

Space: Its Enclosure by State and Capital

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Marx made a thorough analysis of the production process as an exploitation of labor, but he made only cursory and reluctant comments about the prerequisite for capitalist production, about the initial capital that made the process possible. Without the initial capital, there could have been no investments, no production no great leap forward. This prerequisite was analyzed by the early Soviet Russian marxist Preobrazhensky, who borrowed several insights from the Polish marxist Rosa Luxemburg to formulate his theory of primitive accumulation. By primitive, Preobrazhensky meant the basement of the capitalist edifice, the foundation, the prerequisite. This prerequisite cannot emerge from the capitalist production process itself, if that process is not under way. It must, and does, come from outside the production process. It comes from the plundered colonies. It comes from the expropriated and exterminated populations of the colonies. In earlier days, when there were no overseas colonies, the first capital, the prerequisite for capitalist production, had been squeezed out of internal colonies, out of plundered peasants whose lands were enclosed and requisitioned, out of expelled Jews and Muslims whose possessions were expropriated.

The primitive or preliminary accumulation of capital is not something that happened once, in the distant past, and never after. It is something that continues to accompany the capitalist production process, and is integral part of it... Without an ongoing primitive accumulation of capital, the production process would stop; each crisis would tend to become permanent.

— Fredy Perlman

Introduction

The spatial dimension to the current phase of capitalist globalization is not as easy to categorize as public physical space vs. private physical space. A small number of excellent essays have been written, particularly in the publication *Killing King Abacus* as well as essays by the Midnight Notes Collective and in a less explicit way the writings of Jacques Camatte and Fredy Perlman, related to the varied elements capital and state utilize to expand accumulation and increase control. In other words, these essays and authors have examined in a multi-faceted way, the means which capital and state employ to physically enclose our bodies and social space, while also analyzing the way capital seeks to constrain our imagination, desires, and our very ability to interact.

This essay is dedicated to fostering a deeper understanding of the transformation of space as a totality. Perhaps an essay on one of these elements would have sufficed, but we thought if examined from a totalizing perspective, it would help people to better understand the spatial dimension as an essential element of capital expansion. Additionally, I hope that people do their own research to allow a continually evolving and developing understanding of spatial enclosure. After all, capital is constantly re-establishing itself in different forms, while its content of course remains the same. Our understanding should be as updated as that of capital.

The Global North and Global South

...the fact is that the earth is becoming a space station and millions are already living in space-colony conditions: no oxygen to breathe, limited social /physical contact, a desexualized life, difficulty of communication, lack of sun and green... even the voices of the migrating birds are missing.

— Midnight Notes Collective

The little public and free space (including our minds, genes and biology), within the current phase of capital expansion and state control, is increasingly becoming transformed into a controlled space designed for the production, sale, and consumption of commodities. As capital assumes increased commodification and privatization of once semi-public and free space — including that of our very being — many of the poor and working class in the global north and global south are facing alienation and control in different ways. With the continued process of capital accumulation, however, many are coming to experience it in not such an easily differentiated way. Parts of Philadelphia, for instance, are literally living in conditions one would assign as third world squalor. For ease of analysis, we have attempted to assess in a generalized way, how different spatial regions around the world are experiencing the current phase of capitalist globalization.

Enclosure Then and Now

In his three-volume work, *Capital*, Marx wrote about the enclosures that occurred in parts of Europe during the transition from an agriculturally based, common land economy. He described the process thusly: “The spoliation of the church’s property, the fraudulent alienation of the State domains, the robbery of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property, and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of reckless terrorism, were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation. They conquered the field for capitalistic agriculture, made the soil part and parcel of capital, and created for the town industries the necessary supply for a “free” and outlawed proletariat.” The late Marx, however, saw this process of enclosure as a necessary prerequisite for the “scientific” stage theory of history. In other words, he argued in his later writings, that in order for there to be a revolution the peasant needs to become a worker and the worker once developing the correct consciousness will inevitably overthrow capital and create a classless society.

