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# **A Geography of Injustice**

## **Understanding and Counteracting the Reproduction of Capitalism**

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## INTRODUCTION

“The central paradox of our time is that the unprecedented capacity to secure human well-being should generate such precarious existences for the vast majority of humanity”

(Brodie, 2007: 1)

The 1990's were a golden age for neoliberal capitalism: a system that sought to suppress and render irrelevant any remaining aspirations of a non-capitalistic society in its quest for global domination. With the help of strategic allies, a small group of global socio-economic elite sunk their teeth into the world's economic structures, and began to spread what has come to be known as the United State's preferred brand of capitalism<sup>1</sup>. The neoliberal project that coalesced at the beginning of the 1970's had from the start a class bias and a predetermined set of political, economic and social values that favored the political and economic advancement of a very few at the cost of almost everyone else. But the political and economic elite that espoused them dressed them up as bearers of freedom and ultimate (unlimited) opportunity. These tenants were to be implemented in any nation-state (as if local specificities do not matter) wishing or ready to make the transformation into *real* democracy. It was, and is, a hegemony continually manufactured through the constant provision of entertainment and information, broadcasted and staged to emphasize that: *this* political and economic model is as good as it gets. The freedom you have under *this* system is more than you can ask for. Just let us take care of it for you.

The above-described discourse seeks to tranquilize everyone into a false sense of security, teaching that these economic measures are hailed as the only logical (viable) course of action, to bring wealth and development. Left out of the official discourse is the fact that neoliberal economic policies almost invariably permit, even 'necessitate', the exploitation of local communities and resources for profits. Despite its democratic makeover, the world's socio economic elite traditionally force feed neoliberal models to the world's economy through military force, propaganda and cruelly imposed ideological hegemony<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Not to discount the influence that Thatcher had from her perch in the U.K.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout Latin America, Iraq, ...Read *Confessions of an Economic Hitman* by John Perkins for more

Take as only one example the policy decisions of the then U.S. president, Bill Clinton, in the 1990's. On an international scale perhaps his biggest achievement was to open ripe doors for military and economic exploitation and infiltration throughout the Americas. In 1993 he signed into law a trade agreement that extended the United State's socio-economic empire into Mexico and further south through neoliberal doctrine. Far from delivering the perceived benefits of free trade, NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) saw the invasion of powerful, and government supported, transnational corporations into new markets, running local initiatives (farmers, micro-producers) out of business, left and right.

It gets worse. The socio-economic elite pulling the strings did not limit themselves simply to imposing inequity in the international community. Although Clinton has time and time again managed to become the most popular figures in the United States for his supposedly do-gooder policies, a closer look at his political achievements teaches us otherwise. At best, he fell asleep and dreamt that the great depression never happened, or never would happen again, when in 1999 he turned the country over to the financial industry, repealing the Glass-Steagall Act. In so doing, his administration opened the trap door for the slide into the next (super)crisis.

Yet not even the clearest sign of systemic failure is enough to bring about real change. The hegemony of neoliberalism is so deeply ingrained, that we carry through crises with the same thinking that got us into this mess.

The system rolls on. It rolls on because it lures us into believing that *this is how things work in the real world*: get with it or get out. Convinced to value certain things, like the freedom (for those with the economic capacity) to own an automobile and a home, and live a *luxurious* life, for me the American dream spoke to the endless possibilities of what you can have, and what you can do; assuming you *earn* it. And in accordance with this logic, I also internalized its necessary implications: if a person does not have money to buy these things, they do not deserve it. If a person is poor it is his/her fault. Indoctrinated through education and entertainment alike, neoliberal capitalism teaches from day one the mandate of fitting into the system and finding financial success. Dominance is achieved by keeping the *important* people content (rich), and the poor people poor; it divides-and-conquers, so to speak, to quell rebellious formations.

If we are to understand capitalism's injustices, we must understand how capitalism reproduces itself, both economically and socially. Understanding this allows us to slow its reproduction. We must also choose where to attack. Do we attack its economic, or social reproduction? Is it even possible to attack one, and not the other? A main contention of this thesis is that *both* economic and social reproduction of capitalism depends more and more upon the production of space.

Economic reproduction depends upon the production of space in the city. In order for the production of the built environment to soak up surplus value and spit out profit, it valorizes, fragments and homogenizes urban space. Space, in this sense, becomes reduced to a profitable commodity. Social reproduction focuses on a different type of space. The capitalist system depends on creating so-called "ideal citizens," who are alienated and who depend on the system of wage-labor and the capitalist class. The social reproduction of capitalism occurs at the city level in the everyday lives of the inhabitants as urban space is appropriated, maintained and regulated to facilitate the social reproduction of capitalist relationships.

Space is an important locus of capitalism's reproduction: without it capitalism, as with any mode of production, cannot be reproduced. If we understand the way space is implicated in the reproduction of capitalism, we can begin to use space to stop capitalism's reproduction. This effort is perhaps most easily tackled at the micro level. That is to say, we can challenge capitalist social relations, the capitalist mode of production, by changing our own modes of production: changing the way we "earn a living", and changing the foundation for all our social relationships in the process.

## **FOCUS and RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

As I am beginning with the assumption that injustices are built into the social relations of production, which sustain capitalism as an economic system, I will begin with a quick overview of these relationships.

After identifying these, and showing how they sustain the economic structure of capitalism, I will prove that the injustices built into the social relations, come to fruition through processes of capitalisms' reproduction, which takes place both economically and socially (in conjunction with one another). Because this thesis is investigating the

geography of capitalism's reproduction, of capitalism's injustices, I will, building off the ideas of Henri Lefebvre, place special emphasis on the geography of its reproduction. Therefore I will focus my investigation around the role the space plays in reproducing capitalism.

As I follow the thread tying the production of injustice to the reproduction of capitalism, and then identify its spatiality, I come to my final, and potentially liberating section. Here I will consider in what ways we are able to "resist" capitalism and create different modes of production, paying special attention to how space is involved. All these points of research culminate in one central research question:

- *In what ways are the unjust social relationships that sustain a capitalist economy reproduced geographically, and how can we geographically reorganize to resist the capitalist system and the injustices implicit in it?*

Now this obviously represents a broad scope of threads, which I could pursue, so I still must limit my focus in certain instances.

First of all, this is a paper responding to neoliberal capitalism, and accordingly, to catch its full ability to transgress human and social values, I will focus in on the United States; though most of what I will discuss is applicable all around the neoliberal(izing) world.

As I am particularly interested in the geography of capitalism's reproduction, the city will provide the investigative field. It is after all the urban "mixing pot" in which the history of capitalism is wrestled out, dialectically shaping and re-shaping the urban landscape as it goes. This vantage point promises insight into the powers working to reproduce and expand the capitalist system, allowing us to understand how injustices are forged through the process; allowing us to grip the dynamics that play out as policy and ideologies at the macro level are *realized* in the micro. It is in the urban, at the everyday level, that we, as homogenized, 'objective' individuals, unconsciously reproduce the terms of agreement that allow the capitalist engine to sputter on, reproducing, rather than alleviating, the injustices of the system in its search for profit. It is also, importantly, in

the urban that capitalist encroachments breed discontent and dreams of alternative societies.

With the help of Lefebvre and his interpreters (Merrifield, Purcell...), I will show how space becomes an ultimate source of power for those who can access, control and produce it, and how the production of space becomes a main strategy of reproduction. Because Lefebvrian ideas tend to be abstract and theoretically difficult, I will ground his ideas, in conjunction (and sometimes disjunction) with other Marxist geographers, around a case study of the redevelopment of the Bronx Terminal Market in New York City. This case demonstrates effectively the role of the production of space in reproducing capitalism, both economically and socially, and provides insight into the way that social relationships of production converge in, and are formed by, space.

Space is important for multiple reasons but especially because it is intimately tied to the everyday level, and it is in the everyday level that the social relationships of production play out, and injustices are realized. Again using the case of the Bronx Terminal Market, I will illustrate the connection between capitalism's reproduction and the production of space. This will reveal the tension underlying the "space wars" that are ever present in our global cities.

To bring this dynamic to life I will make use of Lefebvre's spatial triad, focusing in on two of the dimensions in part (mediate and are mediated by the third): space as 'conceived' by planners, bureaucrats, technocrats... and the everyday lived space of inhabitants. I will contend that it is this tension which is at the base of capitalist social struggles, and it is therein we can look to uncover the social (power) relationships that are involved in its construction and lived experience.

As will become apparent, there manifests a constant struggle and tension in and over space as capital seeks to control and nurture its exchange value, while the people, the social beings *living* in these spaces depend on and struggle for its use value. This is the contradiction that lies at the heart of this paper. The vast majority of urban space in our global cities is appropriated to facilitate the un-hampered accumulation of capital, leaving little, if any, room for alternative visions. Without the ability to appropriate space for alternative lifestyles, urban dwellers must adapt their lives to the spaces of capitalism and its built in logics.

In essence, space becomes a means to an end for (neoliberal) capitalism. A medium through which to seize control and manipulate its way through the urban environment, fragmenting, valorizing and homogenizing our everyday lives in its path.

The final section will investigate the possibilities and viable routes of reclaiming our spaces and creating “cracks in capitalist social relations”(Holloway); what I believe efforts of socio-spatial justice must be based around. This involves taking control over how we choose to organize human activity on an everyday level, and then having the freedom/ability to appropriate space on those conditions. To illuminate this section I will present a case that serves as an inspiring example showing how people can take back control over their lives.

As I hinted at above, the nexus of all these factors converge and play out on the everyday level; meaning capitalism is reproduced, and injustices are experienced, at the everyday (micro) level (as is a key Lefebvrian idea). If this is so, then we must ‘crack’ into capitalism on the everyday level, slowly digging into the cracks of the machine, so as to get to the core.

Based off these threads, I will argue for a sense of socio-spatial justice that see’s the urban dwellers as appropriators of the spaces they live in, rather than passive consumers. Only when we are able to appropriate spaces free of capitalism’s mantras, of the private ownership model, of (alienated) wage-labor, and profit-based exploitation, will we be able to live new social relations of production and a liberated everyday life. If, in other words, if we wish to free ourselves from a system feeds off us, but does not work for us, we must appropriate spaces in which we can organize our sustenance from the bottom up.

“In one way or another...we try to create cracks in capitalist domination, spaces or moments in which we live out our dream of being human, spaces or moments in which we say to capital, 'No, here you do not rule: here we shall act and live according to our own decisions, according to what we consider necessary or desirable.” (Holloway, 2010a)



## PART 1: THE REALM OF INJUSTICE

"The economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions, as well as of the religious, philosophical and other ideas of a given historical period" (Engels cited out of Wark, 2011: 50)

### Understanding Capitalism: The Sleeping Dragon of Injustice

For the sake of the scope of this thesis I will forego a prolonged discussion of capitalist social relations. Instead, I will outline the basic ways that we organize our selves socially, so that the capitalist economy functions.

