

# **Anti-developmental Perspectives**

**Selections from *Perspectivas Antidesarrollistas***

Miguel Amorós

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# 1. On Lucrative Horrors and Combative Identities

*Text compiled from notes for talks given on May 9, 2009 at the Ateneo Libertario of Sabadell and on May 21, 2009 at the Ateneu Llibertari of Casc Antic (Barcelona). Published as a pamphlet by Desorden (Valencia).*

Economic growth provokes such devastation that modern capitalist society is characterized more by what it destroys than by what it creates.

None of its achievements can compare with the destruction caused by its necessities. This means something quite obvious, that is, that the thirst for profits that leads the productive system, and ultimately the way of life that it entails, results in an avalanche of harm for the population, from health risks (pollution is responsible for one fourth of all illnesses) to environmental destruction.

This devastation has reached such heights that the contrast between private interests and public harm has become clear to even the most dull-witted elements. This is when the centers of power speak of the environmental or territorial conflict, of the culture of refusal or of interactive government. Labor problems have long since ceased to be the main concern of our rulers, as is demonstrated by the fact that more than 40% of the workers earn less than 1,000 euros a month, and this is due to the fact that, under the threat of precariousness and exclusion, the mechanisms of control and integration function perfectly. This is not the case in other domains, since the failure of political environmentalism allowed the social question, which had been expelled from the urban neighborhoods and factories, to reemerge in the misnamed environmental struggles, and particularly in the defense of territory, without the moderating influence and dispersion of “participatory democracy”.

Nonetheless, this emergency has not been so overwhelming that it has produced a phenomenon of generalized consciousness, and the struggles still have a long way to go.

It is therefore not the danger of a social movement born from the defense of the territory that has sowed such anxiety among our leaders, but the fact that developmentalism, based primarily on real estate speculation, has unleashed a financial crisis from which they expect to extricate themselves by way of a new paradigm: the “green” economy, or “sustainable” development.

Developmentalist “sustainability”, however, requires a degree of popular collaboration that in other times was not judged to be necessary by the arbitrary regime that ruled in the past. Thus, if the advocates of a way of life that is respectful of nature always clashed with the paternalistic and authoritarian ways of the government, since the latter had inherited the technical personnel, the programs and the procedures of the dictatorial past, and above all, because the plans of the developers and financiers whom it served did not permit any obstacles, now that the impact of the real estate bubble, climate change, the hole in the ozone layer and a foreseeable shortage of fossil fuels has launched a new “green” cycle with an expectation of vast profits, a more dialogue-centered *modus operandi* is apparently in order. Hence the relative attention given to

local groups and civil society coalitions, especially the more moderate and accommodating ones. The interests of the ruling class are now less oriented towards “seashores” and golf courses than to renewable energy, hybrid vehicles, recycling and environmentally-friendly architecture, but since the construction of gigantic infrastructure projects, GMO farming and environmental destruction will continue, the deactivation of the inevitable protests makes it unavoidable to deal with the protestors.

Thus, at least according to what the leaders who are most attentive to the new interests of economic domination say, the language of order has changed its vocabulary because it no longer has to deny the existence of conflicts, but to accept them as something that cannot be avoided and that must be managed; as a result, those who protest against devastation and waste are no longer stigmatized as egoists, subversives and enemies of progress. For this new brand of leader, territorial struggles are unavoidable, but easy to deal with by way of the right techniques of participation and consultation, that is, by way of “participatory democracy”, something that many of those involved once demanded, which does not prevent the authorities from imposing a policy of “zero tolerance” against conflicts that cannot be recuperated, such as, for example, the struggle against the TAV in Euskal Herria.

In view of the “crisis of confidence” in institutions and parties, a reflection of the extreme incompatibility between globalized capitalism and bourgeois democratic forms—as is demonstrated, for example, by unilateral communication, the suppression of public space and the increasing prevalence of emergency laws—the “anti-system” enemies of yesterday have to be turned into the collaborators of today. The punitive arsenal contained in the legal codes of “democracy” does not contradict this seeming decriminalization of protest; it rather serves as a disciplinary reserve against any possible excesses, providing a legal cover for repression when civility does not work. The necessities of control have multiplied now that the downtown districts of the cities have been transformed into sites that are exclusively devoted to consumption, a process that is intended to embrace the totality of the territory. The new regime can continue to call itself democratic while it legally establishes a discreet state of emergency that facilitates the repression of not only political dissidents, but also of entire sectors of the population who might refuse to be integrated as obedient consumers in the economic system and will not put up with its depredations. The same need for pacification and making the territory profitable that caused its defenders to be treated as agitators, criminals and marginals, when capital exercised its rights of conquest, leads these same elements to be treated with kid gloves when it is a matter of establishing the environmental and social cost of the territory-commodity. This change of policy is a consequence of the change that has affected capitalist interests in the stage that corresponds with the artificialization and consumption of the territory, that of the constitution of the territory-business. The leaders seek out the support of the most backward and least combative sectors that have emerged in the struggle, a struggle which is still underdeveloped, and therefore not sufficiently conscious of the absolute incompatibility of its goals with those of capital. And how is this going to be accomplished? The same way as always, first, by attracting to the negotiating commissions a handful of representatives separated from the horizontal structures established at the beginning of the struggles, in such a way that these structures lose control over their delegates and as a result, lose control of the struggles themselves. Second, by isolating and ruthlessly repressing the dedicated opposition. Dealing with power corrupts, and the authorities are very well aware of this.

Their occupation is the oldest one in the world. In order to liquidate the struggle against development and in defense of the territory and to integrate the affected residents in the green management of the catastrophe, their alleged representatives have to proceed along that shameful road that in times past was trodden by the trade union leaders. If in the past it was labor, today it is residence that is the basic form taken by exploitation, and therefore the one that best defines proletarianization. The proletarian is an inhabitant who must be constantly reeducated in consumption and seduced with participation. And as recent history teaches us so well, in the suburbs of Paris, in Genoa, Athens, Berlin or Barcelona, when seduction does not work because the autonomy of the political sphere is impossible under globalization and its effects are pure illusion, those who exclaim like the boy in the fairy tale that the emperor has no clothes, refusing to be corrupted in collaboration with capital and the state, are dealt with by means of merciless war. There are more than enough laws for this purpose.

Formal bourgeois democracy was based on the formulation of a public interest on the part of political mediators, a public interest to which they subordinated private interests, which in relation to the territory took the form of regional planning, from which lasting laws and regulations were deduced that were applied in the name of the public interest. Another turn of the capitalist screw, developmentalism, profoundly modified this system. Consumerist individualization shattered the authority principle, the disciplinary structures of society like the family, the school and the church were undermined and political paternalism was rendered ineffective, leaving no other recourse for the powers that be other than the police, the courts and the prisons. From then on, decision-making became more of a technical matter, dependent on experts, and was financed by private capital, something that favored the rule of business interests in public affairs, whose increasing influence made the very idea itself of the common interest disappear, thus completely discrediting politics. The new form of territorial management, increasingly determined by private interests, mainly those of the real estate developers and green capitalism, could not be confined by the norms of a general plan. Laws and planning initiatives therefore were increasingly characterized by a generally emergency or exceptional nature: they were revised, planning was carried out in stages, emergency plans were implemented, there were “multi-functional responses” and “special projects”, etc. It was a sort of *a-la-carte* planning, compatible with each private interest, which rendered previous measures inoperative when it was considered that they were harmful to private interests; a kind of planning that sought immediate economic results, squeezing the maximum profits from the entire territory. This rather abrupt change of course, which took place over only a period of two decades, seriously harmed the really existing collective interests and unleashed conflicts everywhere.

Since resistance to the devastation thus caused could not be stopped exclusively with repression, the new “managers” of the territory were compelled to change their tactics. Thus, the penal state gave birth to “participatory democracy”. The modernist leaders assumed the task of making the common interest disappear because the application of the prevailing regulatory regime was prejudicial to the private interests that they represented, and as a result the common interest had to be suspended or done away with, but this conferred legitimacy on the conflict just as it deprived them of legitimacy. Thus, instead of trying to impose, in the name of the common interest that they were supposed to represent by virtue of their electoral mandate, they had to first come to grips with the conflict, and then negotiate case by case with *ad hoc* interlocutors who volunteered to perform this task. These negotiations concluded not with the establishment of a new legal framework or regulatory regime, but with something like the signing of a contract.

