the emergence of "dynamical, richly diverse, and interconnected systems", allowing the fluid incubation of ideas, recombination of economic factors, and reassociation of people (Bettencourt, 2014). These are the mechanisms which constitute the generation of new socioeconomic forms and functions.

The metropolis is, thereby, seen as an "economic motor" (Scott, 2009), "social reactor" (Bettencourt, 2014), or "innovation machine" (Florida, Adler, & Mellander, 2016) which, by virtue of its "sheer number of and variety of divisions of labour", is brimming with creative potential (Jacobs, 1970). The various 'agglomeration economies' and 'agglomeration externalities', by which urbanites get more out of less, represent the "triumph of the city" (Glaeser, 2011).

For some, however, there is more triumph left to be had. It is thought that, if a class of technical specialists could master the "social physics" of the city, then they can "tune the flows of ideas between people by providing small incentives, or nudges, to individuals", making the reactor "more flexible, creative, and productive" (Pentland, 2015). In sum, it is suggested that the city and other units of organization can be dynamically Taylorized using big data and an internet of things.

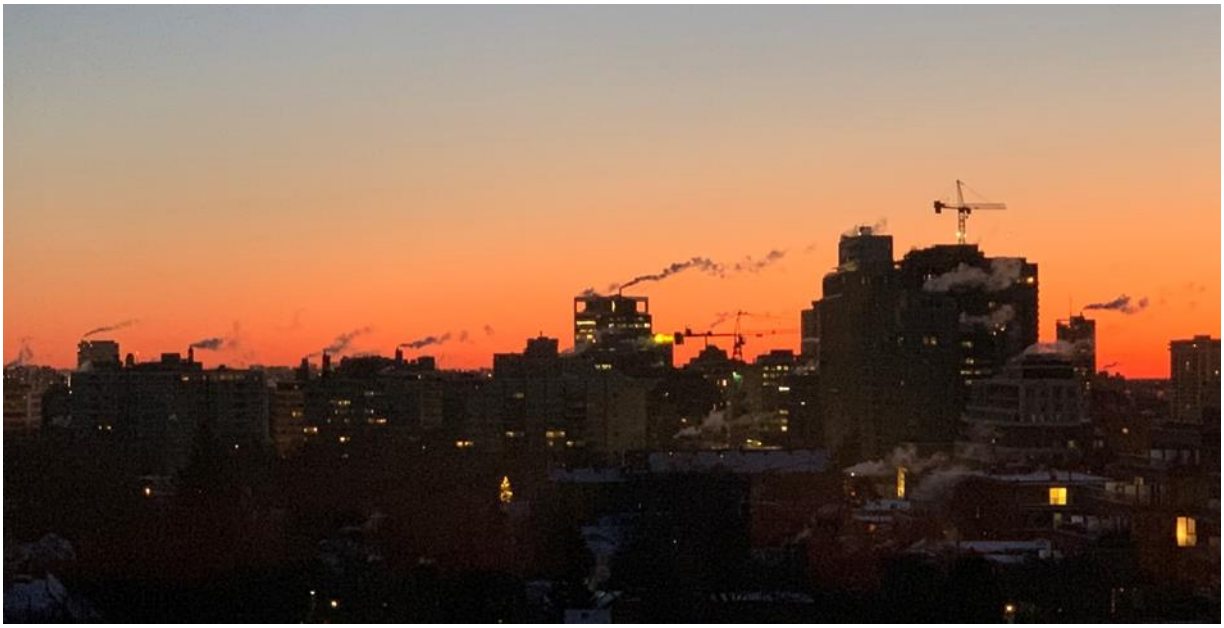

Figure 1 – Daylight Savings. Turn clocks forward one hour to maintain efficiency

Many urban theorists have already pushed back against the triumphalist, neoliberal narrative of the resurgent city. They highlight problems related to spatial segregation and gentrification (Moskowitz, 2018); housing unaffordability and homelessness (Marcuse & Madden, 2016); education inequity and economic inequality (Florida, 2017); accessibility- and transport-related social exclusion (Lucas, 2012); urban forms which harm sociability (Montgomery, 2013); and many other issues related to health, security, and social justice.

As a dynamic and irreducibly complex concentration of civilization, the city is perhaps open to an inexhaustible range of interpretations. It is a Rorschach test for all who contemplate its role in the story of humanity.

This purpose of this paper is to explore more fundamentally *what it is like* being the grist of a social reactor? What is the experience of the urban subject in a socioeconomic wealth engine? This broad question of *urban interiority* is the concern of this paper. However, that questioning is focused through the lens of the 'occupational phenomenon' known as burnout.

Burnout is commonly defined as "a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that results from long-term involvement in work situations that are emotionally demanding" (Malakh-Pines & Aronson, 1988; Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001). This paper synthesizes indications from various sources which suggest that burnout can be strongly associated with urban living – an association is crucially potent today.

BURNOUT

The word 'burnout' derives from an analogy which is interesting because of the contradictory poetic interpretations of fire. An adequate analysis of those interpretations is beyond the scope of this paper, but some key aspects of the fire analogy can be highlighted to contextualize this hypothesis.

Fire has often been associated with the sense of being lifted beyond oneself to an ecstatic state. The jouissance of the rising sun within and without. Hence, the French poet Charles Baudelaire wrote about "The fire that fills the lucid realms on high" (Baudelaire (Aggeler Trans.), 1954 [1857]).

From 'the burning bush' to 'burning man', fire can represent states of transcendence. Fire is a gift/loot from the Gods for union with them. In various texts of the Judeo-Christian tradition, God claims: "Who is near me is near to the fire". However, the link between divinity and fire is positively ambiguous, as when that God is referred to, or even refers to himself as, a "consuming fire" (Jacobson, 2005).

In their book *Stealing Fire*, Steven Kotler and Jamie Wheal (2017) posit a modern revolution in the technologies of *ekstasis*, with all the dramatic existential promises and perils. 'Ecstasy' is commonly taken to mean intense pleasure or rapture, but its classical meaning is to be 'outside oneself'. It may refer to "any situation in which (part of) the mind or

body is removed from its normal place of function" (Hornblower, Spawforth, & Eidinow, 2012, p. 486). If the feeling of being taken out of one's "normal place of function", of being 'moved', at first opens one up to the warmth of intimacy and other passions and pleasures of discovery, it is not a place whose further reaches one should live. As the German philosopher Josef Pieper (1998 [1948], p. 126) put it: "it is a "greater" thing to dwell "under the stars." But man is not made to live "out there" permanently". In its very basic sociological sense, one is ecstatic when some aspect of one's social reality can no longer be taken for granted (Berger, 2011, p. 134). However, sane day-to-day functioning requires that we take some things for granted at least most of the time.

