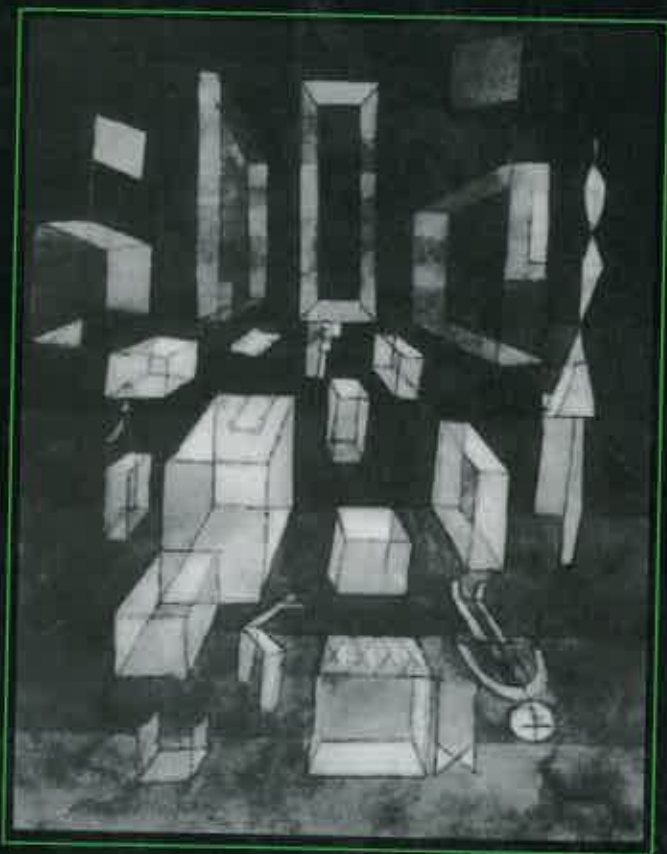


THE PRODUCTION OF
SPACE

— *Henri Lefebvre* —



TRANSLATED BY
DONALD NICHOLSON~SMITH

from practice or from the changes wrought by practice (i.e. from the worldwide process of transformation).

The working-out of the code calls itself for an effort to stay within the paradigmatic sphere: that is, the sphere of essential, hidden, implicit and unstated oppositions – oppositions susceptible of orienting a social practice – as opposed to the sphere of explicit relations, the sphere of the operational links between terms; in short, the syntagmatic sphere of language, ordinary discourse, writing, reading, literature, and so on.

A code of this kind must be correlated with a system of knowledge. It brings an alphabet, a lexicon and a grammar together within an overall framework; and it situates itself – though not in such a way as to exclude it – vis-à-vis non-knowledge (ignorance or misunderstanding); in other words, vis-à-vis the *lived* and the *perceived*. Such a knowledge is conscious of its own approximateness: it is at once certain and uncertain. It announces its own relativity at each step, undertaking (or at least seeking to undertake) self-criticism, yet never allowing itself to become dissipated in apologies for non-knowledge, absolute spontaneity or 'pure' violence. This knowledge must find a middle path between dogmatism on the one hand and the abdication of understanding on the other.

XXI

The approach taken here may be described as 'regressive–progressive'. It takes as its starting-point the realities of the present: the forward leap of productive forces, and the new technical and scientific capacity to transform natural space so radically that it threatens nature itself. The effects of this destructive and constructive power are to be felt on all sides; they enter into combinations, often in alarming ways, with the pressures of the world market. Within this global framework, as might be expected, the Leninist principle of uneven development applies in full force: some countries are still in the earliest stages of the production of things (goods) in space, and only the most industrialized and urbanized ones can exploit to the full the new possibilities opened up by technology and knowledge. The production of space, having attained the conceptual and linguistic level, acts retroactively upon the past, disclosing aspects and moments of it hitherto uncomprehended. The past appears in a different light, and hence the process whereby that past becomes the present also takes on another aspect.