#### Social Relations of Production

As I am proceeding with a Marxist analysis of capitalism, I understand that it is the economic system of society that drives its development (see Engels quote above). This being so, the economy demands its own set of social relations organized around it to 'operate the machine'. The capitalist economy is based off a logic of accumulation wherein the name of the game is to increase (accumulate) the amount of money you have to begin with. This is done by investing into some thing, time into a service, money into a product, which can then be sold at a price that is higher than what it cost to produce it. If successful, the investor walks away with profit (what is called surplus value), which can then be re-injected into the production of something for sale, and so on and so forth. As long as capitalists are continuously able to invest successfully (make profit), the economy will grow and reproduce. If capitalists are unable to extract profit, if investments are unsuccessful, if there are no profitable outlets for surplus value, it over-accumulates, devalues and threatens crisis. Harvey put's the process into equation form:

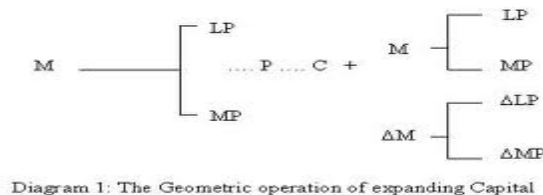


Figure 1: Harvey's diagram of geometric operation of expanding capital<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> All figures will be sourced in the reference list

Here, the capitalist uses money to buy labor power (LP) and the means of production (MP). This generates profit through the distribution (sale) of the commodity produced. The capitalist then re-invests a portion of this profit into the equation, and attempts an even higher return. This diagram, following the cycle of accumulation, expands exponentially until profit can no longer be achieved. If this occurs, as a result of a number of circumstances (lack of demand, lack of profitable investments), the capitalist ends up sitting on a pile of capital, which, unable to be reinvested into production, over-accumulates, devalues and threatens crisis.

In order to sustain this logic capitalism organizes society into different groups (classes) to make sure that there are producers (capitalist), workers and consumers (the people). As the name implies, capitalism gives power to the individuals who are able to amass great wealth and turn it into more. The consumers play an important role, but without the capitalist's investment, and, importantly, without the workers (who are consumers) labor, the wheel does not turn.

I will frame these relations as they relate to the fundamental economic component, the commodity. The commodity, in its many forms, is what the capitalist invests in and "force-feeds" (for a price) to the consumers.

The "private ownership model" (property relation) allows the capitalist the ability to purchase both the means of production (infrastructure, raw materials, land...) and the labor needed to produce the specific commodity. Merrifield (2002a: 78) understands private property relations as "public enemy number one" for this very reason. By purchasing and monopolizing the means of production, the capitalist effectively removes any basis for self-sufficiency on behalf of the people and thus create a class of dependent laborers. Dispossessed of the ability to produce what one needs for oneself, the consumer must enter into an agreement with the capitalist, selling his/her labor (the only thing they has left) in exchange for a sum of money, which can be used to purchase commodities back from the capitalist.

This system is called wage-labor and effectively ensures the dependence of the worker on the wage-paying capitalist, clearly creating a hierarchical organization ripe for exploitation. The more desperate one gets for the next paycheck, the more willing he/she is to subjugate oneself to demeaning working conditions. It is the employer who stacks

the deck, the employee who must play the cards. Harvey, like most Marxist's, see's the labor relation as the 'most fundamental' of all because of its role in commodity production (Harvey from Gregory et.al, 1985: 131). This fundamental profit making activity (production of commodities) revolves around the capitalist's exploitation of the workers labor.

The last institution I will touch on is that of market exchange, the realm of distribution. By organizing distribution on a market system, capitalists ensure that the subjects will play the game, as they must have the ability to purchase the goods they need on the market, rather than procuring them using alternative mechanisms, such as will be presented in part two.

These relationships are constructed to sustain the logic of accumulation and reproduce the capitalist economy. This economy is based all the more around consumption. Consequently, the only way the capitalist will achieve the profit necessary to re-invest and keep the wheel spinning is if we (the subjects) keep consuming what is produced. The capitalist that is unable to sell his/her product has no profit to re-invest. Capital is stuck in the produced goods, which are not consumed, and starts to over accumulate and lose value. This sets off the warning bells for the capitalist who is engaged in a competitive hierarchy with other capitalists. To climb the ladder, exploitation is called for, and in the name of profit, becomes necessary.

To catch the full extent of capitalism's ability to exploit and subjugate social relationships as 'necessitated' by the logic of capital accumulation, I will focus on the latest, and hopefully last, incarnation of capitalism.

### **Neoliberal(izing) Capitalism**

The dawn of neoliberal capitalism in the United States (in the 1970's) wreaks havoc on social life precisely because the state has itself become resigned to the profit imperative, falling under a spell that dictates: 'enough is enough, we cannot any longer play the game of supervisor/provider' (for the people). The preceding period of Keynesian (welfare-based) capitalism made sure that the social *needs* of citizens would be protected; not in the sense that they are liberated from market mechanisms, but in the sense that the state afforded financial help to those who needed it most. This appears to be the most the state

is willing to do under capitalism. Rather than attacking the structural foundations of injustice, the state simply alleviates its conditions and thus contributes directly to its reproduction. But the “failed” welfare state became too much of a financial burden.

The crisis of the welfare state opened the door for neoliberalism, and it swept in swiftly and comprehensively, turning over every rock so as to make sure there were (are) no other realms of alternative production, alternative organizations of human activity, that take away from neoliberal dominance. The doors opened by the crisis led to the emergence of intensive and predatory accumulation mechanisms. All said and done, capitalists were given the green light to exploit the social relations built around them and commoditize everything in their paths (removing barriers along the way), profitizing whatever they are able to get their hands on (an expanding realm of necessities and goods).

It is important to consider that the state does not simply remove itself from the game in the name of financial austerity. The state too, feeling the weight of a depressed economy, has become resigned to the imperative of growth at any cost. The preferred vehicle for this growth is the private market.

This profit imperative consumes the ‘superstructure’ of state and other powerful organizations to the point that most, if not all, activities conducted on this level are aimed towards ‘producing’ as much profit as possible. This implies the inevitable exploitation of nature, of labor, and of the consumers.

What results from all this on a societal level is alienation. The people are alienated from the higher-level (political, legal, economic) processes that determine to a great extent the quality of their lives. Workers are alienated from the products of their labor, as they become private property. More and more, capitalist subjects are alienated even from their true natures (as common social beings), as they are indoctrinated with all these ideas and assurances of the *right* way to live (ideas and assurances which come down from above). The drive for profit, then, results in alienation. The major form that this takes in a capitalistic system based off the production, distribution and consumption of commodities is what Marx termed commodity fetishism.

The commodity, when fetishized, becomes reduced to its exchange value, its quantitative value, and is produced and appropriated along these lines. This drives

production of commodities based on a logic concerning speculative ‘rates of profit’ and subordinates the production of commodities that may provide real, viable, long-term social uses. Sustainable, efficient commodities simply do not foster conspicuous consumption.

The essence of commodity fetishism lies in the masking of its true social character, which is borne out of the social relations that converged in its production. The people see the commodity as an object for enjoyment (use), and are unable to see the relations of production and logic behind their manifestation.

To grasp the full before/after effect of capitalistic proceedings, I will present here the first part of my case study, depicting the history of the Bronx Terminal Market before a mega-developer got its hands on the area.

### ❖ **Case Study, Part 1: Bronx Terminal Market: before redevelopment**

The following frames the history of the Bronx Terminal Market: a long-time, vital social resource for (largely) immigrant populations scattered around one of the major global cities of our times.

#### **Stage #1 – 1920’s**

The Bronx Terminal Market (BTM) has a long and storied history. Though the project was conceived of as early as 1917 (Gray, 1994), the market never took off until a new mayor took office in 1934 and set his sights on the ‘nuisance’ represented by New York’s ‘unsavory’ pushcart vendors (Gray). That mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia, set to work on the completion of the BTM as part of a program centered on the development of public markets to house the un-organized vendor trade scattered around the city. After seven months time, the administration had not only completed development of the market, but also made it profitable for the first time (Gray). They had transformed it into a bustling market for a variety of foodstuffs including: produce, meat, fruits and vegetables. This period represents the birth of a long-time, socially valuable (unique, differential) center of exchange (distributional space) that would go on to withstand the test of time and the turning of the tides.

### **Mid-stage, mid-century**

During the mid-century, a couple important developments occur. A new market opens nearby at Hunts Point drawing the business of many current (mainly Italian) BTM merchants/vendors (Elliot, 2004). This leaves an opening, which is quickly filled by an influx of Hispanic merchants, part of the wave of Puerto Rican immigration to the city during this time period<sup>4</sup>. The re-invigorated merchant population quickly develops a substantial following, turning the BTM into one of the largest Hispanic wholesale food markets in the country (Elliot, 2004). The market space provides a key service to the increasing number of Hispanic bodegas popping up around the city, as well as the (poorer) immigrants they serve. It represents an alternative mechanism of support, a refreshing and authentic environment in the midst of a city increasingly built to serve the wealthy.

By the end of the 60's, however, New York City is buckling under the latest financial crisis and the BTM is proving to be a substantial drain on city funds. Right around the time neoliberalism starts to rear its head, city officials are left with the unenviable decision concerning the fate of the market: to regenerate or dissolve, to preserve the unique, socially valuable market or to cut it loose?

### **Stage #3: 1970's**

In steps David Buntzman, head of Arol Development Corporation, an all to welcome symbol of wealth in difficult times. After (what amounts to bribing<sup>5</sup>) contributing a decent sum of money to the presidential campaign of then mayor John Lindsay, his company is awarded a 99-year lease from New York City officials to take over the market area (Bagli, 2004). With new ownership (technically the city is still 'owner', but practically?), the BTM pushed on through the years and remained an important hub for ethnic(ally enriching) products, and continued to provide livelihoods for the (at one time 100 merchants, 1000 employees) merchants and their employees. Not to mention the irreplaceable social service provided to the immigrant populations trying to assimilate to one of the most intensely capitalist cities in the world.

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<sup>4</sup> The reason behind this migration is eerily similar to the current migration Mexican migration due to the signing of NAFTA: subsidized transnational corporations come in and force local farmers out of business. Farmers then flee to cities, and to the U.S in search of a lifeline

<sup>5</sup> The city could not afford to maintain the market, but it remained an important wholesale food market and was thus a target for other developers/landlords: hence, the 'bribe'

However, Buntzman does not keep up his end of the deal and starves the market for investment, doing little more than collecting rents from the merchants. In fact, the first three years since taking over, Buntzman increased rents by 80 percent, invested next to nothing into the market and drove at least three merchants with almost 375 jobs out of the market (Newfield, 1975). “Don’t fight me, you can’t win” (Newfield), Buntzman tells Abe Solomon, one of four brothers who operate Goodie Brand (generating 100 blue collar jobs for Hispanic workers), also under threat of eviction at the time. He is in it for the money, so he takes what he can from the merchants (in rent) and gives nothing back, aided by his superstar lawyers.

The city has been engaged in legal battles with Arol over their refusal to meet the terms of agreement in the lease (general upkeep of the market); they finally get their chance to do something about it 30 years later.