Indeed, homelessness itself is far more than not having a shelter to watch TV and sleep after work, it is the feeling of being stuck out of place in the full socio-geographic sense. It is a feeling of being alien; the intimate self-world relationship of sound identity has been severed and, as a result, that identity is no longer a stable whole.

Hence, ekstasis tends to inspire *eros* – "the desiring and hunting for wholeness" (Pieper, 1998 [1948], p. 137) or "the desire to regain a lost wholeness" (Hunter, 1983). The gap between stasis and ekstasis yields an erotic potential which drives much of human activity[1]. One's desires are enflamed when in the ecstatic state. Ekstasis is a tense state of *out-of-placed-ness*, and eros is the desire for its relief through consumption or communion.

However, eros often charts the path of least resistance in the geometry of desire. Though extremely compelling, it often represents the least reliable way to sustainably achieve catharsis (i.e. close the ecstatic gap). What is more, each trip down the erotic path of least resistance

[1] "Insolent Eros,
seated on the skull
of Humanity
as if on a throne" (Baudelaire (Howard Trans.), 1985 [1857])

weakens its cathartic effects. It takes a profound level of maturity, self-control, and environmental stability to fashion a livelihood that avoids those "sweetbitter" (Carson, 1986) erotic paths which seem to pass through heaven on their way to hell. There seems to be a perennial modal confusion between the heat of internal self-transcendence and the heat of external compulsion.

Which brings us to the other, related association of fire. Fire is associated with evil, anger, and agony, with purgatory. Conceptually, the purgatorial hell is the last place anyone wants to be, but, once there, one finds it almost impossible to leave. Hell is a place of seemingly intractable social conflicts which diminish one's autonomy and compel one's body to perform actions which betray one's wellbeing. It is the place most inimical to human flourishing. It is the place where the human feels most out of place.

How do this relate to burnout exactly?

It is generally agreed that burnout is the result of prolonged exposure to high-demand situations of *social mismatch*, without adequate means for emotionally processing the experiences of that exposure. Often, sufferers of burnout feel as though they do not belong, and that they are alone in feeling this way. As Christina Maslach implores, "burnout is not a problem of people so much as it is of the social environment in which they work"; it is not about bad people but rather bad situations (Maslach, 2003).

However, these situations can dehumanize; one's humanity can become 'denatured' in the heat of prolonged ekstasis. The paths of least resistance from ekstasis include indulging in substances and behaviours that numb the socio-cognitive and emotional sensitivities (e.g. opiates, alcohol[2], emotional distancing), and violent outbursts of

[2] "Only when we drink poison are we well —
we want, this fire so burns our brain tissue,
to drown in the abyss — heaven or hell,

grievance and despair. More laborious and privileged paths include seeking professional therapeutic help, exploring practices of emotional grounding (e.g. mindfulness meditation, journaling), seeking community, and seeking a change of situations in general. These endeavours are often preceded by, or interspersed with, feelings of inadequacy and self-loathing which can further drive an individual to exploit themselves and others. The individual becomes less of a *subject-in-the-world* and more of a *project-seeking-a-world* (Byung-Chul, 2015 [2010]).

Burnout can, therefore, be viewed as the consequence of spending too much time in a molten social reality – one with scant opportunity for community and meaningful catharsis. It points to an environment which not only denies one the satisfaction of core human needs, but which also compels one 'erotically' past a healthy threshold despite these feelings.

A key argument being made in this paper is that the socio-technical systems we call contemporary cities are 'workplaces' which dangerously exploit this psychological dynamic to spur production and innovation on one hand and consumption on the other. The result is a crisis of burnout and its concomitants. Tragically, burnout threatens even the fruits of 'cityness', as it turns curiosity into cynicism, engagement into depersonalization, and pride into self-loathing (Maslach, 2003).

Every 'tent city' is a most visual manifestation of "the charring of burned lives that forms a scab on the city" (Calvino, 1978 [1972], p. 99), to put it most provocatively. One need not look to the unhoused and downtrodden to recognize, to feel, the effects of the city's infernal restlessness.

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who cares? Through the unknown, we'll find the new" (Baudelaire (Aggeler Trans.), 1954 [1857]).

URBAN FLAME

The modern metropolis was *the* mass social medium before the digital social media came into existence. The hyperdensity of full-sensory interactions comprising the metropolis makes it a "hot medium" by Marshall McLuhan's definition (1964, p. 27). Poetic observers have more than hinted at the kindling of a metaphysical furnace with the birth of the modern metropolis. However, as discussed, fire has always been an ambivalent technology.

The historian Fernand Braudel (2002, p. 101) wrote of the "urban flame" which was always ready to "rise from the ashes" of the conflict-ridden Mesopotamian world. Today, we can refer to the city as did Henri Lefebvre (1992 [1974], p. 93): as a "constantly burning, blazing bonfire" which "consumes (in both senses of the word) truly colossal quantities of energy, both physical and human". In *The Great Transition*, Karl Polanyi (2001 [1944], p. 69) argues that among the function of many walled towns was to contain the "inferno of early capitalism" (p. 163).

These are the words of scholars, but it the artist's job to faithfully catalyse, and give expression to, a society's cultural immune system. Honoré de Balzac's preferred metaphor for the new metropolis was 'inferno' (Alter, 2005, p. 7), invoking Dante's hell city of Dis. Émile Zola, who was influenced by Balzac, gave ample expression to the city's association with fire and heat (Nelson, 2013, p. 111). They wrote while the population of Paris exploded, surpassing Istanbul, Tokyo, Guangzhou and Beijing in the first half of the19th century (Reba, Reitsma, & Seto, 2018). In 1898, the novel *Inferno* by Swedish writer August Strindberg is published, describing his torrid period living in Paris during its great period of transformation. Decades later, writing in Paris, the Italian writer Italo Calvino (1978 [1972], p. 165) would also write of "the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together".