This *modus operandi* is also the one which Marx proposed in his chief 'methodological' text. The categories (concepts) which express social relationships in the most advanced society, namely bourgeois society, writes Marx, also allow 'insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements [bourgeois society] built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along with it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it'.³⁷

Though it may seem paradoxical at first sight, this method appears on closer inspection to be fairly sensible. For how *could* we come to understand a genesis, the genesis of the present, along with the preconditions and processes involved, other than by starting from that present, working our way back to the past and then retracing our steps? Surely this must be the method adopted by any historian, economist or sociologist – assuming, of course, that such specialists aspire to any methodology at all.

Though perfectly clear in its formulation and application, Marx's approach does have its problems, and they become apparent as soon as he applies his method to the concept and reality of *labour*. The main difficulty arises from the fact that the 'regressive' and the 'progressive' movements become intertwined both in the exposition and in the research procedure itself. There is a constant risk of the regressive phase telescoping into the progressive one, so interrupting or obscuring it. The beginning might then appear at the end, and the outcome might emerge at the outset. All of which serves to add an extra level of complexity to the uncovering of those contradictions which drive every historical process forward – and thus (according to Marx) towards its end.

This is indeed the very problem which confronts us in the present context. A new concept, that of the production of space, appears at the start; it must 'operate' or 'work' in such a way as to shed light on processes from which it cannot separate itself because it is a product of them. Our task, therefore, is to employ this concept by giving it free rein without for all that according it, after the fashion of the Hegelians,

³⁷ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 105. This is an appropriate moment to point out a serious blunder in *Panorama des sciences sociales* (see above, note 4), where the method here discussed is attributed to Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre's own discussion of method, however, explicitly cites Henri Lefebvre, 'Perspectives', *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie* (1953) – an article reprinted in my *Du rural à l'urbain* (Paris: Anthropos, 1970); see Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 41 and 42, and *Panorama*, pp. 89ff. *Panorama* is thus wrong on two counts, for what is involved here is actually the trajectory of Marxist thought itself.

a life and strength of its own *qua* concept – without, in other words, according an autonomous reality to knowledge. Ultimately, once it has illuminated and thereby validated its own coming-into-being, the production of space (as theoretical concept and practical reality in indissoluble conjunction) will become clear, and our demonstration will be over: we shall have arrived at a truth 'in itself and for itself', complete and yet relative.

In this way the method can become progressively more dialectical without posing a threat to logic and consistency. Not that there is no danger of falling into obscurity or, especially, into repetitiousness. Marx certainly failed to avoid such risks completely. And he was very aware of them: witness the fact that the exposition in *Capital* by no means follows exactly the method set forth in the *Grundrisse*; Marx's great doctrinal dissertation starts off from a form, that of exchange value, and not from the concepts brought to the fore in the earlier work, namely production and labour. On the other hand, the approach adumbrated in the *Grundrisse* is taken up again apropos of the accumulation of capital: in England, studying the most advanced form of capitalism in order to understand the system in other countries and the process of its actual growth, Marx cleaved firmly to his initial methodological precepts.

say its 'productive' capacity – and why not?) has been prejudiced in consequence. A creative capacity of this kind manifests itself between the time when a concept begins to perturb dominant tendencies and the time when it begins to promote these tendencies – when, in other words, it is incorporated into the established wisdom, into the public domain, into culture and pedagogy. Marx and Marxism have certainly not escaped a process of this kind, but the Marxist schema has retained much force. There is no knowledge, according to this schema, without a critique of knowledge – no knowledge aside from critical knowledge. Political economy as a science is not and cannot be 'positive' and 'positive' alone; political economy is also the critique of political economy – that is to say, the critique of the economic and of the political, and of their supposed unity or synthesis. An understanding of production implies its critical analysis, and this brings the concept of relations of production out of obscurity. These relations, once clearly identified, exert a retroactive influence upon the confused ensemble from which they have emerged – upon the concepts of productive social labour and of production. At this point a new concept is constituted, one which subsumes that of the relations of production but is not identical to it: the concept of *mode of production*. Between the relations of production and the mode of production is a connection that Marx never completely uncovered, never fully worked out. This created a lacuna in his thought that his successors have striven to fill. Whether they have succeeded in doing so is another matter.