By the time the 1990s role around, the market undergoes another transformation. Another wave of immigration sees the African population explode onto the scene in the decade running up to the turn of the century<sup>6</sup>. Following this surge, African merchants are mixed into the fray and the market evolves to incorporate a wide variety of African goods, fruits, vegetables, produce, meats, that simply cannot be found anywhere else, concentrated into one market space in any case. Read through a historical lens, the transformation of the market through the years bears the imprint of wider societal transformations. The evolution of the market follows the cyclical trends of the evolving capitalist economy, as well as the demographic transitions spurred, in part, by different waves of immigration.

### **Present (recent) time**

The business is predominantly wholesale, providing unique ethnic foods to an array of bodegas, restaurants and supermarkets around the city; but there is a substantial retail trade as well, particularly on Friday’s and Saturday’s (Elliot, 2004). The combined impact of retail and wholesale trade radiates throughout the city as growing immigrant populations are able to access a piece of home, at prices that are accessible to lower-income groups (its just not *all* about profit to them). Bodega owners, supermarkets and restaurants have access to a wide variety of unique, ethnic goods at prices that allow them

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<sup>6</sup> Nigerian and Ghanian populations grew to about 30,000 in 2000 from 11,000 in 1990 (Purnick, J: 2004)

to re-sell cheap enough to accommodate for their customers. Immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, West Indies...can stop in and experience a refreshing environment, a home away from home, while picking up goat legs and heads, bull penis, cows feet, frozen fish, Ghanaian dvds, toothpaste, tomatoes (the list goes on and on), all in one place, and that is key.

But just as important is the price level. The merchants keep prices low enough so that restaurant owners who shop there can charge less for their meals; so the bodega owners can charge less for their products; so the (impoverished) immigrant populations in New York can bring something home without falling behind on payments. Location (all grouped together, one-stop shopping), selection (diverse, ethnically enriching) and price (cheap): these three factors make the market an irreplaceable resource to tap into for New York's immigrant population, and the city's diversity in general.

The market remains an important center of distribution serving this wide variety of customers who depend on the unique compilation of goods and services provided at costs that allow wide access. The merchants must orient their activities around profit to stay afloat, but there is a difference between a wholesale consumption with profit-making activities, and understanding it more as a 'necessary evil' (it is profit maximization vs. the necessity of profit). In other words, it is not all about the money, but more about the service, the community and the quality of life that is developed day-by-day.

But after 30 years of neglect, on behalf of Mr. Buntzman, the market is crumbling. It is an eyesore, as city officials eagerly proclaim, and is a ripe target for urban renewal. The sorry state has already seen the loss of many merchants businesses; but still, there remain a couple dozen merchants with there 400 some employees generating \$400 million every year (Bagli, 2004). These merchants, however, have no 'legitimate' right to the market spaces. They have contracts with Arol allowing them to rent the spaces, but this contract does not provide them any voice; this is reserved for the owners. Even though the merchants, and their predecessors, have called the market home since the 1930's, their fates are subject to the whims of the owner; they are alienated from the socio-economic processes that determine their future.

In the beginning of the infamous regime of Mayor Bloomberg, the city finally gets its chance to clean up this 'blight' on the surface of the city, to transform a



dilapidated market into a new, exciting development. To the Bloomberg administration, the aesthetics of the market space are of central concern. Poor conditions drive away the bearers of higher tax code and negatively affect the city's status on the global urban hierarchy. The preservation of the market's social use value thus takes the backseat in the cities agenda for redevelopment. But what will it be, who will develop it and for what purpose will it be developed?

We will return to the market later on.

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### **Reproducing Capitalism: Waking the Sleeping Dragon**

Up until this point I have been discussing the dominant (hegemonic) social and economic ideologies, which exist in the realm of the state and other global institutions. Building off Lefebvre's concept of levels, or 'spatio-temporal fields of social reality' (Ronneberger: 141), I will bring the geographical reproduction of capitalism to life by showing how state and global ideologies (macro) meet everyday human existence (micro) through the mediating level of the urban. This will allow insight into the production of injustice in our cities, as experienced through the spatial manifestations of capitalism's unjust social relations.

But first, a discussion revolving around the invasiveness of the commodity form is warranted, and will allow us a basis from which to proceed with an investigation of its geography.

### **Reproductive Strategies: the 'colonization of everyday life'**

The reproduction of capitalism must occur economically, as necessitated by the under riding logic of capital accumulation. This is why capitalism organizes society around the imperatives of this logic: i.e. into different classes, which play specific roles in facilitating the accumulation and reinvestment of surplus value (which contains the process of production and distribution). Now I will turn my attention to the reproduction of these social relations.

In advanced (neoliberal) capitalism, reproduction has come to be structured around commodity form, and bringing this form into the everyday lives of the people.

The economy, in other words, will be sustained so long as the people keep purchasing and consuming the commodities that are produced. To ensure this happens, (corporate, transnational) capitalist powers, which are handed the reins by neoliberal governance, set to work with a plan that entails invading the private level of the everyday with a barrage of information, images, entertainment and ideals. These messages serve to normalize the fetishized commodity into our everyday lives (identities) and our social relationships, and are found in the spaces (both abstract and concrete) that constitute our daily lives. Thus, we see billboards and other forms of advertisements crowding public spaces in conjunction with the all-important intrusion into our (private) homes through mass media and entertainment television. These are mechanisms in place to keep us complacent laborer/consumers, so that we reproduce the system that we understand as normal. There is no room to breathe, to think for one-self: the end result is what Lefebvre calls the ‘colonization of everyday life’.

Why is this colonization so important for capitalism’s strategists? As economic pressure intensifies, the solution must be to increase consumption. Consumption is not inherently bad. Obviously we must consume to survive; so it is important to distinguish between needs, and desires. Human beings need food, clothes, warmth, etc., and there are many people in this world who struggle daily to provide these need. We do inherently *need* certain other things, but I think the majority of us can say we do not need everything we have.

Lefebvre, as communicated through Wark (2011: 96), recognized that need without desire (without play, superfluity, luxury...) represents *actual* human poverty. In such a case there is simply no room for desire, only for ‘intense need’. On the other hand, when “desire is abstracted from need”, when one is unable to distinguish between what one *needs* and what one *desires*, then our desires “lose vitality, spontaneity and ossify into the mere *accumulation of things*” (Wark, 2011: 96, emphasis added). Capitalism thrives off this alienation: the more we consume, the more fuel in the economy. While capitalism can not be held responsible for making us desire all that we do, it certainly benefits from our desires, and therefore aides the process through subconscious and cleverly disguised advertisements and consumption campaigns<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> By framing progress as a competition to amass the most and best things

The abstraction of desire from need is precisely what feeds and reproduces the commodity fetishism, and enforces its imposition on our daily lives and social relations. Indeed, as Wark proclaims (2011: 96), building off Debord and Lefebvre: “the imposition of the commodity form on one aspect of everyday life after another breaks the tension between desire and need”. Those individuals who are unable to make the connection between their needs and desires, she says, are ‘cut off from their own being’, alienated from them-selves. They became passive recipients of the onslaught of messages and images that await them at every turn, and, experienced daily, these leave their marks.

This process culminates and is solidified through the intrusion of mass media, entertainment and the like, and is referred to, in its entirety, as the spectacle (Debord). The spectacle is the socio-economic form that serves as the basis of critique for many anti-capitalist movements in the past half-century<sup>8</sup>, within the rise of advanced capitalism.

This colonization of everyday life is important for a few reasons, which bear justifying before I begin an analysis of the geography of it all. Because the commodity form has become central to the reproduction of capitalist economy, social relations are accordingly organized to facilitate its production and distribution. In the overtly profit-minded vehicle of neoliberalism, the commodity is valued almost solely for its exchange value, for its ability to achieve profit. This means that our economy revolves around proliferating the commodities’ quantitative value, while qualitative imperatives, such as sustainable uses, take the back seat. There is, for example, an actual business policy called ‘planned obsolescence’: businesses manufacture commodities with a limited life span (period of use) so that they become obsolete after a certain period of time. After this period, the consumer is then urged to buy a new commodity to replace it. This ‘consuming for the sake of consumption’ is at the heart of our economic system, and it is driven by the daily propaganda of the spectacle.

When we experience this dynamic daily, we do not stop to think of the forces of production behind our consumption; we instead see it as the ‘natural way of doing things’: we consume (the fetishized commodities). As the everyday is the realm of our

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<sup>8</sup> Among the most intriguing, the (largely French/European) Situationist International movement whose effective ‘leader’ was Guy Debord: author and lead critiquer of the Society of the Spectacle

social relations, these too become mediated by the quantitative logic of the commodity. They themselves become concerned with quantity, rather than quality. Thus, as our desires become abstracted from needs, our daily interactions and experiences become centered on what we possess and how *much* we *own*. This, identifying ourselves with what we have, is a direct product of the private property model.

Day-by-day, the spectacle ensures that we are reproduced as ‘passive consumers’ of the throng of commodities that we, quite frankly, come to believe that we *need*. To purchase these commodities on the market and sustain the individuals that we *want* to be, we are irrevocably dependent upon our incomes. We live our lives accordingly, toiling away at work only to spend our leisure time consuming this ‘spectacle’. We are quite content to revel in the endless accumulation of things, because we know no other way. Boredom becomes a sickness that can be cured by visiting the local Wal-Mart, which readily provides prescription ‘medicines’. The genius of it: you think nothing of it. It is normal, and more than that, we like it!

“It is like the air we breathe & the water we drink, it is like beer & cricket & the need for money. It is, we think, the natural order of things.”

(Mayday Resources, 2003)

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“The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (Debord, 1994: thesis 4)

This statement, one of Debord’s many theses concerning the spectacle, should strike a chord with us. We know by now that the reproduction of capitalism relies on a set of social relationships to sustain production. What Debord is saying here is that the spectacle becomes *the* key social relationship. By propagating our lives around the demands of the spectacle (which we understand as natural) we unknowingly reproduce the dynamics of production and consumption that reinforce and reproduce capitalism. We are victims of the cunning commodity fetishism; our everyday lives are determined to more or less an extent by the corporate and private enterprise that broadcast spectacle;

mediating the way we see and understand the world. Debord's thirtieth thesis<sup>9</sup> invigorates this argument.

*“We’re all given phones, that make pancakes, so we don’t rock the boat” (Chomsky)*

Chomsky’s quote aptly reveals the logic behind the reproduction of the spectacle. If, indeed, we are all so satisfied with the things we have, and what these things can do for us, there is no need to even think about a different life. We sit complacently in our throng of ‘things’, as if being babysat by capital: in our homes, yet powerless.

### **The Geography of it All**

“Geography matters, not for the simplistic and overly used reason that everything happens in space, but because *where* things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen” (Warf and Alias, 2009:1)

The spectacle, being a social relationship, requires a space for its evolution (reproduction), and thus has a specific geography. This geography, when unveiled, goes a long way towards understanding the ‘true’ nature of the spectacle: that as the reproductive machine of (neo) capitalism. To understand its geography, we must go beyond its fetishized appearance and investigate how it is produced, asking: by whom, for whom and for what purpose.