Around the turn of the century, New York City begins its own population explosion. In 1906 The Russian writer Maksim Gorky visits Manhattan, and the next year his acerbic essay is published describing the "city of fire" which "burns but does not consume"; a crucible for the "passionate play of the motely tongues of fire" (Gorky, 2020 [1907]). New York City was the birthplace of the American comic book and its 'new gods'. In 1939, the urban flame sublimates into Marvel Comic's first ever superhero: The Human Torch (DeForest, 2020). By then, New York City has already surpassed London as the largest city in the world (Reba, Reitsma, & Seto, 2018). The Human Torch begins his career as a man-made android that unintendedly busts into flames upon contact with the air. The story arch has the android develop from troubling monstrosity to hero undercover in the city's police force. Here is the immune system at work. "While the Torch then inadvertently caused parts of New York City to burn, he eventually learned to control his flame and vowed to help humanity" (Marvel, 2020). The inferno is tamed in this symbolic performance to hopefully prefigure its taming in reality[3]. While it is true that literal arsons tend to closely follow periods of economic despair, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s, fire is a psycho-social tool which reflects internal states as much as it meets external opportunities[4]. It is the scorched tactic of people feeling displaced (Gottlieb, 2019) or left behind (Waldheim, 2013).

The "highly volcanic species of psychological lava" which architects Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter (1978, p. 11) claim to be at the "the substratum of the modern city" destroys Los Angeles in the 1997 movie *Volcano* (Jackson). Throughout, there are artless allusions to a slew of societal ills, including those which culminated in Los Angeles riots which threatened to raze swaths of the city five years earlier. The 2019

[3] "Every early form of a god reveals something about a source of stress that creates difficulties for a culture" (Sloterdijk, 2016, p. 419)

[4] "The ascetic saint is a revolutionary who would see the world burn for the promise of future wholeness" (Simmel (quoted by Lopez), 2020)

movie *Joker* (Phillips) uses the not-so-metaphorical connection between the idea of heat and urban strife: it begins with a heat wave and ends with rioters setting Gotham City ablaze.

Throughout history, social reactors have frequently threatened meltdown. One must wonder if agglomeration gains are worth the social delirium which often accompanies and perhaps even conditions them.

DILERIOUS CITY

The phantasmagoric urban scenescape acts on, and conditions, the urban mind. The urban subject often finds themselves "grasping shards of sensory data and jagged ends" (Alter, 2005, p. 20), pulling their mind unnaturally to its edge, where a scattered awareness is rarely allowed to center. In the urban crowd, each stranger jockeys for the mind's resources, as the mind is tempted to simulate a human story behind the appearance. Each stranger represents a potential point of contact through which a new world, a new timeline, awaits. Each is a flicker of possibility. There are too many people you could have been, could have been with. The Italian architect and urban planner Stefano Boeri (2011) has even called for a "Proxemic of Urban Sexuality" to explore the deeper tensions helping to hold the city together. Thus, immersion in an anonymous urban crowd "produces a kind of imaginative binge" (Alter, 2005, p. 36), and it is this binging on 'urban buzz' which is simultaneously a source of excitement and a threat to well-being.

Burnout is commonly identified along three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. These are almost precisely the mental adaptations Berlin-born sociologist Georg Simmel (1950 [1903]) attributed to metropolitan conditions. He wrote about the "intensification of

emotional life" which was "due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli". Further, he wrote how these hyperstimuli cause the urbanite to create a "protective organ" for themselves which manifests psycho-socially in a "blasé outlook" or "blasé attitude". Finally, he saw this psychological phenomenon potentially "dragging the personality downward into a feeling of its own valuelessness". Yes, in *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, Georg Simmel was writing about what is commonly identified as burnout, even though he did not use the term and personally avoided condemning the psychological adaptations to it.

In the period between Simmel's birth in 1858 and the article's publication, Berlin's population had almost quintupled, climbing from ninth most populous city in the world to fourth (Reba, Reitsma, & Seto, 2018). One must wonder if the experience of rapid urbanization inspires a sort of 'urbanological imagination' in those privileged with the time for imagination. It is the vantage of the *flâneur* or the discriminatee[5] on the outside looking in. Yet, one cannot truly know something without inhabiting it, without becoming a part it all. The perennial question of how to live with others and be free is not resolved in the city, it just takes the form of new challenges.

In general, urban living is conducive to the emergence of the individual as a transcendent *I*, whom, without protective layers or considerable wisdom, would tend toward a crippling self-awareness or a dissolution of identity. Psychiatric researchers Kimberlie Dean and Robin Murray (2005) reveal that "[a]n increased prevalence of psychosis in urban compared to rural settings is one of the most consistent findings in schizophrenia research". With their own research, Carsten Bøcker Pedersen and Preben Bo Mortensen (2001) added to the "[m]any studies [which] have demonstrated that an urban birth or upbringing

[5] Simmel was a Jew in a time of growing antisemitism in Germany

increases schizophrenia risk". Are we to believe that the undiagnosed go unscathed?

Indeed, a certain habit of emotional distancing is almost necessary to prevent one's nerves from fraying in the metropolis. From every side, the urban subject is bombarded with contradictory promises of pleasure and belonging. But most of these promises are false. The social reactor, plugged into global markets, cannot allow itself to stall with the tempering of desires or the flourishing of community. It is driven by the individualistic pursuits of these most human needs.

The urban theorist Allen J. Scott (2009, p. 78) writes about the "possessive individualism characteristic of so much of modern urban life at the expense of more communal values", pointing out that what often passes for progressive openness, tolerance, and diversity, belies much of the social isolation, fragmentation, and inequities endemic to the metropolis. Urban workers spend too much time and energy "navigating pathways through the reefs and shoals of practical social existence" (Scott, 2009, p. 78) to develop deep, meaningful relationships. Social mismatch and depersonalization are endemic.

Of course, in a dense urban environment, one often has no choice but to be cognitively overstimulated and over-engaged. In the warmer, dryer months, a discordant cacophony of crying and gnashing machines reaches fever pitch during the day. These are the sounds of the city making room for more people and repairing the wear-and-tear that inevitably accompanies the opposition of nature. On a typical walk through summertime metropolis, one might hear sirens, alarms, horns, roaring engines, hissing breaking systems, screeching rail cars, reversing trucks, large pneumatic arms, generators, air conditions, ventilators, mixers, saws, drills, compactors, sprayers, jack hammers, leaf blowers, pumps, trimmers, lawn mowers, bush whackers, helicopters, speakers, and so on. Noise remains one of the biggest civic complaints in large cities, and is considered a health hazard (Hong,

Kim, & Widener, 2019). The skyscrapers seem to 'scream' their multitudes, even when empty[6]. The metropolis is a loud place both literally and figuratively. It is exceedingly difficult for the *vita contempletiva* to find a home in "the city's push and fury", to borrow a phrase from poet Carl Sandburg (1916, p. 120).

