

The War Against Territory, the Highest Stage of Domination

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During the last two hundred years, human society has evolved in a permanent conflict with the planetary habitat, a conflict imposed by the rules of capitalist production, conduct which, by seriously altering the self-generative processes in the rural natural environment, has entailed their destruction, endangering not only the continued existence of society, but even the survival of the species. The industrialized areas, polluted and exhausted, are becoming ever more hostile to life and more inhuman.

For us, nature is not a pre-social fact, but a product of culture and history, a space defined by an eminently rural sense of time, which is why we shall employ the word “territory” when referring to it. Similarly, by “society” we mean industrial, urban society, since this is its historical form under the capitalist regime. After this clarification, we must say that this territory is governed by laws that are very different from the ones that govern the mass society that is colonizing it. The most important of these laws can be framed as follows: everything is connected, everything is related to everything else. In mass society, on the other hand, each element acts in isolation from the others, and it is not human needs that determine its action, but, quite to the contrary, it is this action that determines those needs. Today the territory is poorly socialized nature; society is poorly naturalized humanity.

Nature/territory normally functions cyclically: everything returns to the beginning. There are no leftovers. The basic substances go from one place to another by way of closed circuits; the wastes of one process constitute the raw material of the next process, and thus in succession, until the process returns to the beginning. The processes of technological civilization, however, are instead linear: the solid and liquid wastes are dumped until they pollute land and water, on the one hand, and on the other hand, gases are accumulating in the atmosphere and have poisoned it, warming the planet beyond its normal temperature and drastically disrupting the climate. With regard to both the territory as well as the urban core, every modification has its price. Each innovation has its undesired response; sudden changes entail inevitable disasters. The technologization and chemicalization of productivist society has an impact on the environment, and unexpectedly, on society itself as well. The concentration of the population in ever-smaller areas transforms isolated outbreaks of illness into epidemics. An industrialized food supply causes previously unthinkable damage to human health. All of humanity is trapped in the clash between the

natural territorial environment and the artificial urban environment, between the cyclical, balanced and conservative processes of the territory, and the linear, unbalanced and expansionist processes of industrial society. As a result, a crisis takes place, the real crisis.

Viewed from an extra-territorial vantage point, the crisis can be posed as a secondary environmental issue to be resolved with technical means and legislative measures; a question of research, innovation, legislation, taxes, investments, etc.; nothing that “the markets” cannot handle or that the state cannot control. If, on the other hand, we look at the crisis from a point of view external to society (and consequently capitalism), the crisis can then be understood as a problem of civilization, for which the human species, that dubious “crown of creation”, is exclusively responsible, and the crisis can be fixed with rigorous demographic controls, transcendental meditation, vegan diets or primitivism. One position leads to the overestimation of the value of the new technologies and conventional politics, while the other leads us to the irrational rejection of all tools and to regression to an animal existence. Both are facets of irrationalism, although under an opposite sign in each case; the first, optimistic, is inscribed in the instrumentalization of the individual and the total artificialization of life; the second, pessimistic, reflects anti-speciesism and mystical spiritualism, that is, in the negation of culture and of the historical function of humanity in the world. One position will justify any environmental disaster in the name of the alleged benefits provided by technology, and the other will applaud any humanitarian catastrophe in the name of reducing the number of human beings on the planet, so that the odious preponderance of that species should come to an end.

Between these two extremes there are intermediate positions, some postulating a kind of “sustainable” development or a “new culture of the land”, and others leaning more towards de-growth; the former, however, inexplicably differentiate between environmental crisis and economic crisis, as if they had hardly anything to do with each other, seeking to resolve one without affecting the other. This falsifies the territorial question by presenting it as a conservationist problem, not as a social problem, which situates its proponents on the same terrain as the advocates of radical development, and thus leads them to make their peace with the economic and institutional agents, who are ultimately the ones who must enforce the proper measures. With respect to de-growth, its supporters avoid the same error in theory only to commit it in practice. They separate the economy from politics, underestimating the value of the defense of territory in order to focus all their attention on the state, the entity that is supposed to be beyond all good and evil but which is nothing but capital in its political form. The solution would appear to be embodied in civil society initiatives of cooperation, which, whether with the support or the neutrality of the institutions, will attempt to peacefully occupy the spaces forgotten by economic growth.

We think that a harmonious relation between society and nature would be desirable, and therefore also between the city and the territory. We think it is an error to consider these two things as if they were separate realities. There is no single corner of nature that does not bear social footprints, nor is there any place in society exempt from natural upheavals. A correct way of posing the question would allow us to see ecological problems as social, and social problems as ecological, for the simple reason that the crisis is of one piece, global, ecological and social at the same time, territorial and urban. The laws that govern nature and the territory do not necessarily have to contradict the laws that govern urban society. Actually, however, the industrial functioning of society long ago declared war on the natural environment, or the territory. And nature responds to war with war.