**Figure 2: Rendering of Times Square; Mass intrusion of Spectacle**

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<sup>9</sup> “The more he contemplates the less he lives; the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The externality of the spectacle in relation to the active man appears in the fact that his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him. This is why the spectator feels at home nowhere, because the spectacle is everywhere.” (Debord, 1994: thesis #30)

### **Spatio-temporal fields (levels) of social reality**

To bring this geography to life I will make use of Lefebvre's 'spatio-temporal fields of social reality'. In a nutshell, this logic dictates the interrelationships between three different levels through the production of 'reality'.

The global level is home to state structures and other powerful organizations. This is the macro level where society is organized according to specific economic ideals. Accordingly, capitalist power and ideology radiate from this level in the attempt to organize all facets of life.

The private level is the level of everyday life. This is the level that each and every one of us experience directly on a day-to-day basis and live our lives through. This is the level of injustice, and the breeding grounds for transformation.

The third level is represented by the urban, the city. This level represents the clashing ground mediating the relationship between the global (state and institutions) and the private and thus is directly related to the conditions of our everyday lives, as we experience them at the private level.

It is the relationship between the global and the urban level that we must focus on if we are to understand *how* and *why* we experience everyday life the way we do. Therein lies the geographical focus of this thesis and therein arises the contradictions of capitalist development that we must overcome. In particular, the global level engages the urban to facilitate its societal ideals (consumption based economic growth) while disregarding the plight of those urban dwellers who might not otherwise choose to organize their lives in this way.

### **Capitalism's Space**

"Capitalism has been able to attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions for a century, and it has succeeded in achieving "growth". We cannot calculate at what price, but we do know the means: by occupying a space, by producing a space" (Lefebvre, 1973: 21 cited in Gottdiener, 1985: 144)

Increasingly assimilated into the realm of capital accumulation, urban space has become a key, if not the key, ingredient in spurring capitalisms reproduction and expansion. This is so for a couple of reasons. Ill take them one by one.

Urban space becomes a real “force of production” (Merrifield, 2002a: 88) as capitalists increasingly pour investment into the production of the built environment. Known as the second circuit of capital accumulation, investment in the built environment serves to soak up capital that would otherwise over-accumulate. This invigorates the economy in the short term (pouring money into the economy and activating idle productive mechanisms), and staves off stagnation. As production of the commodity (apartment buildings, office buildings, tourist infrastructure) is finished, the capitalist places it on the market for a set price. Depending on the quality of the commodity produced (location, condition, service provided), they can expect to turn a reasonable profit as it is consumed (rented, leased, leisurely consumed).

This is real estates big game: to produce the spaces that corporate powers and the wealthy so desire (in the city centers, in skyscrapers towering above the city) and lease it out to them for obnoxious amounts of money. The more obnoxious this amount gets, the capitalist turns a profit, and the wheel keeps spinning. Just have a look at the skyline of any major city today. Due to the ‘magnificence’ of these investments, they overshadow and outweigh, other, ‘inferior’ initiatives in terms of ability to reproduce the economy, and thus tend to be favored developments when the economy needs the most help.

The preceding corresponds to the traditional Marxist political-economy understanding of the role of space in the reproduction of capitalism; the view championed by the likes of celebrated geographer David Harvey. What Harvey (and other strict political economists) seems to discount is the role of everyday life: not simply as a “repository of larger processes”, but more along Lefebvrian lines, as a “semi-autonomous and contradictory level of totality” (Goonewardena and Kipfer et.al, 2008: 8).

Lefebvre’s analysis implies an active role for the sphere of everyday life, capable of transcending the reach of the overall political economy. To help clarify, Goonewardena (129) makes use of Lefebvre’s metaphor and understands the ‘specialized structures’ of the political economy as the trees that grow in a forest. These trees are borne out of the everyday (the ground), yet are experienced as disconnected (alienated) from what goes on in the forest floor. Importantly, though, the trees (specialized structures) cast shadows on the ground and ‘alter the composition and fertility of the soil’. Even so, the organisms on the forest floor have a life of their own, subjectively

independent from the forces that determine the composition of their living environments. Everyday life then appears as an arena in which real social transformation can take place, with or without corresponding transformations of the overall political economy.

This leads into the other reason: the urban has become integral to the reproduction of capitalism because it represents the playing field for the unfolding of everyday life, for the contested reproduction of capitalist social relations. This is the domain of distribution and consumption, the necessary co-activities of production. Cities have become home to the majority of earth's inhabitants and thus function as the circuit board on which modes of production are organized. The urban is, in other words, the level where the 'specialized structures' of the global meet the private; where capitalism is reproduced and where we can organize to resist it.

The contradiction between space as necessitated for purposes of accumulation (global), and space as necessitated for the unfolding of social life (private), lies at the heart of this paper. As the drivers of accumulation gain more control over space in the city, they impress the logic of accumulation into the spaces of the private sphere of human activity, and thus into the social relations that are shaped at this level. The spatial organization borne out of this logic denies the use of space for purposes other than economic valorization, and thus restricts and controls the *quality* of life that can be achieved in and through this space. The urban represents the mediating stage between higher-level ideologies, and private level appropriations of life, and when studied closely, reveals the forces at work in capitalism's reproduction and the injustices manufactured along the way.

To clarify the picture I will rely on Lefebvre's spatial triad, or, three dimensions of space. I place specific focus on two of these dimensions because it is the interaction between them, the tension between their logics, which mediate the third dimension, actual spatial practices.

### **Conceived/Abstract Space**

This dimension represents space as conceived by the global level and its planners, bureaucrats, technocrat and other organizational powers. These are the actors who conceive of and seek to implement a very specific space to facilitate their economic ideals. To facilitate the reproduction of capitalism, these 'specialists' designate and map



out certain spaces for certain purposes; such as business improvement districts, or housing, commercial or leisure areas. These become fragmented spaces embedded with capitalistic ideologies, which seek to *use* and produce space(s) according to their exchange values, according to the ability of capitalists to profit through their appropriation. The state, heavily influenced by capitalist powers, will develop the parameters of spatial organization according to the social relations of production that 'drive' society. The preferred spatial organization thus adopts the platforms of private property, of commercialization and of economic valorization. Urban space, too, is fetishized and reduced to its quantitative attributes; how much profit can be sucked out of this space, or that?

### **Lived Space**

Lived space represents the dimension through which we experience and live our lives everyday. This space corresponds to the private, everyday level, and thus is the space wherein we experience the 'wrath' of decisions taken at the upper level. Consequently, it is the space wherein we experience the injustice of capitalist relations: the alienation, the exploitation and social backwardness of capitalism's logic. Importantly, it is also the space that offers breeding grounds for resistance, for transformation. The way this space is experienced responds to and is constrained by the conceived space of 'specialists' and its corresponding spatial practices. We experience the power of the majestic developments, the regulation and securitization of public spaces. For the very reason that we experience capitalism's unjust logic of economic necessity in this space, it breathes life into instances of resistance and dreams of another world.

### **Perceived space/Spatial practices**

The dialectical tension that builds and frames the struggle between use and exchange value in our urban cities come together through the actual spatial practices secreted by conceived and lived space. Conceived space gives rise to the production of spaces in the built environment for their exchange value, while lived space characterizes the everyday struggle of urban dwellers to reproduce their own lives through space. The material manifestations of this tension reside in perceived space, in the spatial practices

of both the producers of space (state, capital) and the, would be, appropriators of space (the people).

Lefebvre insists that we cannot examine one facet of space without the others. They always influence and restrict, shape and restrain, and give rise to the constantly fluctuating dynamics and experiences of life in the city. We can understand the perceived dimension as the objective experience of space (experienced (more or less) commonly to all), while the conceived and lived dimensions are subjective to the particularities of their origin.

I should here clarify the conceptual differences between Harvey's political economy project and Lefebvre's conceptual and practice stress on everyday life. Harvey privileges and problematizes, above all, the material, perceived realm of spatial practices; i.e., how the political economy engages space. Understood in this way, he places emphasis on the role of urban space in sustaining the logic of capital accumulation and incidentally trivializes the dynamics of resistance that are broiling in the lived space of everyday users.

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The domination of the conceived space of the global level, over the lived space of the private level, serves as the underlying force of injustice<sup>10</sup>. As the productive, profit-making feature of space becomes hegemonized, this (conceived) dimension creeps into that of lived space, altering the composition of the social relations that are crafted at this level through the spatial practices of all users.

The global level is imbued with the neoliberal logic. Neoliberalism idolizes profit-making activities to the point that: 'there is no alternative' (Thatcher). The state thus employs a strategy based around providing maximum incentive to the private market to facilitate the accumulation of capital (Lefebvre, 2003: 78). Part of this strategy, then, see's the state step out of the way of real estate developers, even facilitating their power grabs into the urban environment. These ideologies and the corresponding templates of social organization, embedded within the global level, are transferred into the urban

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<sup>10</sup> As Merrifield notes (2002a: 90), the dimension of conceived space "is the dominant space of any society, intimately tied to the relations of production, and the 'order' which those relations impose"

environment through the use and organization of space (the perceived, material practices). Urban space becomes an invaluable commodity.

Do not take this last bit lightly. Remember that neoliberal capitalism thrives off the alienation manufactured through the fetishism of commodities, masking their (real, socially produced) nature by idolizing their quantitative worth and emphasizing their ‘normality’.

Imagine what this means to our cities, as the spaces within become homogenized and reduced to their exchange values. The spaces, I might add, that urban dwellers depend upon for their use values. Lefebvre’s project, much like Marx’s on commodity fetishism, consists in going beyond the actual manifestations of space and uncovering the processes of production; processes which contain and disseminate the social relationships internal to capitalism’s logic, and all the injustice contained therein.

### ❖ Case Study part 2: The geography of capitalism’s reproduction

“Those that create an interesting and stimulating everyday neighborhood life lose it to the predatory practices of the real estate entrepreneurs, the financiers, and upper-class consumers bereft of any urban social imagination” (Harvey, 2012: 78)

We pick up where we left off at the turn of the century, after thirty years of effective neglect on behalf of the market’s landlord (Arol Development Corporation).



Figure 3: Bronx Terminal Market in 'Sorry' State

When Buntzman obtained the lease from the city in the early 70’s, the market still housed nearly 100 merchants and collectively well over 1,000 employees (Bagli, 2004). But thirty years of neglect has left its mark on the market area, leaving a decrepit and less

than aesthetically pleasing space to house the remaining 23 merchants and their 750 employees<sup>11</sup>.

In the context of neoliberally mandated urban renewal schemes, the BTM represents an ideal target: an area characterized by disinvestment, ripe for redevelopment and the creation of a new spectacle. The city just has to find some actor willing and able to undertake the task (some capitalist willing to sink money into a project). Enter Steven Ross, head of Related Companies and acquaintance of then deputy mayor for economic development, Dan Doctoroff. Related has the ability to turn the market space into something that New York can be proud of (a neoliberally imbued pride), and city officials are all too eager to make it happen. The details of the exchange are marked by shady 'official' interactions between city officials in their mediation of Arol and Related's discussions. As it results, Related purchases the lease directly from Arol Development and are given the go-ahead to implement the renewal plan. I will not go into detail of the changing of the guards, but I will outline the ways in which the city went to great lengths to ensure Related got its hands on the market space.