This kind of participation, concerning which it was made quite clear that it was not a substitute for “representative democracy”, that is, for the parliamentary bureaucratic party system, was nothing but the necessary complement to a political-administrative apparatus that was neither capable of stopping the destruction of the territory, which was required by economic growth, nor was it capable of achieving consensus in the name of the common good, since its very mode of functioning made such a common good impossible to formulate. This territorial participation or “governance”, by fixing the “democratic limits” of the conflict, also established the tasks of repression by delineating the terrain upon which it could be exercised. Thus, far from implementing any kind of democratization, no matter how mild it might have been, which would have implied the recovery of the public space, where discussions are held and decisions are collectively made, just the opposite took place, as was confirmed by the increasingly draconian and punitive nature of legislation and the practical outlawing of demonstrations, assemblies, public debate, and any objective information.

Unfortunately for the ruling class, building bridges is not as easy as signing mortgages. The good intentions expressed by the authorities for the future were not enough to deactivate the territorial conflict, since the causes that brought it about were still very much present. We are not on a new stage; at most, capitalism is preparing a new stage, but not *ex novo*; it must rely on the old productive activities. The new interests have not come to abolish the old ones, but to prolong and extend their rule. The authorities thus are not attempting to amend the horrors of the old productive system, which have fundamentally not changed, and as a result they are even less capable of containing the immense deployment of penal measures as well as the construction of prisons and internment camps; what they are trying to do is to make these horrors compatible with the new orientation of domination.

So it is not a matter of putting an end to the classical model of developmentalism, based on the fusion of private economic interests, political interests and administrative interests, a model that has been responsible for so many atrocities, but of bringing this model up-to-date, of “rearticulating” it thanks to a state-managed ecological restructuring of the economy.

This miraculous reconversion does not annul the preceding degradation, putting an end to uncontrolled urbanism and the destruction of the territory, that is, putting an end to gigantic transport infrastructure projects, nuclear power plants and coal and oil burning power plants, dams and water diversion projects, incinerators and toxic waste dumps, sports complexes and ski resorts, the construction of electric MAT lines or new prisons.... What is taking place is precisely the opposite; capitalist environmentalism and its “participatory” pseudo-democracy are attempting to preserve this degradation—it must not be forgotten that this is the only mode of accumulation that capital currently possesses—while merely whitewashing its image. The opening of new markets is at stake: that of greenhouse gas emissions, that of oceanic waste dumps, that of sewage, that of environmentally-friendly cars, ecological construction, organic food, rural tourism, renewables, alternative punishment, etc. Private wealth now requires a new developmentalism—“a new productive model”—a new politics, a new language, a more sophisticated repressive apparatus, and, to top it all off, another type of programmed horror, but this time based on the regulation of the financial markets, new technologies of industrial ecology, huge investments and the reeducation of the masses with regard to technological innovations and a new kind of consumerism. These tasks are beyond the capacity of the market; they require measures that only the state is capable of implementing.

As was the case with fascism, the authoritarian state is erected as a remedy for disturbances that are inherent to capitalism. The fact that the interests that determined our lives in the past are the same ones that are still doing so today, is a banality that is extremely obvious with respect to the question of the territory.

The purpose of the series of laws regulating land use and urban development was their total commodification, which not only gave a *carte blanche* to the unlimited expansion of the conurbations and the culmination of the disaster engulfing the coastal regions, but also to the diffuse urbanization of natural and rural spaces, now within the reach of the urban hordes thanks to generalized motorization. In barely two decades the peninsular territory was completely banalized, and any uniqueness annihilated, whether by its pure and simple degeneration under a layer of asphalt or concrete, or else by its transformation into an environmental commodity. The collapse of the mortgage market put an end to a lucrative business that also acted as the main driving force of the economy, but today the private developers are still planning development in the metropolitan areas and nearby regions and regulating land use. Thus, with the change of course announced by the bankruptcy of neoliberal policies and the financial crisis, new laws and new plans are or will be born affecting neighborhoods, the countryside, natural hazards, geographical information, the coastal zones, infrastructures of all types, etc., that herald a different kind of planning and establish new conditions for the real estate market and green recreation. Business is not interrupted, but is shifted from new construction to rehabilitation, isolating buildings and landscape management, while the culture of the motor vehicle is furthered somewhat by the development of bio-fuels or electric cars. The difference between this new situation and the old one lies in the fact that in this new cycle of capital accumulation the state plays the main role. All decisions, from the renovation of parking lots to the return of nuclear energy, from the introduction of new GMOs into the diet of the population to the planned routes for the high-speed train, now require “the state’s approval”, and, as a corollary, new laws and stipulations that will regulate compliance.

The adoption of the ecological lexicon on the part of businessmen is a logical accompaniment of this process, because now the language of ecology is the language of politics and therefore the idiom of business. Soon it will also be the language of pedagogy and jurisprudence.

Words, however, cannot conceal reality. As we have already noted, the old vandalistic projects will continue without respite their destructive task shoulder to shoulder with the new ones, but this task will now be self-defined as “green”. The ruling interests are still those of the ruling class, although they are now legitimated as affairs of state and as protectors of the environment; behind the AVE, the MAT lines, the dams and highways proposed by the PEIT or the plans for private self-financing highways, there are powerful business and financial interests, the same ones that are now promoting ethanol distilleries, desalination plants and solar electric generation complexes. Under the rules of neo-liberalism, politics was nothing but another private business; according to the new rules, business is pure politics. The new paradigm does not repeal the previous one but preserves it with a facelift; as a result, as we have pointed out, the old horrors will be joined by the new ones and finally, under the attentive gaze of the agents of order, with state guidance and the commitment of the “citizenry”, we shall have aberrations of every kind. The participation of “civil society” will not change this reality in any way, since under the present conditions it is a simple aspect of business and its function is nothing but demobilization. Someone might gain access to the world of offices and officials and think that he is “refounding” a more just and democratic system, when in reality he is just adding his grain of sand to a “society of control”,

as the sorcerer's apprentices who have read Foucault would say. In an effectively authoritarian regime, democracy is only a moment of repression.

More often than they did two decades ago, the defenders of the territory, even those who confine themselves to "civil" protest, that is, protest that is symbolic and ineffective, speak of an alternative model of territorial planning, based on the reduction of access to the private vehicle and the development of public transport, on a proposal to reestablish the equilibrium of the city and the countryside, on "responsible" consumption and on a "new culture of the territory". These proposals are as intriguing as they are empty, since what they seek is an impossible formula of a compromise between the preservation of the territory and metropolitan expansion, or, what amounts to the same thing, the globalized economy. No conservationist legislation, or state subsidy, or even any political coalition, will be capable of guaranteeing territorial integrity while at the same time keeping the territory in the market, or, to put it another way, no capitalism can function generally without having the entire territory at its disposal. There is not enough room between corporate leaders (including politicians) and the defense of the territory for dialogue, since their respective interests are diametrically opposed: if there is profit to be made, it can only be at the expense of the territory; if there is any benefit to the territory, it is only to the detriment of capitalist profits. And such an irreconcilable opposition of interests can only give rise to conflict. Thus, the defenders of the territory must face it: they must not engage in dialogue, but in battle. They do not have to choose between words and deeds, but between defense and attack. The struggles are and will be local, but the combatants are not just confronting small-time local speculators or the venal politicians of their hometowns.

Once the territorial conflict becomes generalized, the lobbies of the highway construction companies, agribusiness, distribution, recreation and oil and gas industries will become active, well protected by the state. As its proposals bear fruit, the defense of the territory—of traditional gardens, forests, free spaces, rivers, animals, ancestral occupations and knowledge, its customs, traditions and history, etc.—with its anti-authoritarian practices will reveal both an irremediable institutional rupture as well as the incompatibility of life that is rooted and free of pressures with economic globalization. For the monstrous conurbations and the disappearance of the rural world are the consequences of economic globalization, and industrial GMO agriculture is the adequate means to feed such offspring. The same thing can be said of the reservoirs, power plants, highways, mega-ports, airports and high-speed trains: these are the structures that best correspond with the supply of water and energy or with the mobility of people and the circulation of commodities that are usually supplied to the metropolitan areas. It is entirely obvious that territorial equilibrium, its recomposition from its fragments, will never be achieved except by the dismantling of the productive apparatus, de-urbanization and the abolition of the state, authentically titanic historical tasks, which must orient the anti-developmental struggle and the defense of the territory and exceed by far any kind of "transversal management", such as is being called for by creative leaders and their civil society coalition accomplices.

