

Fixed abodes

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Domestication and sedentization are not processes that were only imposed on “primitive” peoples; these processes occurred in Europe as well. Latin American nomads and European vagabonds experienced similar repression but by different means. Missions and prisons served similar functions: they settled the roamers and put them to work. Now, there are many all too familiar ways to regulate or fix movement. Here in the US, incarceration rates are skyrocketing. The computerization of biometrics is a new weapon in the State’s arsenal that greatly increases the accuracy with which they can identify human beings: this facilitates incarceration and immigration control. The above technologies and institutions of control share a common aim: to regulate movement and direct human action into the repetitive rotation of production and consumption.

Domestication in Latin America

Throughout Latin America during the colonial period Spanish style towns and cities were built with a central plaza, church and municipal building. American settlement patterns had been generally much more dispersed than Spanish towns. The Colonial administration forcibly concentrated dispersed settlements into such towns (*reducciones*). Once in towns it was much easier for individuals to be reduced to subjects of the crown and coerced into giving tribute.

The Missions settled, converted and hispanicized previously nomadic or semi-nomadic groups. They also eliminated hunting and gathering in order to enforce the production of a substantial agricultural surplus. (Hu de Hart 1981: 36) This system destroyed the economic autonomy that was based in hunting and gathering and attempted to instill the discipline of daily work, so that residents would produce with less resistance. One crucial aspect of this was the imposition of the time of the mission bell and the Christian work week. Obviously profit cannot be maximized if workers are left to work on their own time. The logic of productivity needs to organize time as well as space.

Apache warfare and raiding were very successful and managed to repel Spaniards from a 250 mile area, near the present day Mexico-US border. The Colonial administration had still not gained control of this area in 1821, at the time of independence. The Spaniards simply could not dominate the Apache militarily. Apaches were familiar with the area and traveled on horseback, they often raided Spanish settlements and disappeared without a trace. Colonial policies with regards to nomadic and semi-nomadic people always made sedentization a priority for this very reason. How could they control or exploit people that they can’t even find?

After all else had failed, the Spanish administration lured some Apaches into “Peace Establishments” (settlements near presidios) in 1786 by simply promising them weekly rations. One interesting difference between these settlements and Missions is that these settlements were a financial loss to the crown, they did not manage to exploit residents except when males were forced to serve militarily. That is, in this case control was more important to them than exploitation. They resorted to this method because Apaches simply would not submit to settling in missions. Residents of these settlements were forbidden from traveling beyond 30 miles from settlements unless authorized and were required to carry passports in those cases. (Griffin 1988: 99) But this law was often ignored and Apaches continued to travel where they wished. Apaches were encouraged to use guns instead of bows and arrows so that they would be dependent on the market for the acquisition of gun-powder, and they were encouraged to use liquor for the same reason. These measures were moderately successful for 25 years. But when rations started

to dwindle raiding increased and when the Mexicans ran out of rations in 1833, the situation returned to that of 1770 with as many Apaches roaming and raiding as before the “Peace Establishments” were built. (Worcester) In short, these measures failed, the nomadic Apache continued to elude the Spanish. These Apaches fiercely resisted domestication and refused to settle down permanently. Only later, Mexico and the US finally forced to settle or exterminated them but this achieved only after a long struggle.

Reducciones, Missions and ‘Peace Establishments” all put residents where they were locatable so that they would be more easily exploitable. The vagabonds of Europe were as much a threat to the powerful as the nomads and semi-nomads of Latin America, they were therefore also submitted to regimes of domestication. While the residents of Missions were converted to Christianity while they were taught the discipline of daily labor, European vagabonds were forced out of idleness while enclosed within four walls.

Confinement and European Domestication

During the early 1600s the first “houses of confinement” were built in Europe, to still the wandering and to put the idle to work.