Walter Benjamin spent a good part of his life researching, observing, and experiencing the history of capital and its violent, subtle, and covert means of transforming nature, man, and urban geography (and its human subjects). In his monumental book *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin devotes a large portion of this work to assessing the Haussmannization of architecture. This Haussmannization entailed the wholesale destruction of narrow streets, which was an attempt to halt the construction of barricades. Paris had seen insurrections in 1830 and 1848, all of which had seen people utilizing the narrow streets as a means by which to build barricades. When Haussmann came to power in 1853 he completed the process of enclosing narrow streets by building boulevards, which while making it increasingly difficult to build barricades, also furthered the atomization of the working class by destroying the neighborhoods and enclaves

frequented by poor and the working class people. This process of enclosure was one of intense dislocation, which ripples down to the enclosures occurring in the global south.

The Global South

The current phase of capitalist expansion is marked by a similar propensity towards the forced expulsion off of common lands in the South. With this forced expulsion comes a migration to the city to be met with forced proletarianization. In this context, many attempt to flee such immiseration, only to be met with the brute force of the border patrol.

As the movement of capital is deregulated it becomes virtually impossible to flee the impoverishment wrought by capitalist institutions and corporations. Tighter borders, thus serve as key ingredient in the restricted movement of the poor. In this sense “...as capital moves ever more freely around the world: we are locked up, confined, enclosed.” Capital can move unmolested, while the poor and working class are restricted from free movement.

More generally, this attack against the poor is part of the always-continuing process of capital accumulation. Thus, the poor and working class are continually exploited, while capital can continue its plunder.

The Global North

Thus as anonymous victims of the rising organic composition of capital, they find themselves unemployed (often for the young this means there is no possibility for them to enter the global productive process), they feel no compulsion to organize against a specific antagonist. The enemy which has victimized them is not any capitalist in particular but capitalist society as whole which they perceive more or less confusedly.

— Negation, No. 35

The necessity of capital to retool does not mean it leaves the region from which it physically exploited. As Fredy Perlman pointed out in the above passage the process of capital accumulation continues today. Of course, the physical enclosure of the earth and its inhabitants continues in the North, but with little space left to exploit capital has set out to enclose and commodify the inner recesses of our bodies, minds and the natural world.

Thus, our bodies and the natural world become the testing grounds for genetic engineering, cloning, and various forms of biological manipulation. In this way, capitalist technology has moved from pesticides to genetic engineering. The actual composition of the innards of the plant have been engineered with isolated genes from other plants and even animals, to allow its outer physical structure to endure excessive dousing of chemicals — thus being manufactured into fully engineered plant where its characteristics as a differentiated plant are erased.

“Today all urban space is watched, controlled, patrolled, feared, distrusted, perpetually threatened. In the name of security, it has gradually reached the point of the creation of an absolute technological-military prison. One can say that this long war will cease in order to abandon its place to a kind of monstrous prison is an extreme

form of ‘necessary’ protection. And this is happening under a democracy that tries to appear powerless, under the egalitarian rhetoric with which it cloaks itself, to prevent- since this is what it wants and needs in order to conserve itself – every city of its dreams from becoming a maximum security prison space (thus without respite), where the circulation of individuals resembles the circling of the prisoners round and round that courtyard with the high windowless walls where the poor exhausted footsteps resound in cadence.”

Similarly, the means utilized lately by the state to control its subjects here in the North (and the South in a similar way) are felt through physical means, however, its means have become more subtle and ominous. Surveillance – in designated semi-public and private spaces, monitoring devices for ex-prison inmates on parole, retina scanning, iris scanning, computerized biometrics – are all utilized as identification systems to keep “criminals” locked into the prison structure. As Killing King Abacus states in their article entitled “Fixed Abodes”: “This leads us towards a world which according to the system, the most valuable thing about the human body is the digital data which it provides.” This illustrates the means which the state utilizes to continue its domination. In this way, capital needs the state to continue its process of accumulation.

Conquering The Space Of Our Imagination

In a like vein, our very personalities, tastes, desires, and emotions are being commodified to fit the impersonality of capital. Jacques Camatte assessed this phenomenon as capital penetrating “...thought, consciousness, and thus destroying human beings such as they have been produced by centuries of class society. Their loss of substance is the loss of their former being, which capital has pumped out of them... it must now conquer imagination.” In other words, capital having achieved almost complete domination over our physical body and social space has sought to conquer our imagination.