We are facing a confrontation between the metropolis and the territory that it is attempting to colonize, and by an irony of history, the cause of freedom, reason and desire has abandoned the cities, or more precisely, what were once cities, in order to take refuge in the countryside, or what was once the countryside, and to wage from there, with the nihilist crowd of the excluded in the suburbs, the counterattack against the anti-historical forces based in the conurbations. Far from the shopping malls, and therefore far from the commodification of life and the nationalization of existence, time and place recover some meaning and allow individuals to recover their mem-

ory and cooperate against capitalist irrationality, constructing, if it transcends the civil society platform horizon, a new identity of the exploited rooted in the territory, and therefore in their concrete condition as residents, rather than in the abstract condition of citizens. This identity does not have to aspire to contribute a more regulated framework to the housing and real estate market, but abolish all commodity relations; nor will it attempt to complement the technocratic regime that likes to call itself a “democracy” when it is nothing but a disguised totalitarianism, but rather to replace it with a real democracy of the base, horizontal, direct, and characterized by self-management. It will not be rallying point for a new kind of nationalism, but the emblem of a universal will for freedom.

## 2. The Voice of His Master – The Spatial Restructuring of Capitalist Society and Its Consequences

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We live immersed in a process of the globalization of space, that is, of complete submission of space to the laws of the global economy, which is why it is often the case that, in the cities and towns marginalized by contemporary economic flows, there is no lack of voices shouting that we should begin swimming in it as soon as possible.

The panacea of the economic curse is almost always a macro-infrastructure: a highway, a mega-port, a high-speed train station, a tourism complex.... The voices of the local oligarchy are sometimes joined by the voices of the mass of wage workers, convinced of the blessings of development. They say that “progress” is necessary, that this is the way that we can emerge from “backwardness”, that there will be “jobs” and therefore “money”. The ruling interests, those of the ruling class, are always presented as general interests, and the more firmly it rules over the population, the greater will be their identification with those interests. At the present time, when the penetration of capital reaches all the domains of human activity, individuals think the way capital wants them to think: they do not really exist, except as an abstraction, because they are not really thinking; their thought has been programmed. When they speak, we hear the commodity promoting its world. In order to use concepts like progress, backwardness, work or money, without succumbing to the platitudes of the language of our leaders, we have to understand their real meaning, and in order to do so we have to situate ourselves outside the usual way of thinking of domination. To think, or to exist, is to question.

First of all, we have to ask ourselves about the real meaning of the construction of a large-scale infrastructure project, since, after all, it will generate a large demand for labor, although it will be a temporary demand and the jobs will not be high-paid positions, and will under optimal circumstances result in a higher level of consumption among the wage workers, a more extensive commodification of their lives, or, which amounts to the same thing, a growth of “the middle class”. The population as well as circulation will increase, and there will be more urban development, shopping malls and hotels will be built, more cars will be sold and new bank branch offices will be opened. A new lifestyle will be imposed, more motorized and more consumerist, with more and more indispensable technological prostheses, etc., whose consequences in the form of traffic accidents, heart attacks and suicides will be reflected in the statistics. And we will also have to reckon with the fact that this infrastructure will have a negative impact on the environment and will lead to a greater level of artificialization of the natural world.

Social inequality and anomie will also increase, that is, there will be a higher degree of social decomposition, with all its necessary consequences: corruption, standardization, atomization, exclusion, violence, neurosis, fear, surveillance, racism....

The production of wastes and pollution will also increase, along with noise, detentions of undocumented immigrants, thieves and drug dealers, real estate speculation and other ways to get rich quickly, and political corruption, and it will exacerbate the decline of health standards, education and public assistance, etc. These are evils that are inherent to capitalist development, which are bound to happen, anyway; infrastructure development will only accelerate their emergence and contribute to their intensification. Large-scale infrastructure projects are demanded by capitalist globalization, by the new international division of labor, in which circulation and “flows” predominate over production and places. They help to put the old metropolitan areas “on the map” by converting them into nodes of the international commodity network. Capital, master of space, restructures it by adapting it to the needs of the moment. Under global capitalism, both independent institutions and autonomous administrative bodies, as well as local markets, become obsolete. The old cities are transformed into impersonal urban agglomerations in permanent expansion, places for entertainment and consumption on a grand scale, veritable black holes that absorb energy, commodities and lives, settlements without public space, without time, without history or any culture of their own, transparent, thematized, simplified. This is the result of a victory; that of capital.

The end of a stage based on the industrial economy linked to national markets under state protection and supported by the trade unions has disorganized space, reducing it to disconnected fragments, without any function. While the old metropolitan areas fight for a place in the globalized economy, attracting corporate headquarters and trying to monopolize managerial and executive functions, the shattered pieces of the urban and territorial system that surrounds them must once again gravitate around their vicinity seeking to make contact with the international “flows”, that is, to become integrated in the metropolitan conurbation by offering space and other facilities for the globalization of their economies. The smaller cities and the countryside, in decline and “backwards” because they suffer from the consequences of the cessation or relocation of productive activities, have to survive—they have to accumulate capital—in the vicinity of the nodes of the global network. This is why they have no other recourse other than to demand their share, their infrastructure, in order to be incorporated into some suburban highway network.

In the periphery of the conurbations an all-out war is being waged by the globalized economy, one that demands an increase in the rate and a higher degree of territorial destruction.

It would appear that salvation comes from the pitchfork. To dismantle the “progressive” discourse and unmask the interests that hide behind it is now an unavoidable task. Human happiness and freedom will be the work of those who have known how to avoid what our leaders call “development”, “progress” and “work”.

When it is the fruit of conscious resistance, “backwardness” is revolutionary.

### 3. The Cunning Art of Destroying Cities – On the Totalitarian Tendency of the Urban Phenomenon

*Text based on talks, debates and interviews held on January 7, 8 and 9, 2010, at Radio Black Out, at the Librería Calusca in Milan, at the Pasquale Cavaliere Hall in Turin, and at the Ex Pescheria de Avigliana (Val Susa).*

The city is a particularly revolutionary model of human settlement that first appeared between 3,000 and 4,000 B.C. in Mesopotamia. The real Eden was a city, not a garden. Writing, mathematics, the arts and sciences, and real democracy were born there, along with the ideas of liberty and revolution, unconventional sexuality, poetry, history and philosophy; but there, too, bureaucracy, hierarchy, classes, standing armies and money first appeared. Pausanias refused to call any aggregation of buildings that did not have a plaza or public buildings a city, that is, any town that did not have public space, a space for the direct participation and intervention of the citizenry, or any an area for community politics (the word politics comes from *polis*, the Greek word for city). For in the city, government, justice, festivals, markets, theater, thought, ceremonial and pedagogy, that is, all the activities that were considered to be public activities, took place in the open air or in places open to the public. The city's boundaries were precisely defined by an urban precinct protected by ditches and walls.

There was a clear distinction between the city, the exceptional form of inhabited space, and the non-city, the countryside, which was the more usual form of inhabited space.