Is it any wonder that, for many, the urban environment presents conditions that periodically inspire a longing to 'get away from it all'? Hence, every social reactor threatens eruption without liberal use of its pressure relief valves, i.e. its 'getaways'. They include accesses to idyllic hinterlands and trips abroad to waterside resorts, but also to urban oases ('cottage country in the city'). Coney Island beach was once described as a "monstrous safety valve of the world's most highly charged metropolis" (Koolhaas, 2014 [1994]). It is only when faced with his own mortality that Georg Simmel decided to retreat from urban life to Black Forest to complete his most meaningful work (Wolff, 1950, p. xxiii).

It is a strange twist of human fate that the urbanite must take breaks from their habitat. Are these not signs that the modern metropolis is the birthplace of burnout?

HOW IT WORKS

How does the urban 'wealth engine' work?

We might say that the modern city is a sort of Stirling engine which operates by the fission-fusion principle.

A Stirling engine runs by exploiting a temperature differential. In the human system, this differential is the unequal access to resources, opportunities, and risks. The city juxtaposes opulence and squalor,

[6] "By night the skyscraper looms in the smoke and the stars and has a soul" (Sandburg, 1916, p. 67)

which function as carrot and stick, respectively. Under social pressure, or simply in the pursuit of dignity and security, an individual must work towards one and avoid the other. It is a tragedy of modernity that many urban environments were not designed with livability and wellbeing thoroughly in mind. Navigating environments orders of magnitude beyond the human scale, the human, almost by definition, feels out of place. Therefore, the demand for livable places vastly outstrips their supply. In these situations, the market is said to be 'overheated', as people desire more than can be satiated. What many large cities around the world are experiencing are not only housing crises but also livability crises, as large swaths of the urban form are inimical to effective livelihood.

Once this differential exists (or even its possibility) people are easily motivated compete for resources and opportunities, in units of cooperation (people cooperate to compete and compete to cooperate). However, the global economy's incessant demand for innovation represents conditions within which most of these units do not survive long or at least do not inspire loyalty. McKinsey reports that the average lifespan of companies listed in the S&P 500 list fell from 61 years in 1958 to 18 years in 2011 (Garelli, 2016). The value of urban proximity is that it accommodates the recombination of economic factors and the re-association of people – they all exist in one place, constituting one large "mixing population" (Bettencourt, 2013). As such, the more volatile an industry is, with differential wins and losses, the more it appears to cluster geographically, as people attempt to ride the volatility (Krugman, 1991; Overman & Puga, 2010). The "cognitive-cultural" industries that increasingly comprise the economies of large metropolitan areas are more "project-oriented" and "transaction-intensive" than industries of old (Scott, 2009). They require the constant fission and fusion of cooperative units: mergers, acquisitions, hires, fires, spinoffs, liquidations, lending, recalling, and so on.

As global capitalism (with its growth obligation) increases its demand on individuals, these individuals are increasingly driven to invest in skills, resources, and credentials which can be used as market leverage. Many of the things which are more difficult to use as market leverage are increasingly neglected, such as friendship, honor, sincerity, wonder, and so on. Once a person has been 'burnt', they may become even less likely to oppose these incentives, and more likely to orient further to the market. As such, social decay and self-commodification can perpetuate one another. For those who do not succumb to economic despair, life increasingly becomes a series of projects to display with one's resume. The orientation towards shorter and shorter timescales challenges the goals of sustainability, family life, and community development.

If only it were the case that the "perennial gale of creative destruction" (Schumpeter, 2003 [1943], p. 87) left the social fabric unscorched. It is the task of urban and regional governance to facilitate the cultivation of cooperative communities and assist them in buffering the 'solar flares' of the global economy.

CITIES AND WORK

Homo faber ("man the worker") is a creature of urbanity. This according to Jacques Ellul (1993 [1970]) who sought to demonstrate that the early writers of the Jewish Bible strongly associated cities with physical and psychological slavery; that they had an uneasy relationship with they city's immense spiritual or psycho-social power. Today, to say that "Cities are primarily labour markets" (Bertaud, 2018, p. 19) is to assert an unfortunate reality: that work has come to dominate the lives of many people everywhere, especially the inhabitants of large world cities.

In 2018 the World Health Organization called burnout an "occupational phenomenon" and advised that the term "should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life" (WHO, 2020). This statement may prove incredibly short-sighted; that is, if it is not simply a statement serving administrative purposes. However, the degree to which the city can be said to be a labour market, and the degree to which work (especially cognitive-cultural and service work) dominates urban living, is the degree to which the inhabitants of the 'city as workplace' are susceptible to occupational burnout. Indeed, many researchers have argued that the city or region, and not the firm, should be considered the primary unit of analysis for studying the new economy (Florida, Adler, & Mellander, 2016).