After trying for decades to wrest the lease from Buntzman's hands (Bagli, 2004), the city jumped on the chance when Related showed interest in the market. Ross, friends with the deputy mayor of economic development, was not only allowed, but had the route paved to purchase the remaining lease from the Buntzman family company. Then it was simply a question of what to build, and how to get approval from the city.

Ross represents a prototypical capitalist; his company, a neoliberal mega-developer armed with support of the neoliberal state. Their plan is to build a new megamall, retail center and spectacle: a development fully oriented around the profit motive. The grand Gateway Center, as it would be called, would bring important jobs and investment into a community desperate for it. The city, fully resigned to neoliberal doctrines, is all for it. Not only does Mayor Bloomberg offer Related tax-incentives, low-interest loans, and \$14 million in cash, his administration promised to reimburse the mega-developer if the necessary zoning changes weren't made to allow the construction to go up (Angotti, 2005). What this tells city officials involved in the overview of the process, 'if we do not allow this, we lose as well'.

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<sup>11</sup> These numbers are according to Fainstein, 2005, and will vary according to whom you ask

‘Surprisingly’, the project went ahead as planned. The new Gateway Center at the mouth of the Bronx would be constructed in a matter of years, and the remaining merchants were notified of their evictions, offered measly relocation packages and sent packing.



Figure 4: Stanley Meyer, president of the BTM merchants association, with fellow members who sued to bar their eviction.

### Analyzing the developments: placing the redevelopment in the context of capitalism’s reproduction



Figure 5 & 6: Actual result of the redevelopment

The Gateway Center at the Bronx Terminal has become an icon of capitalist consumerism, a ‘spatial mooring point’ for the insertion of commodity relations into our everyday lives.

In the context of neoliberal governance schemes, the city handed the reigns over to a private company who invested heavily into a space of the city with the goal of achieving a profit down the road. Sound familiar? This represents the connection between capital accumulation and urbanization, to the point. Capitalists sink surplus value into the urban environment, putting labor to work and invigorating the economy while offering a return of profit, if all goes according to plan. The Gateway Center epitomizes the type of development characteristic of neoliberal accumulation schemes. Ross and his fellow cronies lease the retail spaces to a variety of big-box stores who promise the profit that makes the investment worth it. The retailers in turn have access to a space where they are able to reach new customer bases and take over micro-economies with the standardized commodities that are made available to the ‘drooling’ consumers. They add to their network of retail spaces, where each space serves the same purpose, looks the same, and offers the same products available for sale. “If you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all”.

The commodities they offer are fetishized through news, media and general broadcasting and made and are made available for consumption at spaces like these. It is a collaborative and structured effort on behalf of corporate America. It is the spectacle.

The city wants it because the investment acts to reinvigorate (and reproduce) the economy. They exchanged a less profitable, eyesore of a market with an extremely profitable, beautified urban center: climbing another step on the ladder of the global urban hierarchy. Corporate America drools over it as yet another space to facilitate the consumption of their fetishized commodities.

But what affect does this transformation represent to those who depended on the old market (merchants, employees and those who shopped there/relied on their services), and how does it contribute to the reproduction of capitalism?

### **Fate of market merchants**

The operations of the Bronx Terminal Market merchants were dependent upon their grouping together as a one-stop-shopping experience. They fed off each other and each other’s customers. Therein lay their competitive advantage in a society increasingly threatening to operations like theirs (operations that do not revolve around profit). This allowed them to keep their prices down, because they had enough business to do so. If

dispersed, as the city essentially forced, this advantage is lost and their businesses threatened. Sal Paolillo owns Wholesale Produce, one of the remaining businesses in the early 2000's. He has this to say about the importance of the merchants remaining consolidated: "See, I sell tomatoes...if I were all by myself, I would go out of business. Basically, that would be the end of it. It's not right" (Vandam, 2005).

His resembles the plight of each of the remaining merchants, as well as the customers they serve. By failing to relocate the market merchants *together*, the city effectively condemned the businesses and destroyed a unique and socially invaluable space; in favor of a homogenized, boring, one-size-fits-all, center of mass-consumption. This transformation represents a clear example of the conceived space of capitalist powers marginalizing alternative, differential spaces, because of their ability to breathe life into alternative visions of society.

To frame the impact of this development in relation to the reproduction of capitalism, I will pay special attention the labor relationship, especially as profit-maximizing capitalists exploit it.

First of all, as Fainstein laments (2005), the change in use (functions) leads to a transformation in the employment structure of the area. The predominantly male, unionized workforce employed by the market merchants give way to a low-paid, low-skilled, undervalued, and exploited workforce to staff the new retail stores. I worked for two years in Target (Wal-Mart like big box store) as a teenager. The work is dehumanizing, uncreative, boring and impersonal labor. Interactions with customers are carefully orchestrated, the things you say, the way you say them, the clothes you wear, your daily activities: all are scripted. There is no room for human creative agency; this is not your role. You are there to grease the machine, to make sure the customer finds what they need, and comes back. And it is the same in every single store you visit. The same style of labor wearing the same clothes, saying the same things, smiling the same way; like they don't want to be there but they need the money.

Keep in mind that this is but one manifestation of 'abstract labor'; the notion includes any type of labor which exists simply because capitalists need it, for either production or distribution.

This is a workforce, then, that exists because it is cheap. Low-skilled work demands lower wages; the less you pay the workers, the more profit you can make. Moreover, these big box stores are traditionally anti-union, meaning, anti-labor rights. If workers can't organize, they can't successfully demand better working conditions (higher output).

The workforce that this replaces operated on a different logic. These jobs served to facilitate the services provided by the market merchants: services that did not 'eat, sleep and die' for profit, but occupied an important and irreplaceable (in that it is unique) niche in the segregated urban landscape. This difference in operative motives is key, underwritten by the divide between social use values and financial exchange values.

### **Summing up**

The reproduction of capitalism is dependent upon on the creation and organization of space to facilitate and guide the social relations of production that reproduce the economy. It follows then that the spaces produced under the neoliberal governance will be imprinted with the same internal dynamics and relationships of neoliberal ideologies. These relationships and ideologies culminate around the imperative of profit, and are validated through the fetishism of the commodity form. This is exactly the form taken by the transformation of the BTM, into the consumption transmitting form of the Gateway Center. The new mall is a space constructed to facilitate 'maximum profit', a goal that appears as the antithesis to social good. The businesses entertained in the new mall are chain stores running on the logic of cheap labor, low-priced goods: high profit. This is a development prototypical of neoliberal times.

As Merrifield rightly remarks (2002a: 90), the market and for-profit system (neoliberalism epitomized) 'always and everywhere flourishes through the abstract and conceived realm'. The Gateway Center epitomizes the abstract, conceptions of space on behalf of planners, technocrats, and politicians (and their puppet-masters). It snuggles in perfectly with the imperative of exchange value in its blatant disregard of the (in)valuable social services provided by the merchants. The production of a neoliberally conceived, abstract space of consumption brings hammers the commodity form even deeper into everyday life of Bronx residents who might otherwise escape its barrage.



The market space became a commodity when neoliberal times demanded economic growth. The development of the retail center epitomizes the maximization of exchange value so integral to neoliberal development, literally sucking as much profit as possible out of urban space.

The result is that the everyday level is dominated by the globally conceived abstract space, and thus suffers a loss of *quality* of life<sup>12</sup>. The actors at this level, in their drive to reproduce capitalism, invade the multiplicity of everyday lives within the urban with the commodity fetishism so important to capitalism's reproduction. Urban dwellers that sustain this barrage are alienated from the trees (specialized structures) that cast these shadows on the ground and 'alter the composition and fertility' of everyday life.

As Marx showed, the alienation produced by capitalism first originated in the workplace, as the capitalist class exploits the laborers in the name of profit. The neoliberal invasion and commodification of space has brought this alienation into most all spheres of everyday life, as we, the urban dwellers, live our lives 'normally' (what we understand as normal) according to pre-determined plans and structures, which we are unaware of.

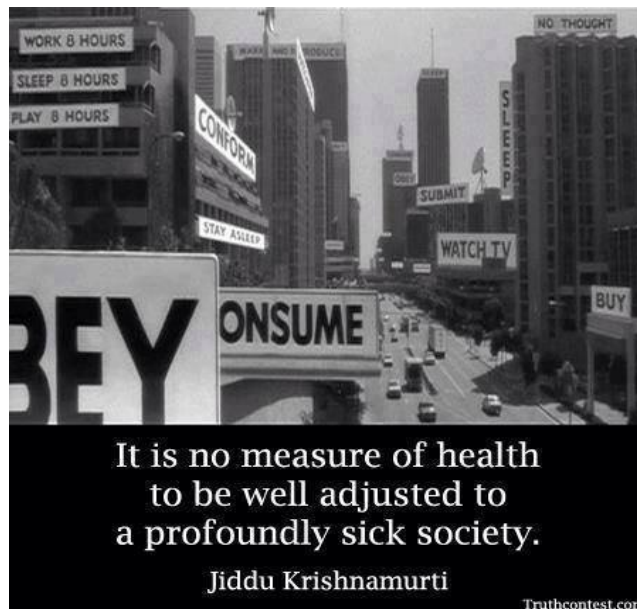


Figure 6: picturing the spectacle

<sup>12</sup> As differences are wiped out in favor of a homogenous and structured population

## **PART 2 – MOVING BEYOND**

"Change life! Change Society! These ideas lose completely their meaning without producing an appropriate space" (Lefebvre, 1991: 59)

"The beginning of radical hope is the recognition that social relationships are arbitrary and mutable — and need not be mediated through monetary transactions." (Malitz)

This section is for those that do not wish to dedicate their lives to a system that serves the interest of the few at the expense of the many, for those wishing to re-organize their lives according to a logic that does not revolve around 'maximum' profit. This is not a project dedicated to the full extinction of capitalism, to the complete overthrow of capitalist systems and structures of production. Capitalism, in the United States, appears to have reached black hole status; anything and everything in its vicinity is sucked in to the system, rarely to be seen (outside of it) again. At this stage, the political activities of those on the left of the political spectrum (the supposed do-gooders) are reduced to clamoring listlessly for a tax raise on our millionaires. Drawing on the pride of a nation who believes they saved the world from communism, these efforts are met with screams of fervor denouncing 'socialism', or any redistribution of wealth<sup>13</sup> for that matter. In this black hole, waiting for change is like waiting for the water to boil, and the burner is set to one.

This may be disheartening, but fret not; capitalism is not any ordinary black hole. All of us have the ability to climb out of it, if we wish too, and create our own black holes. The more of us that do so, the higher the magnitude we achieve and the more of capitalism we take with us in the process. This then is an effort to climb out of the abyss into a new world, to transform everyday lives and the social relationships therein, here and now. Those content with capitalism can go along with their everyday lives just as they are: so long as they do not impinge on the freedoms of those whom the system currently utilizes for profit<sup>14</sup>.

While we cannot force everybody to live under this system, we have to create space for those who vehemently oppose the capitalist way of life. There must be space to

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<sup>13</sup> Even as the system is premised off trickle-down economics where wealth trickles from a few hands to the rest of society

<sup>14</sup> Though that eliminates much of the working class, and without their exploitation, capitalism is not 'capitalism'

sew the seeds of new social structures and relationships from within, from the everyday, and this everyday remain be free of the unjust dynamics of capitalist production.