Keeping these criteria in mind, no urban center of our day can be considered to be a city, since none of them has public spaces. Traffic circles have replaced the open squares and green zones have replaced the public gardens, testimonials to a past that has been theoretically and practically rendered a tabula rasa, while a series of highways and bypasses mark the successive stages of the frontier of a temporarily interrupted urbanizing wave. The totalitarian city arises from the destruction and absorption of the rural space; it is only distinguishable from its surroundings by the density of buildings, which is always increasing; it has no gates or boundaries, only successive layers of multi-lane highways, veritable tentacles by means of which it engulfs the entire territory in a lethal embrace. As opposed to the variety and originality of the streets and plazas of the traditional city, the modern version features the vulgarity and monotony of juxtaposed districts. As opposed to the beauty of the traditional city's architectural forms that expressed a love of life and for everything human, the modern city offers nothing but the monstrosity of monuments that are claimed to symbolize progress and modernity. The decisions concerning the life of their inhabitants are made behind closed, and even armored doors, often in private buildings, guarded by armed thugs and surveillance cameras. Nothing happens that does not have a price, not even the great sport-cultural spectacles that define the advent of modern cities: you have to pay to

have access to these events; you always have to pay to get inside. Everyday life takes place either within a vehicle, or else in a dormitory-residence that is like a bomb shelter.

If a death in the city was always accompanied by a manifestation of public mourning, in the totalitarian metropolis death is a private affair of no importance that only concerns the deceased.

Life and death are so similar that they can hardly be distinguished. Generalized insensitivity is the result: the living dead are concerned with neither the sufferings of others, nor with the air that they breathe.

In the framework of infinite expansion, the rural territory loses its historic patrimony, its own laws, its local traditions and its signs of identity, in order to become an amorphous satellite of the central conurbation. In reality, it is a territory considered as a building site for residential or infrastructural construction or a place to merely pass through on one's way to another conurbation; in short, it is an extension of the metropolis to which the latter's lamentable conditions of survival and its special way of understanding progress are transferred: its high cost of living, consumerism, traffic jams, unhealthiness, neurosis, noise, pollution and industrial food. No longer is the inhabitant of such a place characterized by the love of liberty, solidarity or class vengeance, but by the virtues of the modern city dweller, that is, fear of one's neighbor, race hatred and manipulability, fascist political conditions. In reality the territory can be defined as the interstitial space between two conurbations, and as such it is destined to be destroyed by the infrastructures of rapid transportation and the concentration of the dispersed population. The rationally occupied territory, that is, one with a low population density, ideal for the rural way of life, is unviable for the capitalist economy. They crunched the numbers and it turns out that life in the country is not bountiful with regard to monetary profit; its inhabitants must be concentrated around a shopping mall and recreation facilities, shut up inside their houses and plugged into their televisions.

This might be bad for the inhabitants, but it is good for real estate speculation, the automotive and construction industries and tourism; and it is therefore good for the economy, which has the last word.

Real urbanism arose with the industrial revolution.

Throughout the history of the city, it has endured the blows of totalitarian powers, but never before had its elements been trapped in an abstract social relation, never before had their lives been completely mediated by things, whether commodities, work or money. This began to take place with the rise of the bourgeoisie to power. If the first bourgeois urbanism proclaimed the city as the privileged location for the accumulation of capital, it is only when this function was declared to be the only one for which the city exists that we can speak of totalitarianism. From the formal domination of capital the city passed under the real domination of capital. I have called this stage developmentalist urbanism, because it was in this historical stage that was the prelude to the fascist metropolis that the priority of economic and urban growth was elevated above any other consideration. This development was sealed by a social pact between the local political bosses, the national business leaders and the trade union leaders, and provided thirty glorious years of profits and transformed the dangerous classes into domesticated masses. The leading bourgeois families yielded their commanding positions to managers and executive cadres. From a society of producers, we underwent a transition to a society of consumers; from an industrial economy, to a service economy; from a national capitalism led by the state to a global capitalism directed by high finance.

Urban developmentalism is a period of transition that made its debut with the annihilation of peasant agriculture and concluded with the crisis of industry. From that moment on, all problems are reduced to their technical dimension, especially urban issues. Henceforth, politics, the economy, law and morality shed their autonomy and would only be addressed from the perspective of technique, in the name of progress and of the future, understood, of course, as technical progress and a technical future.

When technology is raised above all ideological discourse and occupies a central position, all questions are resolved technologically. Technological modernization is the key for overcoming all obstacles and the fundamental criterion for modernized truth. Opposition to technology, on the other hand, defines the social enemy, the reactionary, someone who is “anti-system”. Freedom exists in only one sense, that of technics: anyone is free to buy a car and has the right to speed; going slow and walking are subversive acts. Technics is not neutral; it is a tool and a weapon, and as such serves those who possess its secret, concerning those who will be connected or disconnected, those who decide its application. That is, it serves dominant power, the power of domination. It is its marriage with capital that has placed it at the service of oppression, determining its evolution and its continuing development, as well as its transformation into a religion. Technics is simultaneously the condition of existence and the religion of the depoliticized, domesticated and frightened masses. Once this stage has been reached, technics is totalitarian. Not because it affects the totality of life, but because it ravages everything in its path.

It recognizes no limits, since it does not recognize the supremacy of the human. Even a shortage of resources, the pollution of the environment and the degradation of life serve it as a stimulant. There are technical solutions for everything, and no others are necessary. With regard to our present topic, totalitarian urbanism, we may say that it is technicist, that it follows the laws and principles of technology, and just like technology, it functions by destroying everything that came before it in order to reconstruct it from scratch on the occasion of every innovation.

Under the dictatorship of technology the problem is not that labor has become precarious: existence itself has become precarious. Once the proletariat of the factories was liquidated, the productive forces, now eminently technical, are essentially destructive forces.

Urbanism is also a destructive force. Economic growth, which can only be based on technical means, imposes, thanks to the machinery of urbanization, a permanent state of war on the territory and its inhabitants. This is why the architects and the urbanists will have to be judged as war criminals.

And that is why those who try to adjust to and accept a negotiated destruction end up betraying the noble cause of the territory.

The anti-developmental struggle and the struggle for the defense of the territory is the only one that poses the social question in its totality, since now more than ever before it is a struggle for life. It is the class struggle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This struggle cannot be understood to be harmonious with an unquestioned capitalist model; it is inconceivable outside of the horizon of de-urbanization and territorial self-management. Only on those fields where the battles against urbanizing barbarism will be fought shall the winds of freedom blow that were expelled from the primitive cities and the fertile lifeways that characterized agrarian culture will be able to rearise. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*

## 4. Urbi et Orbi – Principles of Anti-Developmentalism

*Notes for talks at the Ateneu Llibertari L'Escletxa (Alacant), September 25, 2010, and for the group Los Glayus (Oviedo), October 7, 2010.*

*“In fact, the Greek word **polis** far more nearly translates ‘pueblo’ than any English word, for the community is not merely a geographical or political unit, but the unit of society in every context.”*

Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The People of the Sierra*

### 1

Now that Europe has finally been urbanized according to the American model of constantly expanding conurbations and suburbs, the urban culture of its cities has been lost. This means the end of the city and its neighborhoods as a community. It has been replaced with a social vacuum, intellectual impoverishment and creative sterility. The modern city is boring, decadent, standardized, depersonalized, noisy, unhealthy and vulgar. It is a nightmare that contradicts the idea of civilization, which is derived from *civitas*. Its functioning is the negation of what it was in its origins. The roots of the crisis must be sought in the period when the bourgeoisie were trying to rationalize the city and impose expansionist policies upon it. From then on, no resident outside of the proprietary class was, properly speaking, a citizen, that is, no one outside of the bourgeoisie could formulate an opinion, freely express it and play a role in the decision making process. The tools of urbanism made their contribution to this dispossession, against which the culture of the working class arose.

Since then, everything has gone from bad to worse, since the slave of work is now the slave of consumption, and as such is so manipulated by the media, so isolated and so intimidated, that it is no longer possible for him, as it was for his predecessors, to have resort to rioting and insurrection, and he can do nothing but hole up in his apartment-bunker.