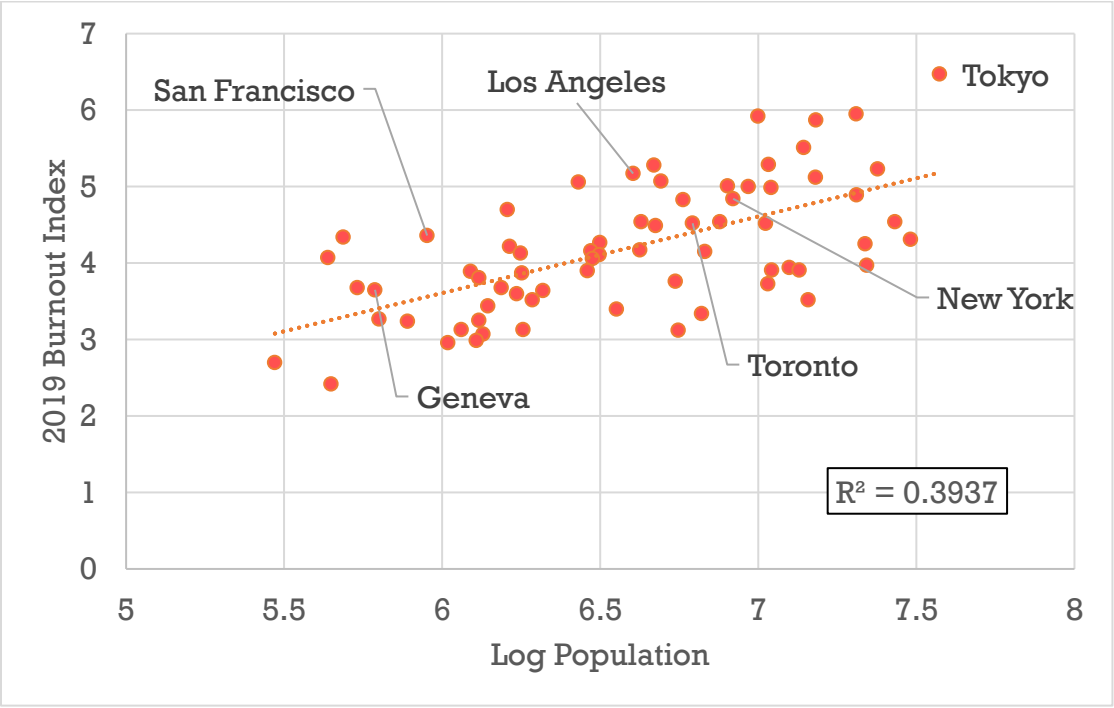

Figure 2 – Burnout Index and city size. Burnout Indices were estimated for 69 cities by SavvySleeper (2020) using several sources of data. Data feature include: "Time Spent in Traffic From Work", "Mental Health Disorder & Substance Abuse Prevalence", "Employee Presenteeism", "Vacation Time", "Amount of Stressed Employee Reviews", "Lack of Motivation at Work", "Annual Work Hours", "Population Working More Than 48 Hours", and "Population Sleeping Less Than 7 Hours". The relationship calls for more through research.

The modern city has been celebrated for the freedom of personal expression, learning, and sharing that it facilitates. This freedom allows

the further division of labour in society, with concomitant productivity gains (Bettencourt, 2014). These are affordances of the hyperconnected urban medium for personal cognition, with consequences for collective, or distributed, cognition. However, we could take instruction from Barbara Tversky's (2019) First Law of Cognition which states: "there are no benefits without costs". It is especially wise to assume a theory of trade-offs when reasoning about the factors influencing wellbeing. Theorist risks abstracting away too many of the inconvenient peculiarities of human psychology when they adopt the functionalist-positivist frame for human systems.

The knowledge and imperatives of an industry influences societal norms, and vice versa. The dialectic of economic divisions and social divisions is highlighted in any introduction which starts with: "What do you do for work?". However, the means, modes, and environments of production have changed so rapidly since the onset of the Industrial Revolution as to have consistently overwhelmed social reality. Émile Durkheim (Durkheim, 2013 [1893]) popularly held that the rapid division of labour in industrializing cities contributed to pervasive *anomie* – a painful feeling associated with the widening of possibilities in socioeconomic life. Analyzing the writing of Durkheim, Philippe Besnard defined it as:

> *"a situation characterized by indeterminate goals and unlimited aspirations, the disorientation or vertigo created by confrontation with an excessive widening of horizons of the possible, in a context of expansion or increasing upward mobility. It is a loss in the infinity of desires"* (Besnard, 2016).

It is not so much a normlessness as a vertiginous expectation of constant innovation and reinvention (Besnard, 2016). It is the flipside of the celebrated socioeconomic liberalism of cities. Durkheim's was just one of the many attempts to grapple with the seeming paradoxes of choice and freedom.

Similarly, in his short book *The Burnout Society*, the philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2015 [2010]) posits that the modern "achievement society", with its insatiable drive from productivity, is an emergent of "excessive positivity". By "excessive positivity" he means conditions under which people are overstimulated and experience greatly diminished resistance to personal expression. These are conditions where anything is possible and, therefore, much is expected from an individual. This, he argues, drives people to exploit themselves to the point of burnout.

In the greedy eyes of the market: people are never economically rational enough, therefore capital and labour are never mobile enough, therefore markets are never efficient enough. The degree to which economic markets determine behaviour, is the degree to which individuals are at risk of being robbed of any character, community, or sovereignty they might have otherwise known. Without the capacity for collective coherence, it is an invitation to self-exploitation, towards a 'saddle point' in wellbeing.

In the twenty-first century, work almost completely overwhelms social reality of cities and its markers are social fragmentation and self-exploitation. There is no point to be made in arguing that work life and social life are separate problem spaces. Firstly, "What happens in the workplace cannot be forgotten in the living place" (Harvey, 1985). Secondly, work constantly targets social life, seeking to profit from its instabilities. Thirdly, the "shifting, open-ended, unstable production relations" (Scott, 2009, p. 61) constituting large metropolitan economies has driven many urbanites to adopt networking as "semi-routinized habit of life" (Scott, 2009, p. 69). Fourthly, as much as some like to pretend that urbanites have lost the desire to have babies and raise them in the city, the fact of the matter is that the economic precarity and social fragmentation of contemporary urban living is not conducive to such projects; the 'neotenous phase' of many careers is

too long. And lastly, the urban form which so conditions our social reality is itself a product of work; economic imperatives and values become embedded in the urban form (Leigh-Star, 1999).

CITIES AND DESIRE

"The city", wrote Louis Wirth (1938), "is, among other things, a great emporium, displaying its multitudinous wares to excite desires". Those wares adorn the people, parking spaces, and properties; are displayed in the windows and shelves; and feature in advertisements that cover the surfaces of the city, including the interior and exterior of its mass transit. In many a subway car, one often has no choice than to be continually spammed.

Billions are spent on advertisement not to inform you of the products and services on the market, but to convince you that, in any profitable sense, you are not where you should want to be. They seek to convince you that the featured product or service is the key to your belonging. To do this it must first nudge you out of place, psychologically. Then, it must get you to substitute your self, your life, for the characters in the ad who are enjoying the product. Hence, the advertising industry is in the business of manufacturing desire with the techniques of ekstasis and mimesis, inserting their product along the perceived path of least resistance (i.e. reducing perceived transaction costs). It is the manufacture of desire that devolves urban rioters into looters of luxury goods.