What is referred to by the ecological experts and corporate and party consultants as “the war of society against nature” is in reality a war waged by the economic system that parasitizes society against society itself. Society is the real victim; every harm done to nature is another harm inflicted on society. The principle of private profit as the fundamental rule of social functioning is the cause of this war. The domain of an economy separated from social needs over all other activities has led to a war against everything that hinders the immediate realization of this profit, whether nature, territory, tradition or social relations themselves. This implies a war against any and all impediments to the market, and therefore, against all barriers to the growth of the productive forces.

The first great war of the autonomous economy against society and the territory, which was waged over the entire course of the 19th century, was given the name of the “industrial revolution”, unintentionally ironic, since what was taking place was a real counterrevolution. The territory was then valorized as the real estate market. The latest, and most deadly such war, in which development became a principle of politics and the productive forces became fully destructive forces, began in the 1950s. At that time, the search for productivity led to technological changes of such a magnitude that they entered into conflict with the territorial and urban environment to an unprecedented extent. Because of transformations introduced in agriculture, construction, transport and distribution, as well as energy production and the development of the petrochemical industry, pollution became generalized and triggered global warming. This time the territory was transformed into a commodity in the form of multi-use space.

The industrialization of agriculture brought in its train the massive use of fertilizers and pesticides, with the subsequent pollution of the land, the rivers and aquifers, eutrophication, acid rain, and mortality among fauna and flora. At the present time, this flight forward has materialized in the form of genetically modified organisms. The release on the market of powerful automobiles was responsible for the photochemical fog known as smog that blanketed the metropolises as if it were a hat, the result of the atmospheric emission of vast quantities of soot, nitrogen dioxide and volatile hydrocarbons produced by the combustion of gasoline. The mortality rates from cancer, allergies and cardiovascular diseases have risen proportionately since then. Furthermore, the replacement of rail transit by the automobile multiplied the demand for fuel, and made urbanization possible, the urbanization of cement and asphalt, with a deadly effect on the territory. The new living conditions in the kingdom of the commodity would imply the consumption of a mountain of chemical products and derivatives: detergents, synthetic fibers, plastic packaging and containers, ersatz products, additives, drugs, cosmetics, etc.; this contributed to malnutrition and pollution, and therefore to the deterioration of health and the environment. In addition, the serious problem of the disposal of wastes and byproducts arose, which led us to unregulated dumping and incineration, and therefore, to dioxins. Then came more pollution, higher mortality among fauna and flora, more illness among humans. Finally, the pillaging of finite resources, especially energy resources, obliged at first the construction of coal burning and nuclear power plants, and then industrial renewables, *fracking* and bio-fuels.

The new qualitative leap in the industrialization of the world and in the aggression against territory has given way to the constitution of a new transnational capitalist oligarchy composed of the leaders of the big banks and large multinational corporations in the transport, energy, chemical and plastics, food, construction and real estate sectors. This oligarchy has monopolized all power of decision, poisoning the planet and then making profits from remediation and the “green” conversion of productive processes. The suicidal circle of destruction is closed with an

unprecedented concentration of power and a parallel development of social inequality, poverty and epidemics on a world scale.

The capitalist social regime, despite the fact that it is victorious, displays obvious symptoms of exhaustion after the globalization of markets, due to the fact that it has been unable to expand economic activity at a sufficient rate. It has come up against its internal limits. The ruin of the territory due to pollution, the destruction of arable land and climate change, as well as the energy crisis that has been inaugurated now that we have crossed the threshold of “peak” oil and natural gas production, indicate its negative external limits. The solution will have to be sought not in the rejection of technology, but in the promotion of benign technologies conducive to social goals, technologies that will neither condition nor alter free and solidarity-based social relations, but which on the contrary will encourage them and reinforce them. In decentralized renewable energies; in an ecological agriculture that reestablishes the natural systems of fertility and pest control; in a collective public transport system; in a form of local production oriented towards the satisfaction of needs in harmony with the environment. The immediate abandonment of the private automobile, petrochemicals, fossil fuels and, generally, of mass production. This is not a return to nature, but to harmony with nature. Frugality, diversity, recycling, thrift, assemblyism ... something that can only be realized by way of social revolution.

The application of revolutionary remedies is impossible in societies that are not predominantly rural, horizontal and egalitarian, and therefore communitarian in an anti-developmental context of de-urbanization and de-globalization. A program that would promote this kind of society challenges the powerful forces that rule today’s society of massification and exclusion. Its profits—and its power—are linked to its permanence and to the intensification of its characteristic traits. These forces have chosen the technological way, which usually means bigger harvests, more cars, more capital, more consumption, more people. They have opted for the disaster that makes them more productive and brings them the most profit. No modification in the production, circulation or consumption of commodities that militates against their interests will be accepted without a struggle. No struggle is worth the trouble, however, that does not force them to retreat. There are no easy ways of transition: all the alternatives to capitalism will be hard. The battle will be very unequal: on the one side are the mercenary armies of the oligarchy; on the other, the badly equipped popular mobilizations. Even so, this does not mean that the victory of Power is assured. If the just forces of the truth are still weak, the catastrophic errors committed by domination will strike a new balance in the scales of the battle.

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