### 2

Globalization and the police state have horribly degraded the civic universe, giving rise in the metropolitan areas not to a collective subject endowed with autonomy and guided by reason—a class—but to a narcissistic and manipulable atom, amorphous and alienated by the superstition of progress. Having abandoned the countryside, escaped the world of customs and forgotten his traditions, man—and woman—did not take a step towards freedom, but proceeded directly to

servitude: the entire course of his life is today conditioned by work, administered by a bureaucracy, monitored by cameras and regulated by consumption. The automobile, the ATM, psychiatry, the second home and the shopping mall are the images of a contaminated well-being and of an abject freedom where the remnants of his individuality are suffocated and the links that united him with what is left of his class are broken. Self-repressed and in an extremely apathetic condition, he cannot change anything even if he wanted to, since he cannot even change himself. The developmentalist industrial society, however, does not just isolate, neuroticize and annihilate its subjects, but also subjugates and destroys the territory, forcing it into the orbit of the conurbations and condemning it to be absorbed by them. This is a double movement of destruction, one that is both centripetal and centrifugal. Towards the center, it is the transformation of the individual into the puppet of the economy; towards the periphery, it is the suburbanization of natural and rural space. With the assistance of political corruption and legal chicanery, the territory falls victim to real estate speculation, the depredations of the tourism industry and large-scale development projects, whether for energy distribution, warehouses, incinerators or other infrastructures. The bankruptcy of the national model of capitalism has led to a monstrous globalized economy, where corporate relocation, motor vehicle traffic, the real estate industry and financial engineering impose their rules. These rules appear to be enormously irrational because the process of globalization has not yet concluded, because the old ways of life and their values have not disappeared, and because the concomitant laws have not yet been fully developed in all their details. This new stage of capital displays contradictions that are typical of a too-rapid transition, to which are added other more profound contradictions of a structural type; and despite the constant political refrain in its favor it cannot be concealed that, rather than a new style of freedom provided with opportunities for its continuous expansion thanks to the new technologies and to the further development of the state machinery, what it entails is a new form of oppression that, by way of technological prostheses and its police forces, will far surpass all previous forms of oppression. This new oppression is not limited to exploitation at the workplace, but affects every aspect of people's lives and the territory that shelters them, yet it only seems to become visible in struggles for the defense of territory, because it is only outside of the conurbations that there are enough individuals whose lives are sufficiently removed from consumerism, and who are still capable of becoming aware of the ecological-social disaster and of confronting its causes.

The contemporary city does not harbor even the slightest trace of solidarity and protest. The clusters of high-rise apartment buildings and highway traffic have swallowed them whole. There, nothing is designed on a human scale nor is anything done for human purposes. For a long time now, undeveloped areas have ceased to be public and direct communication has been proscribed. The technocrats who operate as the high priests of the city have imposed a design that could very well be qualified as cosmological, since it glorifies the deities of technology, progress and private interest. The new architecture and its associated urbanism give form to the triumph of the developmentalist myths of power, and are so inhuman and oppressive that it is strange that the flames have not spread beyond the confines of the ghettos. The typical urban resident, however, hardly ever dares to protest, since he has become habituated to his miserable life and to his absolute lack of control over events. He is domesticated.

And if he does take action, of course, he does not question or threaten the status quo in the very least. The air of the conurbation is making man into a slave, and that is why so many people

are fleeing from the cities; as for the others, newcomers to the conurbation, they no longer even think about complaining.

### 3

None of the problems of the avalanche of urbanization can be solved, nor can any territorial imbalance be corrected, in the framework of the capitalist regime, or within its political-administrative order. The ecological and social disaster is unstoppable. Protectionist legislation, “sustainable” development plans or compensatory “green” taxes are of no use at all.

The constant unhindered growth of the metropolis and the subsequent aggression against the territory result from a specific social formation, globalized capitalist society. Human time and space have been commodified, they have been converted into capital. Nothing can be considered to be outside of the market. As a result, the salvation of the territory, of life and of the city itself, will depend not on laws, taxes or political platforms, but on a radical and comprehensive regime change. In order to attain the requisite consciousness for this change, a long and painful succession of struggles will be necessary, which will give rise to a welter of ideologies, some extremist, but mostly conservative; some looking towards the future, the others contemplating the past; all transformed into the instruments of power and objectively or subjectively committed to capitalism. Overcoming these ideologies must be the *conditio sine qua non* for any radical critical theory that would establish the foundations of revolutionary anti-developmentalism.

### 4

The situation of the territory—by territory we are referring not only to the land or the countryside, but to its history, its culture and its proletarianized population—is the starting point for any authentic struggle. In order to provide solid foundations for the modern social critique an understanding of this situation is indispensable. Critique must be extended with an openly anti-developmental activity, which is the element in which it will encounter solidarity, dignity, desire and the other factors of liberation, since the emancipated society will have to be rebuilt on communitarian foundations and human values. Actions will make their debut in defensive struggles, as resistance against aggression, self-defense, and the refusal to collaborate with the established order. At the same time the anti-developmental critique will have to seriously propose the alternative of separation (or the refusal to be absorbed); in any event, this will mean a return to the scale of the locality, which will not be successful unless it entails a complete self-marginalization from the economy and politics. The initial experiences of life on the margins are just as necessary as street demonstrations, since both serve as examples and perform pedagogical roles, and for this very reason, they contribute to the rise of anti-capitalist consciousness, something that is essential for any offensive operation, especially for the one that must dismantle the dominant political-economic apparatus and implement de-urbanization.

### 5

To reverse the process of urbanization we will have to abolish the causes that give rise to it, that is, the generalized use of money, the real estate market, the industrialization of agriculture,

assembly-line production, cheap transportation and the expansion of credit. For example, by imposing market-based agricultural and livestock production, the city was able to supply its needs at the best price in increasingly distant markets, breaking its connections with and disrupting the adjacent rural areas that previously served as its source for forest products, agricultural goods and livestock; the regional marketplaces, meadows and gardens lost their reason to exist and were transformed into suburban districts; the countryside was depopulated for the benefit of the industrial cities that grew unhindered thanks, first, to the railroad, and later to the automobile. Production was relocated farther from consumption, and the workplace was moved farther away from the residence. The private vehicle bears the greatest responsibility for the appearance of exclusively residential dormitory towns and occupies more than two-thirds of the space in the chaotic metropolitan areas. The circulation of commodities and executives demanded an ever larger infrastructure, leading to a tentacular growth of the metropolis, whose linear pattern is best exemplified in Spain by the Mediterranean coastal conurbation, and whose radial pattern is best exemplified by Madrid.

The conurbation elevated to the megalopolis—a limitless agglomeration of buildings—is the most genuine product of capitalist globalization, and only a collapse of the economy, caused by a natural catastrophe, the fall of a national government, a revolt, an energy crisis or a financial crisis, or a combination of some or all of these possibilities, can stop it. Such an occasion will be the moment for a social offensive that, by destroying all hierarchical structures, will create a situation suitable for anti-developmentalism and for the ways of life that it advocates.

## 6

Society will have to be rebuilt in accordance with the priorities of a moral economy that is not separated from other activities and that will not impinge on the egalitarian social relations established by a regime of true freedom, that is, one that favors local self-sufficiency, collective interests and horizontal political structures.

It will be an economy of subsistence rather than of accumulation, one in which barter will take precedence over exchange mediated by money and equilibrium will prevail over expansion. Keeping in mind the fact that it is cheaper to cultivate a garden than to shop at the supermarket (and it is also healthier), or to produce electricity at home rather than to buy it from a corporation, and, in general, that two-thirds of the goods and services required by a family could be produced more efficiently if they were produced locally, that middlemen are not necessary and less motor vehicle traffic will be needed, such an economy would not be so hard to create. We must also note, however, that although traditional agriculture would prevail in that kind of economy, not everything will be resolved by assuring the food supply through the integration of agriculture with animal husbandry and forestry. Such an economy will also have to respond to the needs for hydrological and energy resources, transport, shoes, clothing, housing, health and sanitation, education, art and culture. The creation of cooperatives, networks and informal markets for equitable exchange, will not be more important than the creation of schools, libraries, health clinics, renewable energy sources, irrigation systems, public transportation facilities and self-defense militias. In the enemy camp, the conurbations require a very large amount of motor vehicle traffic (which implies a considerable waste of energy), constant provisioning on a vast scale, prompt disposal of wastes, an enormous administrative bureaucracy and a large number of social service,

legal, financial and other types of personnel. A cessation or shortage of any of these things will make the conurbations unviable over the short- or the medium-term. Interrupted or irregular provisioning, a significant decline in the production of fossil fuels, power outages due to a technology that is too centralized and uniform, etc., will cause the conurbations to enter into decline and then it will be relatively easy to reverse the proportional importance of the urban and the rural.