It is easy to stoke the flames of desire in a hyperconnected medium[7]. Like other mass media, the "urban world puts a premium on visual recognition" (Wirth, 1938). Because the city is a place of anonymity, and often social isolation, many urbanites are driven to send social

[7] "Don't display what people desire, And their hearts will not be disturbed" (Lao Tzu (Addiss and Lombardo Trans.), 1993, p. 3).

signals of worth and identity by displaying their consumption and lifestyle choices. As such, large cities are where status anxieties seem to be the highest (Botton, 2004). One way to gain leverage amidst large impersonal forces is to display objects of desire and to, thereby, become an object of desire.

'Keeping up with the Joneses' has found empirical confirmation. In his study of U.S. households, Erzo Luttmer (2005) found that, "controlling for an individual's own income, higher earnings of neighbors are associated with lower levels of self-reported happiness". Needless to say, neighbors do not have direct access to each others' pay stubs. As Fran Tonkiss (2013, pp. 76-77) points out, this is where the spatial segregation of cities along economic lines may have an upside. However, in the complex world of urban identities, out-of-everyday-sight often does not necessarily mean out-of-mind.

To what extent is your city a veritable "theatre of envy" which stokes the "flames of envy", propagating more mimetic desire (Girard, 2004) than it can reasonably hope to satiate in a healthy dosage?[8] Lewis Mumford grumpily condemned the world metropolis as a place of "negative vitality": a place where people productively work to return to an equilibrium they are constantly pushed out of. For him, James Joyce's protagonist in *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom, epitomized this state:

> *"James Joyce, in Ulysses, projected this phantasmal state: he showed the mind of Leopold Bloom regurgitating the contents of the newspaper and the advertisement, living in a hell of unfulfilled desires, vague wishes, enfeebling anxieties, morbid compulsions, and dreary vacuities: a dissociated mind in a disintegrated city: perhaps the normal mind of the world metropolis"* (Mumford, 2016 [1938], p. 272).

[8] "The city appears to you as a whole where no desire is lost and of which you are a part, and since it enjoys everything you do not enjoy, you can do nothing but inhabit this desire and be content" (Calvino, 1978 [1972], p. 12)

Italo Calvino sums up this sanguine perspective when, in his book *Invisible Cities*, he wrote this if the inhabitants of a fictitious city called Anastasia:

> *"… your labour which gives form to desire takes from desire its form, and you believe you are enjoying Anastasia wholly when you are only its slave"* (Calvino, 1978 [1972], p. 12).

Was it not the proponents of the 'Creative City' who urged administrators to transform their cities into playgrounds for the economically talented? The idea of "The City as an Entertainment Machine" emerged from the growing influence of entertainment and amenities on urban policy (Clark, 2011). The "new kinds of consumerism and hedonistic social rituals of contemporary urban life" do not only offer consolations for the difficulties of urban living, as Allen Scott (2009, p. 17) has suggested, but they can also induce a 'fear of missing out' which eventually establishes new, more challenging, social expectations. It appears that the contemporary urban interior is 'gaslit'.

Regarding the urban wealth engine, the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk sums up the role of the "consumerism and hedonic social rituals of contemporary urban life" (Scott, 2009, p. 17) perfectly: "In consumer society, the "fires of envy" are interconnected to form power plant-like energy cycles" (Sloterdijk, 2016, p. 384).

CITIES AND CRIME

The economist Gary Becker (1968) theorized that crime is like an economically rational investment given the criminal's set of available opportunities. This set might include both criminal and non-criminal ways of 'getting ahead'. If the reward-risk ratio is perceived to be the highest for a criminal project, then that project will be pursued, i.e. the crime with be attempted. Even in this very mechanical theory of crime,

when the haves and have-nots collocate, as they do in large cities, one would intuitively expect increased crime rates. This is especially the case where institutions and communities find it difficult to keep pace with techno-economic 'disruptions'. In the rap album *Good Kid, M.A.A.D* City, Kendrick Lamar recounts his torn coming-of-age on the streets Compton, Los Angeles. One line recalls: "Home invasion was persuasive / From nine to five I know its vacant". For him, the city represented a place of overpowering temptations and fatal antagonisms. One of his other songs has his mother repeatedly warning him about his gang lifestyle: "One day it's gon' burn you out / One day it's gon' burn you out" (Lamar, 2012).

Strong empirical evidence collected by Martin Daly suggests that income inequality is among the best predictors of violent crime rates, across geographic scales. He suggests that inequality is a better predictor of violent crime than poverty, thereby emphasizing its social dimension. He collects evidence to support the conclusion that:

> *"When the goods that men desire are distributed relatively unevenly, the appeal of risky competitive tactics in pursuit of those goods tends to be relatively high, and for that reason, economic inequality is one important source of the variability in homicide rates"* (Daly, 2016, p. 147).

The economists Edward Glaeser, Matt Resseger, and Kristina Tobio (2009) have also made the connection between urban income inequality and crime rates, as well as between income inequality and skills distribution. They recommend that policies be made to assist localities in raising the lower end of the skills distribution. It a safe suggestion by people reasoning from the vantage point of macrophenomena. It does not get to the core of competitive aggression; it may even fan the fire, depending on the type of education people receive and the capacities of local housing and job markets.

Note that, although the above studies focus on reported crimes, there is nothing to suggest that the underlying mean-spiritedness does not also rare its head in other non-criminal social interactions.

It has been observed that crime rates scale superlinearly with city size (Bettencourt, Lobo, Helbing, Kühnert, & West, 2007). It is not enough to say that these crimes comprise the waste heat of the urban wealth engine. However, that idea may lead us back to our controversial, though unoriginal, hypothesis. Namely, that the very same stoking of desires which drives urban productivity may also drive the city's excess criminal activity; and that the two are often experienced quite similarly. Whereas Becker's theory links criminal and non-criminal activities from a utilitarian perspective, the theory posited here links them from an experiential perspective – one of disturbance or "negative vitality" as Lewis Mumford (2016 [1938], p. 272) called it.

In his Strain Theory of social deviance, Robert Merton, used the word 'innovation' to describe all the activities whereby culturally approved goals are pursued by socially unapproved means. For him, 'innovation' included illegal forms of personal enrichment such as theft and dealing illicit drugs (Merton, 1938). The metropolis is innovative indeed. Merton's usage of the term suggests that many legal and illegal forms of 'creative destruction' may be alike in the phenomenology of their motivation and effects on society. Mark Zuckerberg's motto "move fast and break things" sounded more like an invocation to inflame urban rioters than the ethos of a socially beneficial enterprise. In fact, in their shady activities, many of the large technological disruptors seem to suggest that innovation requires breaking the law (Taplin, 2017; Zuboff, 2019).