In 1607 an ordinance called the archers to the gates of Paris to shoot at any vagabonds or beggars who dared try to enter the city. In 1656 the Hopital General was created, this was more a prison than a hospital and it was used to confine the idle, the vagabonds, beggars, sick and insane. Its openly claimed aim was to prevent idleness. The edict of 1657 was a vagrancy law that was enforced by archers who herded people into the Hospital. This is an interesting mutation of the 1607 policy and an example of an increasing reliance on confinement. These changes in punishment corresponded with an increasing social instability due to a growth in unemployment and a decrease in wages. This instability created an increased mobility of classes. In response to these changes there were three large uprisings in Paris in the early 1600s and guilds were formed in many trades. Obviously this new emphasis on confinement did not disappear with the end of this particular economic crisis. Confinement continued to be used as a source of cheap manpower after the crisis. In subsequent periods of unemployment it was again used as a weapon against social agitation and uprisings.

It is noteworthy that the first houses of confinement in England, France and Germany were built in the most industrialized cities of those countries. In England houses of confinement were opened in 1610 to occupy the pensioners of certain mills and weaving and carding shops. This was done during a recession, in other words, in a time where there was a high risk of rebellion. Industrialization had a great impact on class structure, it created new classes and thus allowed for individuals to change class. It also created new particularly appalling working conditions. As I have mentioned these drastic changes were, not surprisingly, met with resistance and revolt. Confinement was either a response to revolt or a means to prevent violent resistance to industrialization and its results. The history of confinement and other institutions or technologies of control is not a one-way linear process of increasing repression but a series of jumps, a conflict ridden complex of resistances and the state’s responses to resistance.

Measuring Life: Biometrics

Identification is a key technology of control used to keep immigrants out and supposed “criminals” locked in. Computerized biometrics are now the most effective technologies of identification. Finger printing is an older form of biometrics. The Human Genome Project is trying to map out the genes of every citizen of Iceland and put this information into a database. This leads us towards a world in which, according to the system, the most valuable thing about the human body is the digital data which it provides.

Biometrics are being used to restrict access to anything from a building to the nation-state. It is useful to know what specific technologies they are using against us. For example, Iris scanning is a very accurate technology of identification but luckily it has its limitations. It is less effective when used on people with very dark brown eyes. This is a very fortunate coincidence in countries like the US and Britain with racist cops! Retina scanning, on the other hand is said to be infallible. “Counterfeit resistant” Laser ID cards are used by the US INS for Green Cards and for the Department of State’s Border Crossing Card. The EU is considering using this technology as well. Their spread to Europe would be tragic news for illegal immigrants. Data (biological and other wise) which is written onto the Laser Card’s optical memory cannot be altered, therefore it is nearly impossible to forge this technology. This technology is obviously a vast improvement over the passports given to Apaches in the late 1700s, those passports were easy to forge. However, it is fitting that the Apaches resisted this technology not by forging it but by ignoring it and traveling beyond the areas controlled by Spanish. Unfortunately there are now fewer deserts to roam where such things can be ignored, but such places do still exist. The combined use of these technologies and increased surveillance (such as the millions of dollars budgeted for wiretapping in the 2000 Federal Budget) are of great benefit to the budding prison industrial complex.

These technologies give those in power more effective means to keep people in their designated place in the world of sanity: the measured, disciplined, educated, treated, productive world that functions according to the logics of capital and the state. There are always those who escape, defy or resist these logics, this is precisely why the state goes to such lengths to contain us. They are used in tracking systems that give governments and companies the means to find people and put them where they are ‘useful’ to the powerful, such as within the prison industrial complex, or to exclude people from access to privileged domains (gated communities, company buildings, rich countries etc.). While restrictions on human movement are increasing, restrictions on the movement of capital are diminishing. However, the free movement of individuals has always been a threat to productivity; these new technologies are merely a more efficient means to achieve the same repressive goal. They are used to prevent us from acting on our desires unless our desires have become perverted and trapped within the cycle of production and consumption. Reducciones, missions, “Peace Establishments” and confinement were and are all forms of rationalization: they fix and contain human bodies

The free movement of individuals has always been a threat to productivity, the willfully idle vagabond uses mobility to escape the grind of work and the wandering worker can use mobility as an advantage over his boss. The free movement through space is a threat to the state because it threatens any control over space. Complete free movement through space would not only threaten the nation-state but all private property. Mobility is our power.

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