## 7

A household-based economy requires a self-sufficient, decentralized, integrated and diversified territory, one that is cultivated by means of a poly-technology that is adapted to the nature of the land and oriented towards the satisfaction of needs. Self-sufficiency does not mean autarchy, which is why at first demonetization might very well not be absolute, although the use of money will have to be restricted to the absolute minimum necessary and in any case it will be necessary to prevent its hoarding and its use as a source of power or of individual profit.

Decentralization is obligatory for the establishment of collectivism, for de-industrialization and for the successful initiation of local production. Integration, or de-zonification, is a basic requirement for harmony between the country and the city, or to put it another way, for the non-hierarchical reunification of the space of the city with its surrounding region: its principal instrument is regional planning, obviously of an anti-developmental kind, since the reestablishment of balance between regions will not depend on a redistribution of capital, but on the interpenetration between the territory and its inhabitants. Plans for development invite plundering, waste and dictatorial methods, while anti-developmental plans are devoted to facilitating rational resettlement and a generous exchange with nature thanks to the rational use of resources, climate, topography, knowledge and traditions. Diversification allows for savings with regard to transport costs and therefore with regard to energy, besides the fact that it reduces dependence and instills autonomy.

The abundance of public goods and services typical of collectivism will certainly imply a scarcity of private goods and services, but living in a free community will in any event compensate for the sacrifice of superfluous consumption, the suppression of useless services and the disappearance of industrialized leisure. The highest priority of a free society is not individual well-being derived from private profit, but collective happiness, which can only be maintained, on the one hand, by preserving both the environment and emancipated society, and on the other hand by preserving the symbiosis between them.

## 8

After our rapid sketch of the process of ruralization, what about the city? The city, properly speaking, must be reborn from the ashes of the conurbation and it must redefine itself in relation with its rural surroundings, since it will have to be supplied from the latter and, as a result, will have to produce for and exchange products and services with its rural hinterland.

City life is different from that of any other civilized way of life, since it represents the most effective historical attempt to refashion the world in accordance with the highest human aspirations and desires. Today, however, it is more than problematic for freedom to flourish in its

domain. Too many people are looking for this freedom too far away from the cities and too many changes are necessary. For them to act in concert the inhabitants of the city have to share enough common interests; this will only be possible if they manage to abolish the political and social distances between them, if they reduce the size of the city, if they learn a trade, if the factory is replaced by household labor, if the agora is re-established ... or, viewed from another perspective, if production, labor and political management are integrated with the festival, consumption, defense and culture. Taken separately, none of these activities can constitute a coherent and satisfactory way of life. Authentic life, however, cannot be cut off from any of them. On the other hand, abstracting from the details, the city does not have to host every kind of permissible industrial and commercial activity, since the latter can be distributed throughout the countryside, situated near their raw materials and integrated with agrarian activity. For this very reason, the city can be the site of gardens and can create natural corridors. The downfall of the conurbation will at first solve problems such as housing, but those related to transportation and assembly or general administration will only be solved with the restructuring of the overall dimensions of the urban space, along with the repopulation of the historic urban downtown areas. Nine-tenths of the structures in the conurbations will have to be demolished in order to be able to recreate human and civilized conditions in the cities. The public spaces of promenades, streets and squares will have to be restored, liberating them from consumerism, tourism and standardized leisure, so that they can recover their communitarian functions. Each conurbation will have its own process of decomposition, according to the magnitude of the contradictions that it causes to flourish and the intensity of the conflicts that it generates. In view of what is already beginning to take place, urban disintegration will generate high levels of violence and the proliferation of gangs. Whether this will result in a free community or a class-based and authoritarian social formation will depend on the degree of consciousness and determination attained during the unfolding of this process, as well as on the de-urbanizing and anti-state strategies that are implemented in the territory. Win or lose, the one thing we can rely on is that nothing is certain; we will have to await the collective subject engendered by devastation, and today's struggles seem to indicate that the ingredients for the creation of this subject will be mixed outside of the conurbations, but not too far from them.

## 5. The Territory Has Been Absorbed by the City – The City Must Be Absorbed by the Territory

*Text compiled from notes for talks presented in La Coruña, on October 13, 2010, at the CSO “La Casa das Atochas”, and in León, on October 17, 2010, in the CCAN, organized by the “Louise Michel” bookstore.*

In the globalized and urbanized world rural space properly speaking does not exist; it is entirely dependent on the city, whether as a reserve of urbanizable space, or as the stage set or dump for the urban area. The rural space has no autonomy; a territorial arrangement imposed from the city designates its function and its destiny, according to the quantity of surplus value expected from it. The urban explains the rural and not the other way around.

Nor can one speak of a specifically rural way of life, since the habits, customs and behaviors of the countryside are those that are typical of urban life. Agriculture suffered the blows of modernity and industrialization a long time ago, but what is taking place now is not simply a mere turn of the transgenic or hydroponic screw on agrarian production, but the non-agricultural use of rural land. At the present time, the rural areas are not the remnants of what has not yet been urbanized, nor are they even a suburban periphery; at most they can be considered as the interstices within standardized society, but not in the sense of fractures or discontinuities, but as integrated blank spaces. With globalization, urban expansion made a qualitative leap, going from a consequence of capitalism to a presupposition for capitalism. The colonization of the territory is no longer a result, but a necessary precondition for capitalist social relations.

Community under the empire of global capitalism is impossible, since it is a pre-capitalist formation and at the present time any feature that displays such a character has been erased; the smallest detail of everyday life fell under the influence of capital, embedded in its mechanisms of value production and determined by its technology.

Both the working class culture that once subsisted in the most refractory neighborhoods of the cities, as well as the traditional peasant culture that survived in the most remote places, are disappearing. And along with these cultures, the working class and the peasantry also disappeared as structured and active groups. They have been replaced by unconscious, fragmented and uprooted masses. The processes of demographic concentration, standardization, bureaucratization and accumulation of power consecrate the limitless metropolis or the conurbation as the only form of living on the territory, at the same time that they dissolve the remnants of tradition, the bonds that endowed a concrete social group or class with cohesion.

The contradictions between bourgeoisie and proletariat, or country and city, have lost their explosive negativity but they have not entirely dissipated; they are preserved and superseded in the new framework of capitalism, that is, they are perfectly assimilated and integrated. The urban way of life is conditioned not only by work, but by consumption, mobility, surveillance and

control. Urbanism is equivalent to non-communication, artificiality, repression, cultural underdevelopment, multiple dependencies and moral poverty. The conurbation is therefore synonymous with regression and banality.

It is not just that rebellion is impossible outside of a tiny ghetto, but that not even the least degree of freedom can be practiced within such a place. In the urban systems the degree of complication attained requires highly developed bureaucracies, sophisticated technologies, extreme hierarchies and police apparatuses that are operative in real time, and an executive class of experts, mandarins and prison wardens that renders any kind of self-government, direct democracy or self-organization unviable. In the conurbation, freedom is a crime. It is excluded by the technology of the market.

A project for liberation cannot be founded on the self-management of the conurbations, but on their dismantling. Thus, the construction of the realm of freedom is a process of ruralization, which by no means implies the search for a new equilibrium of the market, the promotion of rural businesses at the expense of urban ones, but the abolition of the market, in other words, the establishment of a non-commodified economy and technology.

Both require a refounding of the community outside of the metropolitan area, since the establishment of a natural and extra-economic way of life is implausible in the conurbations.

The community needs to reproduce itself on the basis of alternative technologies and a certain degree of separation from the city, a non-capitalist mode of functioning whose first step might very well be the self-production of food. The social question is re-posed in agrarian terms, but this has nothing to do with the usual peasant trade unionism or with the financing of agricultural exploitation, or in general, with a rural population that is equally subject to capitalism and therefore a satellite of the conurbation, but with the dissidents from all areas who are in search of air that is less enslaving.

However, flight to the countryside, the agro-ecological option, self-sufficiency in consumption, barter or cooperation are never enough, since up to a certain point a subsistence economy can coexist with a market economy, and can even fit in quite well with the latter in critical periods like the present. It does not have enough of a negative dimension, it is not saturated with the negativity that has been displayed, for example, by the revolts of the suburbs.