Nowhere does this quasi-equivalence between criminality and innovation come to life better than in the 1995 move *Heat* (Mann), starring Al Pacino and Robert De Niro. The movie is set in Los Angeles but was inspired by true events in Chicago. Lieutenant Vincent Hanna

(Pacino) and expert thief Neil McCauley (De Niro) work on opposite sides of the law, but they develop a mutual respect because each has a singular commitment to his work. They are both possessed by pathological drives which absolutely preclude the possibility of healthy relationship. They represent the *neglect* and the *cut-and-run* attitudes towards relationships, respectively, which they employ whenever their work should demand it. Locked in mortal competition, the two are the kind of raging workaholics that make for an entertaining crime film. We love to see the cat and the mouse attempt to out-innovate each other.

Despite his evident material success, McCauley continues to nurse a dream of escaping to the Pacific Islands. It is part of his plan, but the audience suspects that the dream is a blue horizon that forever recedes, to be punctured by the red of violence. In the end, lieutenant Hanna shoots McCauley, after a chase around the airside of LAX airport. Unsettled, Hanna holds McCauley's hand in comfort, as the latter succumbs to his wounds. McCauley could not escape the city, but Hanna sacrifices himself to its flames as he turns further away from his relationships. Is it possible for the urbanite to rid herself of some precious dream of leaving the city for good, however vague or ill-conceived?

The director Christopher Nolan took considerable inspiration from *Heat* for his envisioning of Gotham City in *The Dark Knight*. In an interview he said he wanted "to tell a very large, city story or story of a city" (IGN, 2012).

Among the things criminologists have found out about crime rates is that they appear to be influenced by the weather. In general, warmer, dryer days tend to see more crime. Conservatively, it is usually assumed that warmer temperatures are simply more comfortable for being outdoors and, therefore, features more interactions in general

(Sommer, Lee, & Bind, 2019; Schinasi & Hamra, 2017; Heilmann & Kahn, 2019). However, there may be more to the picture.

In his seminal book, *Heat Wave*, on the 1995 social and environmental disaster in Chicago, Eric Klinenberg (2015) demonstrated that the neighbourhoods that experienced higher violent crime rates overlapped significantly with the neighbourhoods that saw the most heat wave deaths. He provides testimonials that suggest that many of the elderly people in those areas were, therefore, too afraid to leave their homes to escape the indoor heat in time, or to socialize outdoors in general. The relationships between the weather, urban form, and social relations is no doubt complex; and oftentimes it takes a disaster to reveal that there is something worth considering more closely. The interactions among the three may be bidirectional in a nontrivial sense, adding a crucial social dimension to the urban heat island effect, for example.

When 'the block is hot', it might be the case both figuratively and literally. Observe the metaphorical use of 'atmosphere', 'warm, and 'heated' when referring to social situations; or the temperature changes of certain parts of the body upon emotional arousal (Nummenmaa, Glerean, Hari, & Hietanend, 2014); or the fact that pathological fire starters are often socially isolated individuals who start fires to relieve tension and sometimes to direct the attention of others (Kolko, 2002). These links call for a deeper attention to the complex interplay between urban form, environmental stimuli, and sociability. It might be said that the analogical mind (Hofstadter & Sander, 2013), with its 'alchemical logic', reveals connections through the unconscious 'cross-talk' between the psychological and the material. In the case of pyromania, for example: can it not be described as an 'erotic' externalization of interior 'ecstatic' sensations?

CITIES AND INNOVATION

The philosopher Josef Pieper looked around at post World War II Europe and noticed that "the world of the "Worker" is pushing into history with a monstrous momentum" (Pieper, 1998 [1948], p. 57). He called his world a world of "total work". Today, the habitus of the metropolis is more and more taking the shape of 'total innovation'[9]. It is one where groups of 'talent' hack together new, disruptive revenue streams and capital gains schemes for wealthy speculators in 'innovation districts' designed for such purposes. Many of the remainders navigate the resultant gigs. Both are engaged in an endless process of self-reinvention and self-commodification. Some of the so-called talent even spend some of their nights and weekends at hackathons, generating value and publicity for existing companies. These hackathons are gamified events where innovation is forced to happen within a given time period (Zukin, 2020).

In 'Startup City', life is on pause because the future is always now. Life in the "innovation complex", as sociologist Sharon Zukin (2020) calls it, tends to a state of permanent exception due to its emphatic accelerationist orientation. Rarely can anyone in such an epistemic community afford the time to question the global economy's feverish demand for innovation and the effects of orienting one's life around it. No, not when innovation has become the unquestioned virtue.

Decades before the term "academic capitalism" was coined, the Pieper lamented that "the totalitarian demands of the working world have conquered the realm of the university" (Pieper, 1998 [1948], p. 94). More recently, the university has been included along with industry and governance, in the "Triple-Helix model" of urban innovation, which has been prescribed to cities everywhere. The university is steadily being pressured into the role of subcomponent in the "regional innovation system" (Leydesdorff & Deakin, 2011). Pieper (1998 [1948],

[9] See, for example, *The city as innovation machine* (Florida, Adler, & Mellander, The city as innovation machine , 2016)

pp. 25-26) pointed out the profound irony: that the English word school stems from the Greek word for leisure. There are few aspects of urban life that the restless demand for innovation is not prepared to squeeze.

"The fire of the revolution that the personal computer ignited continues to spread" (Swaine & Freiberger, 2014, p. xxvii) from city to city. As the symbiotic relationship between the virtual net and the urban grid continues to deepen and complexify, urban governance will find it increasingly challenging to buffer the effects of technological disruptions. The radical technological reimagining of the city, employing internets-of-things and augmented realities, threatens to expose the urban subject to heteronomous forces even more powerful than have already been discussed.

CITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

The city beckons. As Louis Wirth put it, a city "must recruit its migrants from other cities, the countryside, and … from other countries" (Wirth, 1938). The impression should not be given that urban living is inevitably and categorically deleterious to livability and wellbeing. If the world has urbanized at such a feverish pace, it must be because many have freely chosen urban living.