What of the part played by the *land*, as concept and as reality, in this context? At the outset, for the physiocrats, the land was a determining factor, but subsequently it seemed fated quickly to lose all importance. Agriculture and agricultural labour were expected to fade away in face of industrial labour, as much from the quantitative point of view (wealth produced) as from the qualitative one (needs met by products of the land); agriculture itself, it was felt, could and should be industrialized. Furthermore, the land belonged to a class – aristocracy, landowners or feudal lords – which the bourgeoisie appeared certain either to abolish or else to subjugate into complete insignificance. Lastly, the town would surely come to dominate the country, and this would be the death knell (or the transcendence) of the whole antagonism.

The political economists wavered a good deal on the issues of land, of labour and agricultural products, of property and ground rent, and of nature, and their hesitations may easily be traced – including, naturally, those of Malthus as well as those of Ricardo and Marx.

Marx's initial intention in *Capital* was to analyse and lay bare the

capitalist mode of production and bourgeois society in terms of a binary (and dialectical) model that opposed capital to labour, the bourgeoisie to the proletariat, and also, implicitly, profits to wages. This polarity may make it possible to grasp the conflictual development involved in a formal manner, and so to articulate it intelligibly, but it presupposes the disappearance from the picture of a *third* cluster of factors: namely the land, the landowning class, ground rent and agriculture as such. More generally speaking, this bringing to the fore of a binary opposition of a conflictual (dialectical) character implies the subordination of the historical to the economic, both in reality and in the conceptual realm, and hence too the dissolving or absorption, by the economic sphere proper, of a multiplicity of formations (the town, among others) inherited from history, and themselves of a precapitalist nature. In the context of this schema the space of social practice is imperceptible; time has but a very small part to play; and the schema itself is located in an abstract mental space. Time is reduced to the measure of social labour.

Marx quickly became aware – as he was bound to do – of resistance to this reductive schema (though many ‘Marxists’ – and all dogmatic Marxists without exception – have retained it, and indeed aggravated its problems instead of correcting for them).¹¹ Such resistance came from several sides, and in the first place from the very reality under consideration – namely, the Earth. On a world scale, landed property showed no signs of disappearing, nor did the political importance of landowners, nor did the characteristics peculiar to agricultural production. Nor, consequently, did ground rent suddenly abandon the field to profits and wages. What was more, questions of underground and above-ground resources – of the space of the entire planet – were continually growing in importance.

Such considerations account, no doubt, for the peculiarities of a ‘plan’ that is exceedingly hard to reconstruct – that of *Capital*. At the close of Marx’s work, the issue of the land and its ownership re-emerges, and this in a most emphatic way, complete with consideration of ownership in the cases of underground resources, of mines, minerals, waters and forests, as well as in those of the breeding of livestock, of construction and of built-up land. Lastly, and most significantly, Marx now proposed

¹¹ The fate of Marxism has meant – and who by this time could still be unaware of it? – that all dispute, discussion or dialogue concerning the crucial areas of the theory has been prevented. For instance, any attempt to restore to its proper place the concept of ground rent has for decades been utterly squelched, whether in France, in Europe or in the world at large, in the name of a Marxism that has become mere ideology – nothing but a political tool in the hands of apparatchiks.

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his 'trinity formula', according to which there were three, not two, elements in the capitalist mode of production and in bourgeois society. These three aspects or 'factors' were the Earth (Madame la Terre), capital (Monsieur le Capital), and labour (the Workers). In other words: rent, profit, wages – three factors whose interrelationships still needed to be identified and clearly set forth.¹² And *three*, I repeat, rather than *two*: the earlier binary opposition (wages *versus* capital, bourgeoisie *versus* working class), had been abandoned. In speaking of the earth, Marx did not simply mean agriculture. Underground resources were also part of the picture. So too was the nation state, confined within a specific territory. And hence ultimately, in the most absolute sense, politics and political strategy.

