

# Elements for an Immanent Critique of the Political Economy of Modern Space

## Elementos para una crítica inmanente de la economía política del espacio moderno

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**Abstract:** Our purpose is to present a logical sequence that accounts for the way in which the critique of political economy (Marx) is categorically articulated and configured with the production of space (Lefebvre). Methodologically, we carry out a comparative categorical approach to the concepts of criticism, immanence, production, modern space-time, and the urban from various epistemological trajectories as primary and secondary sources. Our results indicate that an immanent critique of the political economy of space makes it possible to delimit the critique of capital and the production of modern space-time as a social totality. We conclude that the critique of modernity from the critique of the political economy of space is a critique of the abstract logic of value and its expression in the social production of abstract space-time, where urban space is the geographic space produced for the reproduction of capital and the place of exchange where the totality of mercantile production takes place.

**Key words:** critique of political economy of space, immanent critique, modern space-time, urbanization.

**Resumen:** Nuestro objetivo es presentar una secuencia lógica que dé cuenta del modo en que la crítica de la economía política (Marx) se articula y configura categorialmente con la producción del espacio (Lefebvre). Metodológicamente, realizamos una aproximación categorial comparativa de los conceptos de crítica, inmanencia, producción, espacio-tiempo moderno y lo urbano desde varias trayectorias epistemológicas en tanto fuentes primarias y secundarias. Nuestros resultados indican que una crítica inmanente de la economía política del espacio permite delimitar la crítica del capital

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y la producción del espacio-tiempo moderno como una totalidad social. Concluimos que la crítica de la modernidad desde la crítica de la economía política del espacio es una crítica de la lógica abstracta del valor y su expresión en la producción social del espacio-tiempo abstracto, donde el espacio urbano es el espacio geográfico producido para la reproducción del capital y el lugar de intercambio donde se realiza la totalidad de la producción mercantil.

**Palabras clave:** crítica de la economía política del espacio, crítica immanente, espacio-tiempo moderno, urbanización.

## Introduction

In the present article we intend to put forward some minimal aspects of the general project of a critique to the political economy of space as an unavoidable dimension of the abstract domination of modernity. We develop a critique of the political economy of urban space from rereading Lefebvre, with a view to contributing to the conceptualization of the urban as regards the specifically capitalist mode of production of space. These theses do not have a univocal or normative, instead they point at systematizing some of the debates in a logical, not necessarily historic. We intend to expose a logical sequence that gives an account of the way in which the critique of the political economy of space has been configured more sinuously than linearly.

The international experience in 1968, the 1973 oil crisis, the Latin American dictatorships, the failure of the Yugoslavian model, the fall of the USSR, the reconfiguration of the Gulf and the quick rise of the Chinese economic model after the 1979 reforms, implicated that economy and social sciences were faced with the need to represent the global space under new parameters and think of the same concept of space from new epistemological trajectories that have been obviated along the century. Lefebvre's studies on urban societies (2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2015) and the change of David Harvey to Marxism (2007) are likely the best know examples and most worked in the critical analyses with the goal of examining the spatial of the United States' hegemony after WWII, strongly marked by the mass consumption, mass culture and digital communication media

In parallel, the rediscovery of Gramsci in Latin America hinted the appearance of dependentist and decolonial theories as of the mid 1970's, and from there, indirectly in economic structuralism, subordinate studies and the postcolonial critique adopted by the spatial theses on center,

periphery and semi-periphery put forward by CEPAL (Bielschowsky, 2010). Paradoxically, CEPAL, which had important influence on Latina American developmentalist projects, particularly in Brazil and the Southern Cone, found a rather strong opposition in a sizeable part of the world of the capital they themselves have contributed to conceptualize and channel from new productive and distributive formulas. The general logic of value seemed not to give a rest in the global process of neoliberalization and translated into the urgency of returning to a critique to the political economy that some disavowed too soon, focusing on the particularisms, language autonomy, discourse, communicative action, et cetera, and that others considered and object of orthodox archaeology.

In this historic context, one of the main tasks of the critical theory in its broadest range was precisely redefining the meaning of the critique. In his opening allocution of the Frankfurt School: “The current situation of social philosophy and the tasks of an institute for social research”, Max Horkheimer stated that the main task of the criticism was to interpret *again*, to turn to the analysis of reality as it was being configured. The ideal of Horkheimer, Adorno, Pollock, etc., entailed a re-elaboration of the general critique, and of the *political economy critique* in particular (Horkheimer, 1996: 398).

In spite of its difficulties and ambiguities, re-elaborating an interpretation of the theory of value to enable the formulation of new questions was part of the gesture that Lefebvre and Harvey retook the critical tradition of heterodox Marxism, despite their respective confidence in several political dimensions of the traditional occidental Marxism. The critique to the political economy, according to Lefebvre and Harvey, was at least incomplete if it did not consider a transversal aspect to every realization process of the logic of value, namely: the general production of a social space able to subsume in formal and actual terms each of the moments that are differentiated in modernity: economy, politics, culture, but also production, interchange, consumption, distribution, and accumulation of capital, at local and global level.