### **Evolutionary Reconstruction**

Building on the ideas of Marxist thinkers, I will construct a framework for the ‘evolutionary reconstruction’ (Alperovitz and Dubb, 2013: 2) of capitalism. Evolutionary reconstruction is premised off the idea that change need not necessarily take the sides of reform (modify existing institutions) or revolution (overthrow existing institutions). Preferred then is the: “systemic institutional transformation of the political economy that unfolds over time” (Alperovitz & Dubb, 2013: 2). This framework fits the understanding that change must come from the everyday level. I am not talking simply about social activism (though it certainly plays its part). I am talking about developing alternative social organizations and mechanisms of production that are able to operate in their own spaces, free of capital’s objectives.

Imagine a network of these spaces in a capitalist grid. They represent little oases of “freedom” amongst the oppressive capitalist ocean. Alone, they are not substantial enough to challenge, even frighten, capitalism’s institutions, but they offer breeding grounds for alternative experiences of life. When allowed to breathe, these breeding grounds can flourish over time. The goal may be long-term institutional changes, but they must originate and be dedicated to transforming life in the everyday sphere. This is what Lefebvre insists, and Harvey seemingly neglects (in that he treats the everyday as repository of larger processes, rather than a semiautonomous sphere (Goonewardena et.al: 8)).

For Lefebvre, this effort must respond to the dominating logic of late capitalism’s abstract space (Gottdiener, 1985: 147). In other words, our everyday lives must be rescued from the social backwardness of ideologies conveyed through abstract space. To do this, urban dwellers must have the ability to appropriate their own space, for their own purposes. Carlsson (2001: 110) and Holloway (2011) share this sentiment, as well as many others.

One answer, then, must be to crack into capitalism and proliferate an abundance

of these ‘oases’ where alternative everyday lives can be realized. These are what Holloway would call cracks in capitalist domination, and it is to him we now turn.

### **A Theory of Cracks**

Everything starts with a resounding refusal, an exclamatory, “No”! ‘I will not continue to dedicate my life to the reproduction of capital’. This refusal serves as the basis from which to proceed, then the question becomes, ‘how’? How do we provide our sustenance (reproduce ourselves), without subordinating ourselves to the logic of capital?

It is not enough to simply say no. We must, in our refusal, imply a different way of doing things. We must offer an alternative motive than that which has spawned our current social organization (where our social relations are mediated by economic value). Holloway is a revolutionary who has lived and studied with the Zapatistas of the Chiapas region in Mexico. Theirs’ is a mission of changing the world one step at a time, a little bit here, a little there. Theirs’ is an everyday struggle to live a life of their choosing, regardless of the efforts of the Mexican state to suck them back into the black hole. Hence their slogan: “*We walk, we do not run, because we are going very far*” (Roos, 2013). Living and breathing this strategy, the Zapatistas have tirelessly refused the Mexican state and reproduced themselves independently, for the past 6,500 days and counting. It can be done.

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Humans are subjectively unique beings. It is the spectacle that turns us into an objective mass of zombies internalizing all that we are told. Allow us, instead, to pursue what makes us happy, to live for something other than money, and behold what we are capable of. Liberate the everyday from oppressive mechanisms of control, and you liberate human subjective qualities. Liberate subjectivity and you allow the innate differences that make human kind an incredibly complex and fascinating organism, to flourish. This sentiment resounds throughout Holloway’s work.

During the 2008 version of the annual Marxism festival held in London, Holloway was engaged in a debate concerning ‘strategies for changing the world’

(Holloway and Callinicos, 2008). On this topic, he declined to give any one way out of the mess, instead holding up a mock, gigantic mirror, in which the audience could all see themselves. His point? There is no simple strategy to organize around. There must be a ‘multiplicity’ of efforts, he says, which are all dedicated in their own way to breaking the domination of capital.

Capital affects all of us all differently, though there certainly are continuities amongst our experiences (as Carlsson reminds us, 2010: 926&929). Some feel its wrath (though maybe do not identify it) through the mind-numbing daily work they endure at the office, in the warehouse or the retail store. Others feel it as they sift through the monthly pile of bills, draining their bank accounts and stores of energy. Still more feel it when they are evicted from their homes because the system understands that housing is a commodity, not a human right.

The continuities behind our experiences unite us, but the multiplicity of our struggles urges each of us to open our own cracks. Thus, Holloway writes (2010:11), “break it in as many ways as we can and try to expand and multiply the cracks and promote their confluence”.

Imagine a wall with cracks forming here and there, all running towards the center of the structure, the breaking point. They all have their own starting points, take their own paths and some may never get there. The wall is able to absorb and redirect their routes. But if enough, of the right magnitude, converge at the right spot, or simply undermine the structural foundations of the wall to the extent that it is not stable, it all comes crumbling down and a new wall must be put up. What each of these cracks has in common is the basis for their formation. They all reject the capitalist social relations and institutions that subordinate their own lives to the prerogatives of profit. I will, later on, give an idea of precisely what a crack may look like.

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In order to unite these efforts to the best of my abilities, I will focus in on what Marxists understand as the fundamental relation of production, that between capital and labor. Understood in this light, the exploitation of the working class at the hands of the

capitalist class (made possible by the institution of private property) is at the base of capitalist injustices. Our everyday lives are dominated because we need to make a living, and to do so we need to work. To liberate our everyday lives, we must have the ability to choose how we wish to ‘make a living’, without relying on capitalism’s institutions.

“Everything the tyrant has comes from us and from his exploitation of us: we have only to stop working for him and he will cease to be a tyrant because the material basis of his tyranny will have disappeared” (Holloway, 2010c: 6)

Holloway reminds us that capitalist exploitation exists only because laborers agree to the system, literally subjecting them-selves to domination. If all the workers in any given factory decided enough was enough and picked up and left, production would be stalled, the capitalist would have no way to turn investment into profit, and would go out of business. What, then, is holding the workers back?

It is one thing to resent the work you do, and still receive the paycheck that allows the purchase of the material foundations of life (food, housing, clothes); and another to walk out and rely on an alternative means of production to sustain one-self. This is the struggle in a nutshell. This is why the wall is still standing. There is an ingrained understanding that the things you need to live must be purchased on the market, and thus we need money to live. Accordingly, we subjugate ourselves to demeaning jobs that exploit our labor so the capitalist can fill his/her pockets. We work for profit’s sake (the capitalist), not for work’s sake (ourselves). We are alienated from the products of our labor and we think nothing of it because, well, it is normal.

Not all labor under capitalism is ‘abstract’, there are plenty of occupations that allow for and value human creativity. It is a split between what Holloway (2010b) calls abstract labor vs. doing, between what Carlsson calls (2010: 926) ‘irrelevant activity’ and ‘meaningful work’; where, ‘doing’ and ‘meaningful work’ are currently out of reach of the majority of urban populations in the United States.

Available to these demographics are the low-skilled, low-paid jobs that exist because the capitalist needs labor to either produce or distribute his commodities. The

people that staff these jobs<sup>15</sup> have no choice but to subject themselves to the whims of the capitalist, as they too must sustain (reproduce) themselves by purchasing the necessary goods on the market.

It is, however, not enough to simply agree to work in de-humanizing conditions; one must also compete with others (in the same boat) for the opportunity to do so. This systemic condition prompted famous Beat author Charles Bukowski to lament the the fact that the working class must essentially be grateful for the opportunity to work in dehumanizing conditions so that they can ‘make lots of money for someone else’ (1975: 55).

These are much like the job I held at Target: meaningless, mind-numbing labor, which is available at the lowest cost to the capitalist so they can produce more profit. But if we instead worked for the sake of work, for something ‘meaningful’, in a rejection of the profit motive, this can constitute a crack in capitalist domination. For instance, if a local community were to work in the fields everyday to produce the food that that community needs on a daily basis, this is meaningful work; this is not ‘for profit’. The community directly experiences the benefits of their labor; it is not alienated from them.

What if the workers in a factory decided what to produce and how to produce it? This could spell the end of ‘planned obsolescence’, in favor of sustainable solutions. Productive activities might then be geared towards engineering goods that are produced for the betterment of mankind (social use), rather than for the highest rate of profit (financial exchange).

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Holloway is right when he says that social change is not the result of activism, but rather, “the outcome of the barely visible transformation of the *daily activity* of millions of people” (2010: 12, emphasis added). This is not to say that activism is un-important, but until we take the tools of domination and exploitation away from the capitalists (i.e., our labor, consumption), they continue to hold the power.

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<sup>15</sup> Not simply ‘the poor’, this includes all those who do not have the necessary skill sets or experience to work in an environment where they are valued as creative humans

Case in point: Occupy Wall Street. I honestly do not know what went on in the park, the extent to which those thousands of people dreamed up different lives. I believe that there were real and important experiments into living life on a different basis, but the way they came across was as a mass of fed-up constituents demanding change from above, when perhaps what we need is change from below. As Buckminster Fuller famously stated, “you never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete”.

Imagine Occupy 2.0. This time protesters do not protest, per se, but simply live, day in and day out, in a rejection of capitalism. They show no interest in Wall Street, or in politics. Within their grasp is the power to live how they choose, here and now. Instead of putting all that popular force and energy into showing disenchantment with the status quo, reappropriate it into helping one another create thousands of oases, thousands of black holes, thousands of cracks.

Chris Carlsson frames this logic in a language of ‘Nowtopia’. As the name implies, he is not waiting for a comprehensive revolution to change the world. His is a project of transforming the everyday. ‘Nowtopians’, then, are those who live alternative social practices and relations on a day-to-day basis. People who break the chain of reproduction in some way: whether they choose not to feed the market, and acquire their needs independently (for example: farming cooperatives, DIY initiatives), or simply choose not to sell their labor to the profit-crazed capitalist and instead ‘make a living’ on their own terms.

These would be the people/practices who occupy the cracks in capitalist domination. Carlsson is aligned with Lefebvre when he says (2001: 109) that the goal must be to liberate social space from the profit minded vehicle of abstract space. Just as capitalism appropriates space to serve its purposes, so must the everyday inhabitants, appropriate space(s) that provide the impetus for lives of our own choosing. Otherwise, we remain dependent on the possibilities laid forth by capitalism.

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Refuse the capitalist logic, and we can begin to alter the basis of development. But, again, we cannot simply refuse to consent, we must reinvent, and this is the hard part. To reinvent takes hard work and determination. It also takes a spatial practice



confluent to the new goals. It takes a space that allows us to produce for ourselves on our own terms, whether individually or in communities (though communities offer undisputable advantages).

Before I begin to propose different ways to ‘crack’ into and expose capitalism, I will introduce Lefebvre’s concept of differential space. Differential qualities of space must be fostered to overcome intrusion of the homogenizing, abstract space of late capitalism.

### **Differential Space**

Differential space is the antithesis to capitalism’s abstract space. If abstract space is all about homogenizing, fragmentizing, valorizing and quantifying, differential space places emphasis on quality, on the differences borne out of liberated human subjectivity, which invigorate and energize a healthy social body. As capitalism relies on an objective mass of constituents who are engaged for purposes of profit-making activities, its actors organize space in the same way; negating qualitative differences in so far as they do not lead to financial gain.