The space of our imagination becomes a cesspool of mass produced images, commodities too expensive to purchase, a life and imagination we can buy through cinema, television and so forth. Similarly, the jobs offered to us are largely in the service sector where we are forced to appear (in dress and appearance) as the role of actor. We are forced to wear a smile as our job is to serve “our” customers. A uniform is part of the actor apparel as well. Our uniformity of dress accords with the uniformity of our acted personalities. Just as many of the commodities for sale on the market are largely disposable junk, so to is the service industry worker. Most service industry jobs are employment at will where the corporation can dispose of the worker as one would dispose of worthless commodities.

Resistance To The New Spatial Reorganization of Capital

With the growth of the Anti-Globalization movement – a movement of many different ideas, tactics, and visions of which anarchists and anti-capitalists play a small, but strong part in – there has been a heightened awareness of the effects related to the current moment in capital and state restructuring. This movement is international in scope, while many, however, fail to see the connection between the north and south. This essay has attempted to link these spatial

regions together, by illustrating the means by which the state will continue its domination and capital will continue its plunder.

The recent string of protests against finance capital, such as those against the WTO, IMF, World Bank, and the FTAA signify people are willing to fight capitalism (or for some simply globalization.). Though not without their share of problems, the protests surrounding these meetings have proven there is a fertile terrain on which to fight. However, with the focus upon financial meetings occurring on specific days this can lead to one merely attending these protests, while neglecting to realize that financial capital is merely one of the strong ways in which today's phase of capital manifests itself. The other means by which capital manifests itself have been taken on in this essay, but others of course exist as well. Gentrification, on the job control and manipulation, homelessness, and so on are all further manifestations of capital colluding with the state in different ways to keep the always continuing process of capital accumulation barreling forth.

As for more regional resistance many examples exist. The Free West Papua movement against the enclosure of their land and their very livelihood, and the South Korean autoworkers fighting militantly against capital and state are two current examples. A few years ago the Mission Yuppie Eradication Project in San Francisco was active in trying to create a movement against rising rents and increased gentrification. The campaign against genetically modified organisms in food in the UK laid the ground for subsequent resistance against GMO's here in the US (particularly in the form of sabotage). The list goes on.

A few years ago here in Portland, the struggle for space took the form amongst a group of mostly street kids known as "the undesirables". Catering to businesses and tourists, the cops attempted to forbid young people from hanging out on Exchange Street during the busy summer tourist season. Exchange Street is the tourist shopping district of an increasingly gentrified Portland. The focus of this group consisted of drawing attention to the lack of social space available for young people to meet and interact- as well as making a degree of inconvenience for businesses and cops. The group has since disbanded due to certain tactics utilized by some participants – some making themselves self-appointed spokespersons for this largely self-defined group. Unfortunately, the potential of such has yet to be fully realized.

Control Of Capital By The State

Within the broad movement against globalized capital, many have come to embrace the state as means by which to control the movement of capital in general, and its corporations and its financial institutions in particular. This faulty logic has lead many to petition the state "demanding" laws restricting the movement of capital across borders. If such a law ever went into effect it could only lead to increased control of the poor and workers. Capital, working hand in hand with the state, would make sure that such a law would work to the advantage of business, and finance, and to the detriment of the poor and the working class. Historically, the role of the state is not one of friend. As witnessed in the self-avowed communist countries of the former USSR, the state in its acquisition of the means of production will use land, labor, and capital in a similar manner private capital makes use of it. The USSR was a state capitalist regime where the means of production were controlled by the state, while the population was forcibly subservient to the elitist party bureaucracy. It is unfortunate some anarchists have fallen into the trap of declaring that the professed "rights" of nation-states have been dissolved, thus meaning the state itself

must intervene to protect its sovereignty. The state needs to be destroyed along with capital and the social relations it produces.

Closing Remarks

The questions of space, physical enclosure and internalized enclosure, are historical and present day sights of contention. We only hope these sights of enclosure will be continually contested by the poor and the working class. As demonstrated, resistance to such enclosure is as international as capital and the state. Through continued interaction internationally our links can become stronger than the superficial links tying capital together. Perhaps such a linkage will lead to an insurrection that seeks to destroy with ferocity and passion the reigning socio-economic order. Such a rupture necessitates a total leveling of this utterly malignant system of control and alienation. At this point of rupture, the space of our bodies, minds, and physical social world will finally be free to fully explore the wondrous lush fields of our imagination.

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