It is not possible to store up enough flammable material to burn the bridges that unite the liberated spaces with the co-management of the social disaster, because their practice does not point beyond passive resistance. For the economy of dissidence to provide a subversive content that could give credibility to an emancipatory project, barriers have to be erected against the conurbations, and, if possible, the latter must be made to recede. A certain de-urbanizing capacity must be possessed and this can only be provided by the defense of the territory.

The territorial conflict entails a profound impulse directed against the market economy that is lacking in a self-sufficient and diversified communitarian economy, since this is the only situation that can generalize local problems, that is, that can transform particular interests into general interests that are incompatible with the interests of the economy and power. It would be engaging in mystification, however, to claim that the conflict, such as it is currently expressed, is of great concern to domination. On the one hand, it still has not displayed all of its destructive potential—it has not yet attracted enough people to its cause—and on the other hand, there are too many people who are located within the system and are attached to their specialty or work directly for the dominant order.

The defense of the territory will not contribute to the dissolution of this order if it does not arouse the passionate involvement of a good number of those who are affected; if it does not manage to convert moral indignation into anti-developmental consciousness; if it does not transform territorial aggression into disaffection with the system. Only thus can the defenders distinguish themselves from those who from their same old trenches fight so that domination, with the requisite political and economic reforms, can be perpetuated. The social decomposition of the conurbations will undoubtedly bring allies, especially from among those who are excluded by the series of economic crises. They must become conscious of their responsibility for the creation of the infrastructures by means of which the defense of the territory will penetrate the conurbations and carry the war into the enemy's rearguard.

## 6. Defense of the Territory or Co-Management of Its Destruction?

*Text reconstructed from talks given at the CSA Sestaferia of Gijón, on October 8, 2010; at the Espacio Libertario of El Ferrol, on October 12, 2010; and at the Jornadas de Agroecología in Valladolid, on November 13, 2010.*

A free society will be a mostly rural society; the conurbation is a strictly capitalist social formation that is incompatible with the advent of freedom and is unviable in economies without markets. These two verities lead us to consider the revolutionary transformation from completely new perspectives. That is why, when we are speaking of organic agriculture, food sovereignty or self-sufficiency, that is, the positive side of anti-developmentalism, it is necessary to indicate the framework within which the latter will emerge, the concrete situation of the territory.

In a society that is on the path of total urbanization, the territory is converted into a vacant, available space; a general reserve of space at the mercy of the metropolitan decision-making centers. In the new stage of capitalist development oppression has transcended the dimension of time and has become spatialized; the social space is the creation of capital and obeys its logic. The exploitation of the territory now plays the same role that the exploitation of labor played in the previous stage, but for optimal performance, places not only have to be filled with commodities, but certain formal changes are necessary that would adapt the specificity of the territory to the economy and not stand in the way of the unlimited expansion of the urban cores. These changes, besides the fact that they trivialize existence in the countryside, foment population flight, the abandonment of agriculture and suburbanization. This, let us say, final campaign of capitalist rationalization is endowed with the corresponding juridical instruments: laws that favor urban activity, agricultural taxes, zoning laws, municipal reforms, the use of eminent domain legislation, executive orders, comprehensive procedures, infrastructure development plans, etc. Furthermore, globalization creates a new ruling class linked to the political, financial and corporate management of space rather than that of the private property of the means of production; a class that was born from the transformation of the bourgeoisie after the defeat of the workers movement and the decomposition of the traditional classes.

This is a class in constant motion that develops within the international division of labor and induces a global territorial reorganization, or, in other words, it is the class that is responsible for constraining the territory to fit the capricious whims of the world market. From its perspective, any resistance to the market constitutes a “step backwards” and any instance of adaptation, “progress”. The existence of an autonomous peasantry would therefore be the quintessence of backwardness, and its extinction, the greatest achievement of progress. The regional governing bodies constitute the first link in the chain of the deregulation of the uses of the territory, for the tertiarization of the economy, and therefore for the rapid globalization of local resources. These changes are financed thanks above all to the surpluses produced by real estate speculation; thus, the shift of capital from industry, agriculture and mining to services results primarily

in the construction of houses, highways and vast infrastructure projects. The countryside has ceased to be the source of food in order to be transformed into a mere source of land, leaving the door wide open to population concentrations, industrial agriculture and “environmental reconversion”, with increasingly catastrophic results for the territory and its inhabitants. The land is no longer the crucible where the identity of individuals and their community is forged.

The colonization of the territory by the commodity has been producing conflicts since the seventies, but they did not occupy a leading role in the anti-capitalist struggle until much later, when the consciousness of the combatants began to overcome the obstacles of environmentalist opportunism and workerist maneuvering. Indeed, both the environmentalists as well as the workerists attacked globalized capitalism in the name of a previous capitalist formation, since liquidated, in which the trade unions, the factory assemblies and the green parties played the role of counterweight to the unilateral requirements of the market. One more turn of the screw of suburbanization, however—and of mass culture—and the territory was standardized, or ordered in accordance with the criteria of maximum profitability, and became the scene of an identical lifestyle, where consumption was interpreted to be the definition of earthly happiness and was therefore considered to be almost a civic duty. Its compromise with institutions and businesses engaged in the controlled degradation of the territory discredited environmentalism, while the disappearance of the factories quenched the last embers of workerism.

The working class condition corresponds with urban society; wage labor is unthinkable in the traditional rural world. This condition, however, which previously served to consolidate a class, has undergone a powerful transformation in fully urbanized society, which has led to the dissolution of class consciousness and to the creation of masses of people immersed in anomie. With or without consciousness, however, the labor conflict no longer transcends the limits of the system and therefore does not question it. It does not even question the existence of the conurbation. And the same thing goes for environmental issues.

The territorial conflict, on the other hand, does. An autonomous and liberated territory is something that is radically incompatible with the capitalist order, something that cannot be said of the defense of the environment, wage levels or jobs. It is also incompatible with masses of urban wage laborers. The defense of the territory has an anti-capitalist and deproletarianizing content that is hard to deny and revealed an essential characteristic that definitively distinguishes it from the workerist and green platforms, at the same time that it denounced their ineffectiveness and obsolescence. This defining characteristic was anti-developmentalism. The battle for the territory rejected a basic dogma of capitalism and of workerist socialism, the development of the productive forces, that is, unlimited growth—both in its pure form as well as its socialized or “sustainable” forms—as an obligatory way of addressing and solving social problems. To the contrary, such growth aggravated those problems. The totalitarian reconstruction of social space as a new class project violates the territory and necessarily creates more problems. Protest, so often without leaders, cannot but spread and intensify, which is why its deactivation has become the main objective of the ruling class. Then the policy of domination was changed, from complete intolerance to the partial recognition of the conflict and negotiation. Thus was born “participatory democracy”, the tool with which a false mediating subject could be manufactured from the ranks of self-proclaimed committees, platforms and social pseudo-movements—the delegation of the citizenry—and in this way protest was imprisoned on local stages, fragmenting and isolating it. Participatory democracy was invoked expressly for the purpose of sabotaging the rebirth of a social consciousness of the territory, preventing the appearance of a real historical

subject. Primo Levi, in *The Drowned and the Saved*, mentions a grey zone between the Nazi executioners and their victims that was composed of all kinds of collaborationist prisoners, thanks to whom the concentration and extermination camps could be administered. In view of the fact that the contemporary colonization of the territory is being carried out with methods that are in perfect correspondence with a hierarchical, bureaucratic and authoritarian society, it is not at all mistaken to establish a parallel and to speak of a grey zone composed of all those who seek compromise formulas between territorial aggression and territorial defense.