However, it is a basic and well-known fact that we often make choices which are not in our best interest. This is especially the case when we are bombarded with the glittering images of mass media. To be susceptible is to be human. This is not even to mention that capture of institutions by special interests which have forcefully encouraged certain ways of living, consuming, and working[10]. The city is much more than a landscape of economic opportunities. It is a cultural

[10] "the modern industrial proletariat was introduced to its role not so much by attraction or monetary reward, but by compulsion, force and fear. It was not allowed to grow as in a sunny garden; it was forged, over fire, by powerful blows of a hammer" (Pollard, 1985, p. 243).

emergent, casting its light to the world through music, movies, tourist guides, and other media.

At least one group of researchers takes the behavioural science approach to the study of location decisions. They suggest that "outcomes and experiences of urban life compare poorly with the overoptimistic expectations of many newcomers", and that this is due to certain biases, heuristics, and cognitive limitations in our appraisal and decision making (Cardoso, Meijers, Ham, Burger, & Vos, 2018). Indeed, there has been a growing concern that urbanization is no longer associated with social mobility (Florida, 2018). Despite this, people continue to take the gamble.

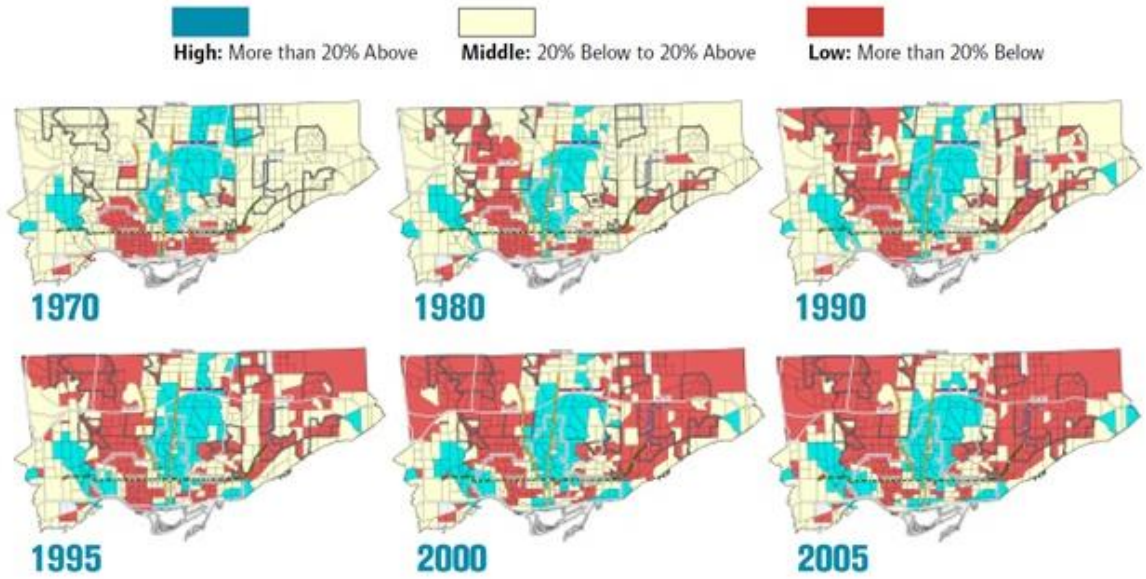

Figure 3 - Toronto catching fire. This image was taken from David Hulchanski's The Three Cities Within Toronto. The colours represent neighbourhoods where the average incomes are 20% less than (red), 20% more than (blue), and within 20% of, the Toronto Metropolitan Area average income. The 35 years between 1970 and 2005 saw the population of the City of Toronto double from approximately 2.5M to approximately 5M people.

A song featured in the 1973 movie *Walking Tall* (Karlson) may have captured the sentiment of many:

Made a mistake a long time ago
'Cause I wanted to see the lights of the city
The big town called me and I just had to go

But a fire behind the lights is not too pretty
Hey, hey, hey
'Cause I'm coming home on the very next train, yes
I'm coming home and I'll never leave again[11]

For some, social pressures seem to preclude the option of returning to whence they came; the socioeconomic sunk costs are too high. For others, it may simply be the practical difficulties. For yet others, there is no longer a home to return to. "If the rate of dislocation is too great, the community must succumb in the process" (Polanyi, 2001 [1944], p. 76). In the age of digital media and global capitalism, it is easier to erode community that to create it. As Jane Jacobs (2004, p. 33) pointed out, once a community dissolves, the memory of its existence often eventually fades, especially across generations. When the influx of capital transforms a place of belonging into a node in the supply network feeding a city-region of consumption, it may be called 'domicide' by other means than physical violence.

BURNOUT CITY

Although much of the developing world still harbours slum-like conditions, much has been done to revitalize, sanitize, and soften many cities around the world. Improvements in urban living should not be taken for granted wherever they are found and whatever form they take.

Burnout City is a deeper questioning of the influence of contemporary urban living on mental life. It asks whether the same properties that make the city a wealth engine have also tended make urban living harmful to many urbanites. It regards fundamental questions of urban interiority (what it is like for the urban subject), viewing urban environments as information media with the capacity for mass socio-

[11] Lyrics can be found at: http://transcripts.thedealr.net/script.php/walking-tall-1973-IRT

cognitive disturbance and exploitation. Thus, it hopes to add some depth to the discourse toward a truly 'Unified Theory of Urban Living'.

A city – its institutions, infrastructure, form, distributions, narratives, signs, and symbols – is a complex 'choice architecture' that influences decision-making, the experience and possibility of autonomy, and culture in general. People shape, and are shaped by, their city. The efficacy of the former can be determined by the how much the latter outcomes serve life-affirming values and enhance personal sovereignty.

As a concept, Burnout City represents a negative region in the vast phase space of possible cities. Actual cities are positioned at various distances from its epicentre. Positing its existence is the first step towards moving away from it, staying clear of it, and moving toward a better urban world for all – one with an appropriate ratio of light to heat.

Suggesting fixes for Burnout City is beyond the scope of this paper. But, in general, addressing it means addressing those aspects of urban living that contribute to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, disengagement, self-exploitation, and self-harm. They not only threaten the health, security, and even ultimately the productivity of cities, but, most importantly, they erode the individual's sense of autonomy and ability to work together with others toward meaningful lives. It is appropriate to end here with the last words of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, coming from the mouth of Marco Polo:

> *"There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space"* (Calvino, 1978 [1972], p. 165).

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