Differential space then champions, and is appropriated by, the qualitative differences unique to each of us. These seek to reach the oxygen at the surface through cracks in the spectacle. No matter how deeply buried, subjectivity (human difference) is always somewhere, broiling up and building energy for release, dialectically charged in response to capitalism’s suppression.

Thus, Merrifield rightly states that ‘abstract space carries within itself the seeds of differential space’ (2002a: 91). This is the space that frightens capitalists to the bone: it “places unacceptable demands on capital accumulation and growth” (91). The social relations that *can* be, that are possible in a differential space, need not bow to the logic of capital. They need not revolve around the profit imperative, and thus threaten to disrupt the cycle of capital accumulation. Even if ever so slightly, they threaten the smooth running of the machine, and thus must be de-legitimated. The rest of this paper will be devoted to identifying alternative social relations and their (micro) modes of production; I will show how these practices need, and give rise to, differential spaces.

## **Occupying the Cracks**

The alternative social relations I will explore must, first and foremost, oppose the fundamental capitalist relationship: that of (abstract) wage-labor. If we free ourselves from this relationship, all of a sudden we can start to develop alternative modes of production. Our work need not, then, reproduce commodity fetishism, in that it can instead produce qualitatively different goods within a framework not of, 'for profit', but for social use. As we are no longer working for the capitalist, the 'things' we produce will not be for private gain, but for the common good, and here we strike into the private ownership statute.

We can organize our productive and distribute activities in a way that ensures maximum social benefit, rather than economic gain (perhaps with a market system organized around "who needs it", and not "who can buy it"). If we read this struggle in terms of individual benefit (capitalism) vs. common benefit, and I think this is the only way to frame it, then what we are after is a mode of production riding a platform of the common good. Thus I turn my attention to the idea of a commons-based economy. This economy is sustained by social relationships mediated by the common good, where our daily activities speak the same language. First I will elaborate on the necessary geography of the commons.

### **The (differential) Space(s) of the Commons**

"A revolution that does not produce its own space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses" (Lefebvre, 1991: 54)

Lefebvre and his followers are adamant in the contention that social change cannot be separated from spatial change, and vice versa. The social is spatial, as is the spatial social. A central platform of revolutionary aspirations is to transform social relations and the everyday lives wherein they are organized. To transform everyday life requires the transformation of space through which these lives are lived. In other words, without producing a new space in conjunction with new institutions and social structures, the revolution will not have 'realized its full potential'.

Consider this through the theory of levels of socio-spatial reality. It is not enough simply to transform the ideologies and superstructures of the global level. Just as neoliberal social relations are reproduced at the private level through the mediation of the urban, likewise must new ideologies and institutions be realized and reproduced at the everyday level. This occurs through the (re) appropriation of the urban environment, the site of the majority of human existence.

This new spatial organization/template must break with the existing order in that it negates the conceptions of space as represented by the state and the institutions it serves. But because this is a project concerned with liberating the everyday, here and now, I am not focusing on transforming the conceptions of space at the global level. This may result down the road through overall structural changes in the logic of society. But here and now, what must be liberated is the ability of urban dwellers to appropriate space to facilitate the everyday lives of their choosing. If able to actively appropriate space (the dimension of perceived/material spatial practices), then the dimension of lived space can gradually reclaim the qualitative differences that are denied by the abstract/conceived dimension of planners, bureaucrats and technocrats alike. They become ‘differential’ spaces, champion use values and qualities that arise out of these differences.

The conceived dimension, responsible for spatial practices that prioritize exchange values, need, in other words, not immediately be transformed. The aim must be to facilitate the spatial practices of those wishing to organize society around the imperatives of the commons, rather than an individualized, capitalistic production. It is to these imperatives we now turn.

### **The Idea of the Commons**

*The law locks up the man or woman  
Who steals the goose off the common  
But leaves the greater villain loose  
Who steals the common from the goose.*  
(17<sup>th</sup> century English folk poem, part 1)

The idea of the commons is the direct antithesis to the institution of private

property. The basis of the concept rests in the common ownership/appropriation of everything that capitalists seek to enclose and privatize: land, raw materials, housing, means of production, and so on. The air we breathe, land we walk on, earth we work and natural resources we uncover: all are inherently common. Under common control, capitalist exploitation has no grounds; there simply remains no means to appropriate these resources for private gain. If we are able to counteract the private ownership model through a focus on the commons, we strike to the very core of capitalist injustice. In reference to commodification, it is the private ownership model that allows the enclosure of all that is common, and turns them into resources for private gain.

For instance, Harvey often cites the process of the enclosure and privatization of land as that through which capitalism ensures a class of dependent wage-laborers. Capitalists essentially take the means of subsistence right out from under the feet of the people, who are left with nothing but their labor to sell (to the capitalists) in order to reproduce themselves day by day. This example typifies the English enclosure movement, which gave birth to the poem running throughout this section.

*The law demands that we atone  
When we take things we do not own  
But leaves the lords and ladies fine  
Who takes things that are yours and mine.*  
(17<sup>th</sup> century English folk poem, part 2)

In neoliberalism's drive for profit, everything common is up for grabs and threatened by enclosure and, eventually, commodification. If capitalists had their say, even the water we need to live would be privatized, and sold on the market<sup>16</sup>. The commons movement then is a resistance to neoliberal capitalism's drive to enclose, privatize and commoditize *everything*<sup>17</sup>.

Typical commons approaches include organic farming cooperatives, workers

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<sup>16</sup> Here you can watch a video of NESTLE chairman Peter Brabeck-Letmathe arguing that water should be privatized: < <http://www.trueactivist.com/nestle-ceo-water-is-not-a-human-right-should-be-privatized/>>

<sup>17</sup> It could be argued that political offices in the U.S have become commoditized, to the extent that politicians effectively have to buy their way into office.

cooperatives, cooperative communities and collaborative consumption<sup>18</sup> (notice the common thread of cooperation). Stopped in the language of solidarity, these practices operate in spaces, and with a logic, that exist outside the realm of capital. As a result, they do not contribute to capitalism's reproduction and instead threaten its stability. Running throughout this logic is a refusal of the capitalist way; the central characteristic of Holloway's cracks, and Carlsson's nowtopian practices. The everyday lives of the people who live these practices, are liberated (to an extent, depending on involvement), from capitalism's drive for profit, and thus take on considerably different characters and *qualities*. Their activities are qualitative in that they cannot be reduced to quantifiable measurements, but instead make an impact on the quality of life, here and now, as well as there and then (through overall impact).

Remembering back to the discussion on Holloway's theory of cracks, he calls for a multitude of efforts spawned out of specific conditions of injustice corresponding to the variety of ways that capitalism affects all of us. Here, the idea of commoning is especially valid. David Bollier is the co-founder of the Commons Strategy Group. He stresses that commoning takes different forms and responds to different needs according to specific spatio-temporal experiences: "In each place, and in each historical situation, the commons may manifest itself in different ways – but always in a common spirit" (Bollier, 2010). The commons movement, in all its various forms and functions (which correspond to specific experiences in time and space), encapsulates the key tension of our times between individualism and collectivism. Capitalism serves the individual; the commons serve the collective whole. It thus provides the impetus for our efforts to re-organize and reclaim the right to our lives, and takes place in the cracks of capitalism's stretched out body. We must reclaim the commons<sup>19</sup>

*The law locks up the man or woman*

*Who steals the goose from off the common*

*And geese will still a common lack*

*Till they go and steal it back.*

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<sup>18</sup> Sharing what we have with one another

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, according to Carlsson (2008: 09.41), 45 percent of the fresh produce consumed by Americans in at the end of WWII was produced in urban gardens.

(17<sup>th</sup> century English folk poem, final part)

### ❖ **Taking Charge – A people’s response to the volatility of global capitalism**

Economic globalization ushered in a difficult period for Argentina’s economy in the 90’s. Much like the scene in Mexico after NAFTA, and Puerto Rico post WWII, the opening of the economy to global forces hit local communities and businesses hard. Competition from imports spelled trouble for these micro-producers and led to an almost 100 percent increase (a doubling) in Argentinian unemployment rates<sup>20</sup>. Welfare benefits provide a security for a portion of the unemployed, however these do not cover black market workers. Historically, Pearson notes that one out of every five laborers in Argentina worked in the black market. In 2001, however, this ratio became one out of every two and a half, meaning twice as many workers had no formal employment, thus no entitlement to welfare services. As unemployment rates rise, those who previously had employment on the black market are left in the dark, with no official avenues to turn to.

In the context of global economic restructuring, with the financial stress that reverberates throughout both formal and informal economies, the Argentinian people decided to take matters into their own hands. When ‘Big Daddy’ (Bollier) is not there for you, one must rely on alternative mechanisms of support. The solutions engineered by the people of Argentina (with help of a collection of urban ecologists) serve as inspiring reminders that it is possible to organize our production and distribution from the bottom up. We can take control of our (individual and communal) reproduction and live how we choose on an everyday basis, without conforming to the demands of the state and its puppet-masters.

#### **An alternative currency**

“If there is a shortage of money why don’t we create alternative money? If there is a lack of market why don’t we create another one?” (Interview with Carlos de Sanzo (urban ecologist) 21/03/2001 from Pearson, 2003: 220)

In the early 1990’s a group of urban ecologists set out on a mission to help the people of Argentina counteract the ill effects of economic crisis. The focus originally

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<sup>20</sup> From 6-7 percent in the 80s to 14-15 percent in the 90s (Pearson, 2003: 223)

centered on providing training and knowledge in practices of sustainability<sup>21</sup> to help families cope with hard times. What it evolved into was a programme even more inspiring to our times: ‘to promote the exchange of goods and services without being restricted by access to money’ (Pearson, 2003: 216).

The *Red Global de Trueque* (RGT) was conceived to facilitate this idea. This represents an alternative, community based currency that was to operate on principles directly opposed to capitalist ideologies. Pearson lists these principles in her paper (2003: 220). Of the twelve, the last sticks out in particular: “We are deeply committed to the idea of progress as a consequence of the sustainable wellbeing of the greatest number of people in all societies”. The ‘sustainable wellbeing of the greatest number of people’, as opposed to the unsustainable accumulation of wealth in the hands of a much smaller number of people. Their effort represents the prototypical ideal of the commons, where collective appropriation of our shared resources leads to ‘a sustainable wellbeing for the greatest number of people’.

The principles on which the RGT is premised can here be related to the capitalist ideologies that radiate from the global level (not in ideals, but in levels of socio-spatial reality). Capitalism sees a never-ending accumulation of wealth as developmental progress, and engages the city and its spaces to facilitate profit-making activities. If, then, the RGT understands developmental progress as ‘a consequence of the sustainable wellbeing of the greatest number of people’, we must ask how it appropriates the urban to facilitate the realization of the common good for all inhabitants.