Anyone who has any experience with civic commissions and local platforms will, *mutatis mutandis*, be able to recognize himself today in the words of Levi, entering the “*lager*”:

“... all of them, with the exception of those who had already gone through an analogous experience, expected to find a terrible but decipherable world, in conformity with that simple model which we atavistically carry within us—‘we’ inside and the enemy outside, separated by a sharply defined geographic frontier. Instead, the arrival in the Lager was indeed a shock because of the surprise it entailed. The world into which one was precipitated was terrible, yes, but also indecipherable: it did not conform to any model; the enemy was all around but also inside, the ‘we’ lost its limits, the contenders were not two, one could not discern a single frontier but rather many confused, perhaps innumerable frontiers, which stretched between each of us. One entered hoping at least for the solidarity of one’s companions in misfortune, but the hoped for allies, except in special cases, were not there; there were instead a thousand sealed off monads, and between them a desperate covert and continuous struggle. The brusque revelation, which became manifest from the very first hours of imprisonment, often in the instant form of concentric aggression on the part of those in whom one hoped to find future allies, was so harsh as to cause the immediate collapse of one’s capacity to resist.”

The grey zones are formed of those who, accepting the rules of the political game of oppression, seek protection from the aggressor state while each one of them dissimulates his self-interest with a mouth full of slogans such as rights of the citizenry, candidates, voluntary austerity, recycling, “de-growth”, the new culture of the territory, social economy, alternative model of regional development, etc. The context is certainly favorable for a human type that has emerged from the decomposition of the middle classes, particularly degenerate, easy to corrupt, ambitious and frustrated, sly and inclined to engage in backdoor deals, priests and philistines, greedy for power and at the same time servile. It is precisely this kind of person that populates the intermediate stratum between the oppressed and the oppressors, the kind that brags about being an environmentalist, is active in his trade union and belongs to some local group. The concept of the grey zone makes politics in a really concentration-camp type of society more intelligible and *vice-versa*, the political life of totalitarian domination can be better understood by way of the birth and development of the grey zone. This zone must contain and dissolve conflict, whether by channeling it towards electoralism, or towards the courts and futile negotiations. In every case it submerges conflict in the spectacle, controlling debate and reducing the real protagonists to the category of the public.

The greys concede a great deal of importance to the communications media in this transfer of reality to the stage of the “culture of yes, but”, which is not only more adapted to the needs of domination, but which also forges a more functional type of submission.

This explains the playful environment that accompanies the media instrumentalization of conflict, since such an euphoric state of mind is the most vulnerable to the unilateral message, and therefore the most adequate for assimilation in the spectacle. Thus, the grey zone of civil society collaboration works hand in hand with the police, the psychologists and the experts of social

democracy in order to make society appear to be without contradictions, transparent, a level playing field, satisfied, festive, ecological and cheerfully contestatory. “Transverse” participatory mechanisms are intended to assure that survival in increasingly more toxic and degrading environments does not tarnish the rose-colored image of the pseudo-conflicts or generate a detectable level of questioning.

Participation must reeducate the individual as a voting citizen, convinced pacifist and “responsible” consumer committed to the environment, not incite him to think or rebel.

By means of the complete separation between the base of protest and its representation and by way of the explicit condemnation of self-defense, an attempt is made to emasculate conflicts, which are invariably destined to drown in the sewers of the state, or the cesspools of the self-proclaimed “representative democracy”. No one should fool themselves; the movement dominated by this grey zone is not, nor does it claim to be, an enemy of parliamentarism but is instead its effective auxiliary. This is why it is not at all contradictory to find in its ranks militants from parties and trade unions, a few local councilmen, and even some mayors, since what they contribute to this movement is their skill in self-limiting conflicts and silencing radical expression from within. They have to prevent debate from leading to anti-developmental conclusions, and the struggle from leading to confrontations; in other words, they have to prevent discussion from concluding in the extra-institutional elaboration of general interests that would give the defense of the territory perspective and resolve in opposition to capitalism. In fact, this participatory and group-related grey zone has gown almost as fast as the conflict itself that it parasitizes, encouraged by the existential vacuum, anomie and confusion provoked by the generalization since the eighties of the urban consumerist way of life. The zeal for consumption—like the zeal for voting—burst forth in a frantic hedonist climate that required, to sustain its momentum, a minimal amount of mental activity, an erased memory, and a suspended intelligence.

No one is spared from this atmosphere; that is why not even the most openly-anti-developmental struggles, the fight against the TAV in Euskal-Herria, the defense of the Galician coastal areas or the opposition to the MAT in Catalonia have been exempt from the influence of a grey zone that, when it does not undermine them from within, preys on them from without. The problem of the greys, however, is that the dominant system, which can hardly do so with the expenses granted by the state, are even less capable of operating with the costs of an agreement that serves to neutralize the conflict.

*A fortiori*, it is not capable of financing a territorial bureaucracy that is minimally credible that could effectively co-manage the process of environmental and social destruction; consequently it does not disdain the path of media criminalization, fines and trials.

This will not cause the grey zone to disappear. Its work will simply not be institutionalized, it will be done for free.

In the domains of late capitalism social anomie largely renders the work of the collaborators unnecessary, since domination can easily repress protests because it almost never has to face real movements, but only radicalized minorities. When revolt, however, undergoes its first outbreaks, the grey zone is an indispensable resource for governments, which are compelled to exchange their image of pseudo-democratic moderation for another more aggressive, and even pseudo-revolutionary, one, which in critical moments are often embodied in the figure of a supreme leader or chief, such as Morales, Ortega or Chavez, for example. The savior “who speaks like the common man”, “with the simple folk who must speak their mind”, that is, with the most submissive and manipulable population, indicates that the social crisis has reached a turning point that requires

the replacement of the traditional political bureaucracy by another one created *ex novo* from the ranks of the state. The populist regimes need a general mobilization of society for the pursuit of a program of growth and linking up with the globalized economy that the traditional political apparatus of the ruling class is in no position to carry out. Once the usual mechanisms of control and representation have failed, an appeal is made to an extensive patronage network that fulfills the function of a satellite base movement.

A duplicate of the party of order. A grey zone that then acquires by cooptation the status of a new class responsible for carrying out important tasks of demoralization, disruption and disorientation in order to induce a state of mass anomie with very low levels of consumption; the grey zone must weave its own web by unraveling the social fabric where it has failed.

Its third-worldist development constitutes a stimulus of the first order for its counterparts in the first world. Contemporary collaborationists, including professional anarchists like Michael Albert and Noam Chomsky, enthusiastically became the best propagandists and even the informal ambassadors of populism. Often celebrities, intellectuals and wannabe politicians become interpreters and champions of the populist discourse, since the pseudo-radical hot air of famous personalities supplies it with topics, myths and references with which an identity that the western grey zone has always lacked can be consolidated. After rummaging around in this storage room, the greys can emerge enlightened enough to place themselves in the hands of reaction disguised as revolt. The grey zone, now that it has been endowed with a discourse of identity, undergoes the transition from being spontaneously reactionary, to being consciously reactionary.

We can conclude that the grey zone, the space occupied by collaborationism that separates the exploited from the exploiters, is a necessary complement of domination, but only becomes indispensable at moments of serious social crisis, when repression does not work, the parties are discredited and it is of the utmost urgency to ideologically disarm the revolt in such a way that it cannot successfully constitute a revolutionary subject. Only then can it be institutionalized; only then can it form part of the state bureaucracy and therefore comfortably perform the task for which it is destined. Because only then do social conditions that make a totalitarian universe possible, conditions that have always been there, become obvious and are displayed in all their horror, assuring the continuity of the destructive process against the threats of revolution.

If the defenders of the territory do not want to end up as members of an administrative partnership managing the catastrophe instead of overcoming it, then they have to unmask the greys from the very beginning, who incubate betrayal and lie in ambush in every conflict. Concerning such people, Rosa Luxemburg often quoted the following Biblical passage: "Ah, if you were at least hot or cold! But since you are neither one nor the other but lukewarm, I spit you out of my mouth."

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Miguel Amorós  
Anti-developmental Perspectives  
Selections from *Perspectivas Antidesarrollistas*  
2012

Retrieved on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2021 from [libcom.org](http://libcom.org)

Six short texts from a book published in 2012 (*Anti-developmental Perspectives*) largely based on talks given in 2009–2010 on the topic of the need for a transition from the economically, environmentally and spiritually unviable city-centered system of globalized capitalism to a new territorial dispersal of human society and productive activities, attaining a higher synthesis of the restoration of the liberating aspects of the city (freedom, public space) and the traditional virtues of the “territory” (local production, self-sufficiency) that can only be brought about by an anti-capitalist revolution.

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