Capital, which was never completed, comes to a halt at this point. We are now beginning to understand the reasons why Marx failed to bring his work to a conclusion – a failure for which his ill health was only partly responsible.

What excuse could there be today for not going back to this exemplary if unfinished work – not with a view to consecrating it in any way but in order to put questions to it? This is especially needful at a time when capitalism, and more generally development, have demonstrated that their survival depends on their being able to extend their reach to space in its entirety: to the *land* (in the process absorbing the towns and agriculture, an outcome already foreseeable in the nineteenth century, but also, and less predictably, creating new sectors altogether – notably that of leisure); to the *underground* resources lying deep in the earth and beneath the sea-bed – energy, raw materials, and so on; and lastly to what might be called the *above-ground* sphere, i.e. to volumes or constructions considered in terms of their height, to the space of mountains and even of the planets. Space in the sense of the earth, the ground, has not disappeared, nor has it been incorporated into industrial production; on the contrary, once integrated into capitalism, it only gains in strength as a specific element or function in capitalism's expansion. This expansion has been an active one, a forward leap of the forces of production, of new modalities of production, but it has occurred without breaking out of the mode and the relations of the capitalist production system; as a consequence, this extension of production and of the productive forces has continued to be accompanied by a *reproduction of the relations of production* which cannot have failed to leave

¹² See also my *Espace et politique (Le droit à la ville, II)* (Paris: Anthropos, 1973), pp. 42ff. Marx's discussion is in *Capital*, vol. III, ch. 48.

its imprint upon the total occupation of all pre-existing space and upon the production of a new space. Not only has capitalism laid hold of pre-existing space, of the Earth, but it also tends to produce a space of its own. How can this be? The answer is: through and by means of urbanization, under the pressure of the world market; and, in accordance with the law of the reproducible and the repetitive, by abolishing spatial and temporal differences, by destroying nature and nature's time. Is there not a danger that the economic sphere, fetishized as the world market, along with the space that it determines, and the political sphere made absolute, might destroy their own foundation – namely land, space, town and country – and thus in effect self-destruct?

Some of the new contradictions generated by the extension of capitalism to space have given rise to quickly popularized *representations*. These divert and evade the problems involved (i.e. the problematic of space), and in fact serve to mask the contradictions that have brought them into being. The issue of pollution is a case in point. Pollution has always existed, in that human groups, settled in villages or towns, have always discharged wastes and refuse into their natural surroundings; but the symbiosis – in the sense of exchange of energies and materials – between nature and society has recently undergone modification, doubtless to the point of rupture. This is what a word such as 'pollution' at once acknowledges and conceals by metaphorizing such ordinary things as household rubbish and smoking chimneys. In the case of 'the environment', we are confronted by a typically metonymic manoeuvre, for the term takes us from the part – a fragment of space more or less fully occupied by objects and signs, functions and structures – to the whole, which is empty, and defined as a neutral and passive 'medium'. If we ask, 'whose environment?' or 'the environment of what?', no pertinent answer is forthcoming.

Although these points have been made earlier, it seems important that they be reiterated. The reason is that in many quarters truly magical origins and powers continue to be attributed to ideologies. How, for example, could bourgeois ideology, if it were no more than a mirror-like reflection of reality, actually reproduce this reality and its production relations? By masking contradictions? It certainly does do that, but it also brings nations and nationalisms into being – hardly a *specular* effect. There is no need to evoke history (the genesis of the nation states), however: any close examination of what such pseudo-theory purports to explain will suffice to demonstrate its absurdity. In Marx's trinitarian scheme, by contrast, there is no rift between ideology and political practice: power holds earth, labour and capital together and