The form of appropriation this takes is represented by the creation of a network of markets, or ‘barter clubs’, localized in communities and spread throughout the country. On the first of May in 1995, the founders of the RGT (a group of three urban ecologists) along with students, family and neighbors, came together in the garage of one founder’s home and launched the very first of these clubs (Pearson, 2003: 216). Three years later, there were an estimated 150 clubs operating in communities through the country, involving between 80 and 100,000 people engaged in barter transactions (217). The

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<sup>21</sup> Oriented around enabling families to become self-sufficient in food within a restricted space (Pearson, 2003: 216)

goods and services being exchanged in these transactions consisted of food, clothes, crafts, health care, therapies, formal and informal education and training (217), all exchanged using an alternative currency called *creditos*.

New participants in these markets are ‘loaned’ 50 of these *creditos* with which they can ‘purchase’ the goods and services available. To continue participating, however, initial consumers must become producers (prosumers): they must too offer something for sale. In this way, the mutual reciprocity that drives this system is assured, as all participants become ‘prosumers’: ‘you have something I want, maybe I have something you want’.

By 2001, there were an estimated 400 thousand members (prosumers) with an annual circulation of between four and six hundred thousand *creditos* (217). Markets took place (some daily, some weekly) in a variety of available spaces and came to offer even the services of legal and medical professionals. One could even barter for car insurance, or the services of a plumber (218). The list goes on and on, encompassing almost anything one could possibly *need*. This fact is remarkable, and is directly related to the notion of ‘prosumers’.

By trading what they have, for what they need, users of the market are urged to utilize and maximize their creative capacities as a means of sustenance. Perhaps no one needs to work in alienating conditions for the capitalist, if we devote our time instead to producing our own means of sustenance.

Those with access to a ‘barter’ market can devote their lives to what makes them happy, producing what they can, and what they want to, in order to exchange these services and goods, for what they need. The markets showcase the dynamism of liberated everyday lives, liberated human subjectivity and its creativity, and serve as a true alternative to capitalism’s method of survival, wherein we are not dependent on ourselves, but on the capitalist.

“We are gathered in this place in order to find a new way out, for survival...because of the political crisis, we have to seek each other out, to mix with everybody to be able to overcome the situation which our families are facing: need. Necessity forces us to do things, to invent new situations.” (An older ‘prosumer’, interviewed by Pearson in 2001.)



The ‘prosumers’ who turn to these markets are the ‘nowtopians’; the market concepts represent the ‘cracks’. The cracks in this case are geographically facilitated by the availability of market spaces, but their impact reverberates throughout the country as ‘prosumers’ carry on their, very different, everyday lives. When confronted with crisis, the people took matters into their own hands to create a real alternative mode of production. There was no interest in identifying the good and bad guys; blame and anger don’t change the world. Instead they devised a system that utilized the creative capacity of each and every member to produce and distribute all the necessities, and more.

Here, the factories are located wherever the producers are. The laborers are the producers, and experience directly the benefits of their labor. The markets for exchange make use of available spaces<sup>22</sup> to facilitate the face-to-face exchange so valuable to trust. Consumers look to local producers rather than the outside macro-producers they are alienated from. Communities are solidified, livelihoods strengthened and the stresses of everyday life reduced. TINA (there is no alternative) becomes TAOA (there are other alternatives)<sup>23</sup>.

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### **Visualizing the struggle over space**

Imagine a map of any region. There are two different variables in the legend. Blue represents capitalist spaces, and orange represents what we’ll call, autonomous spaces. Blue dominates the map, clearly, with some areas darker blue than others (where capitalism hits harder). But ever so slowly, opening through the cracks are little orange marks, popping up here and there randomly, at first. These marks, too, vary in color intensity, depending on the strength (effectiveness) of the existence. Importantly, they vary ever so slightly in color tone as well, corresponding to the specific conditions (refusals and abilities) of their existence. They are each orange, but each one, a different shade and strength (think of the variety among the barter markets in Argentina).

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<sup>22</sup> Community and cultural centers, schools, trade union halls, churches and disused factories (Pearson: 2003: 218)

<sup>23</sup> taoaproject.org

Now imagine a visualization of the long-term evolution of the map. Orange marks tend to break through where the blue is weaker. Some have spastic existences, sparkling on the map for a moment before being overrun with blue. Others hold in there and stand their ground, gradually taking on a fuller color. Because the orange inputs are each of a unique shade of orange, they complement and are drawn too one another; almost as if the orange team should prevail by connecting all the unique shades into one collective whole.

Because the dominant color is currently blue, however, the orange spaces that do stand the test of time are solitary marks on the map, scattered randomly. But through time, the blue starts to give way in certain places to the magnetic-like pull exerted by the orange spots in their effort to connect and evolve. If two shades connect (even above the map; internet), the colors merge, while still in their original spaces, and each respective space becomes stronger.

The stronger these marks grow, they start to spillover their geographic restrictions and into the surrounding blue (they have an affect in their local environment). Sometimes it's a random sprinkle on the radar (an inspired shop-owner who changes business model), and sometimes the bucket tips and makes a bigger stain (collectivizing a private building stock, commons airwave, open-source information).

The blue might have weakened in spaces but remains intact and sturdy as a whole. The orange, meanwhile, continue to exist in a complex and dynamic formation of (seemingly) separate, yet collectively charged, spaces. The orange team does not depend on the blue team relinquishing any of its space; it is rare that this happens. They use, instead, their creativity and collaboration, hard work and determination, to carve out their own spaces and resist the efforts of capital to 're-re-claim' them (see again the Argentinian, as well as the case of 'Freetown' Christiania<sup>24</sup>).

Both these colors correspond to different visions of society and life in general. Both have very different understandings of progress. Capitalism see's progress in the accumulation of wealth, no matter the social consequences. Commons-based approaches see progress as an indicator of overall societal well-being where 'the chain is only as strong as the weakest link'.

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<sup>24</sup> For more: Thörn and Wasshede, 2011

Both ‘modes of production’ must go about organizing society around the production and distribution of the necessary goods. Each will have very different solutions to these mandates. To implement them, they must appropriate and organize spatial practices that act as the effective transmitter of their logic into society. The Argentinian ‘barter’ networks serve as one example, made possible through the appropriation of available spaces.

As of today, in the United States especially, capitalism is winning the game. Its’ blue covers the majority of any map, leaving much discontent and inequality. Those who do not have access to, or cannot appropriate, orange space, are reduced to passive spectators of the spectacle raining down from the blue. It is important for the orange to dream up alternative ways of living, but these remain dreams until the necessary space is in place, and available for use. What good are the ideals of subsistence farming without the fields to appropriate the ideas, or barter networks without the market spaces to facilitate an alternative mode exchange?

### **Looking Ahead**

We know there is more than enough food for every single human being on this planet. So why does one out of every eight people in the world suffer from ‘chronic undernourishment’ (World Hunger Education Service)? That is a staggering 870 million people suffering from extreme hunger on a daily basis. Food is *the* essential human necessity, and 870 million out human beings are cut out of the loop. Now, the vast majority of these people are in the developing world, so their condition has nothing to do with us, right. “Sucks for them, but what can I do about it?”

I don’t pretend to have all the answers. I don’t know how a different society would work in practice, some may have ideas but *can* anyone know? The point is to imagine. If you live in a certain restricted system for so long, you begin to take it for granted, like it is the natural way of things. This is why history is so important; it teaches us that ours is but one in a long, winding pathway of different societal models and structures, intimately tied to the subjective conditions of the times. If we start from scratch, leaving all the technology, all the *things* we have today (factories, infrastructure, cities...), but we take away the specialized structures. Sweep them completely out of

sight. Political, legal, economic and social norms, forget about them. What kind of organization would you conceive of in its place? How would you have us sustain ourselves while reproducing society?

The great Inca civilization of South America (15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries), organized their society without the medium of money<sup>25</sup>. There was no commerce, no market space, no trade; and yet they developed an incredibly rich and established civilization (not to say it was the ideal civilization). This immediately throws out the notion that we can't live in a world without money. I'm not saying that we *should* live in a world without money but that this thing, this concept that drives and consumes our lives is *not* natural!

Capitalism represents a social organization particular to the most recent period of a couple hundred years. Something came before it, and something else will come after. It will not happen overnight, but in waves here and there. This paper then is about instigating what comes next. It is not necessarily a world without money, or without a state, but perhaps a world that cares more about those left behind, than those far ahead. When we can place the common good ahead of the individual, when this thinking becomes hegemonic, maybe then the world will know peace. Not peace as we know it now, as simply a stage in between wars when all is relatively calm. Rather, a peace in which the very notion of war is ridiculous, outrageous even. This is a world in which we help our community and receive help in return; in which we cooperate with one another rather than see our peers as competitors. In which we, together, make the decisions that affect our lives. It's about seeing the world in a different light.

## **CONCLUSION**

Capitalism, especially as it manifests recently in the United States, has rested upon manufacturing 'ideal citizens' who eat, sleep and breathe relentless consumption, providing the impetus for the economy. By consistently turning the gaze of the citizen towards the spectacle, day in and day out, capitalist powers make sure there is no room to breathe (outside of the system) so that we adjust ourselves to a lifestyle we come to understand as normal. Most of us accordingly spend the majority of our lives working in alienating conditions, to make money for someone else, while stuck in a hole of debt

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<sup>25</sup> For more: Ader, 2010

stemming from incessant and prescribed consumption. To ensure that the sheep remain in the pasture, the farmer makes sure they understand that they will not survive without him. Just as the capitalist privatizes and commoditizes as many means of sustenance as possible, so the people remain dependent and have nowhere to turn. The spaces of our cities, in particular, are increasingly commoditized and the possibilities of value in those spaces are reduced to economic, rather than social.

This turns our cities into playgrounds for the wealthy. These are profit-generating machines that see but one purpose for the spaces of the city, to facilitate (maximum) profit-making activities. Development of the built environment takes place unevenly and unequally creating polarized, segmented and hierarchized urban spaces, reflecting the social relations therein. Neoliberalism uses space predatorily to facilitate a dominating presence, but broiling underneath in the cracks of the pavement are the dreams and screams that are fighting to reach the surface. To stop the reproduction of this system, we must pay attention to its geography and real social characters of production (how it engages the city). Only then can we use space to create an everyday life of our choosing.

The purpose then is to create little pockets of life here and there, in the cracks of capital, which can breathe life into new forms of society and fan the flames of a different organization of life activity. These spaces must be appropriated by, and for a use, outside of the profit logic, as I take this motive to be fundamental to the problems of our times. Not everyone has to occupy/make use of these spaces, of course there are beyond many individuals who relish the capitalist way of life. But for those who do not agree with the way capitalism organizes society, they must be able to appropriate a space of their own to organize their own lives. It cannot be mandatory to live under the dictates of the accumulation of capital. The Argentinian people took matters into their own hands to create alternatives; it *can* work.

Just as there are many who live and breathe capitalism, there are countless others who feel oppressed, feel forced into a life that is not their own. For these people, it is a waste of a life. Everyday that goes by working the same dead end job stuck in the same cycle of debt and despair. To all these people, there is a way out. It will not be easy at first, but it is possible, even within the system, to live a different way. Take inspiration

from where you can find it and sew the seeds for a new life. It takes collaboration and cooperation on a broad scale, so seek out those who think like you.

Together, we can take back control over our lives.

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## FIGURES

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