In this respect, Lefebvre stated in *The Production of Space*, the critique to political economy would be hardly able to continue if the history of capital was not presented in parallel to that of space because in their literal mutual coincidence “the proper historical period of the history of space concurs with capital accumulation, beginning with its primitive phase” and “concluding with the global market under the reign of abstraction” and its specific form of domination (Lefebvre, 2013:

181). When we try to *return* to the critique of political economy, Lefebvre expressed that one of the main problems of is the concept of production, traditionally associated with the logic of labor/surplus through occidental Marxism. However, while “the more the meaning [of production] is increasingly intended to be consolidated”, “the less the creative capacity that connotes invention, imagination; instead, only work is usually referred” (Lefebvre, 2013: 126). Quite the contrary, it seemed necessary to speak of “production of knowledge, ideology and meanings, images, discourses, language, symbols and signs” because there is “an abusive use of the procedure that Marx and Engels utilized in a naïve manner: provide the extensive meaning [of production], that is philosophical, with a narrow meaning, scientific (economic)” (Lefebvre, 2013), which inversely is also valid for the intension of reducing the critique to the capitalist space and to the abstract domination to language, subjectivity, etcetera.

The strict projection of the theory of value reduced the long logical-historic process of the enhanced reproduction of capita to certain moments preferable in the analysis. In this way, for example, focusing on accumulation became the overestimation of the relationship labor/surplus value, while paying attention to redistribution turned into various forms of fiscal and tax contention (from Tobin rate to the identification of Pikletti’s hypotheses as the informal economic propositions of political institutionalism and the redistributive propositions of the so-called twenty-first century Socialism). Quite the contrary, the margins of the Marxian critique to political economy are not restricted to Capital, or some of its chapters, but are already configured in the *Grundrisse* in 1857-58 up to the re-elaborations of the exposition of the theory of value after 1867.

Currently, the contemporary rereading of Marxists tradition, from a categorial and logical dimension —frequently antagonistic to each other— that revitalized the new interpretations of Marx’s late theory of value (Kurz, 2016; Postone, 1993; Reichelt, 2001; Bellofiore, 2018a; Backhaus, 1997; Heinrich, 2018), and also from the economic and social dimension that retrieved and updated the thesis of social space, nature, imperialism and uneven and combined development of capitalism (Bellamy Foster, 2008; Moore, 2020). Even liberal economists such as Stiglitz, Krugman, Akerlof, and Shiller contested the hegemonic analytic paradigms of the XX century, at once, of course, they celebrated *the death of Marx* once more (Stiglitz, 2006; Krugman, 1999; Akerlof and Shiller, 2016).

## From plane to language, from language to space

The idea of modern production has several possible trajectories which, apparently, almost every one reaches the Cartesian notion of absolute plane. The Cartesian deduction of space as the experience plane of *res extensa* is still today the basis of empirical sciences: things take place in a referred place on a plane *full* of universally analogue coordinates. Some years later, Pascal reached an utterly different conclusion following Torricelli's experiments: although absolute, space is a unit *devoid* of all the possible. In the long disciplinary trajectory of modern sciences between XVI and XIX centuries, the notion of full space was imposed with especial force on the various empirical sciences, from biology to geography, and even sociology.

When Kant developed his theory of space and time as inseparable conditions for the possibility of experience and representation, without themselves being representations, that is to say, pure concepts of intuition, he took time-space from the objectivity plane to that of subjectivity. Kant's epistemological<sup>1</sup> *Copernican revolution*, was in placing the subject as the condition of possibility of the configuration of images and concrete representations, including natural landscapes —what we see, Kant said, is *a* forest, not *x* number of trees—. Hegel carried on with the Kantian argument stating that essences —of the things, of the space— exists, but only on condition that they are essential due to their essentiality; that is to say, because of the transient and variable nature of what they constitute. At least one of Hegel's examples does not make much room for ambiguity: the essence of state power of the reign of Louis XIV is effectively substantiated in God; however, after the Revolution and the *Déclaration* of 1789, power resides in *man* —not any man, but on the male white proprietor, of course, not in God anymore—. What does it mean? With Hegel, Kantian subjectivity leaves the plane of transcendence to enter into the plane of *immanence*.

What is the relation between this and social space? Hegel understands space as an immanent configuration, that is to say, there is no essence in the

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<sup>1</sup> Kantian terminology is very accurate and suggestive: the subject *configures* reality by means of the a priori synthetic functions the imagination associates from sensible data. Kant's gesture is more radical than it seems —and from what Marxism was willing to recognize at first—, because in the configuration of the world, objectivity exists only as much as subjectivity does. Absolute space, *full or empty*, only exists as *res extensa* because subjectivity signifies it as such.

background of the phenomenon (the noumenon of Kantian phenomenon), but only essential phenomena: this is what Hegel calls experience, where “behind the curtain call... there is nothing to see, unless we go behind it ourselves, both in order to see, and also there is something to see behind the curtain” (Hegel, 2010: 104). In this sense, there are essences as socially produced essences, owing to this Merleau-Ponty (1996: 165) states “from Hegel, militant philosophy reflects no longer on subjectivity, but on intersubjectivity”.

Lefebvre retook the idea by saying that “modernity is Hegelian” because there “the linking between power and knowledge” is affirmed under the form of State, but “the modern world is Marxists” as well, Lefebvre said: first, because such State that subsumes society also codifies the continuation of capital, and because the Marxian principle is not that of need, but that of possibility. If room is made for the possibility, Lefebvre concludes, the modern world is ultimately Nietzschean as well, because “despite the efforts of political forces to affirm themselves above the lived, to subordinate society”, the modern world carries the mark of “the obstinate defense of civilization against state, social and moral pressures” (Lefebvre, 1980: 3). In this sense, it is not only or first and foremost the space as such, but in the way the trajectory of modernity produces a spatial logic from which empirical formulas come out, as a park, a prison, a psychiatric hospital or flows for modern capital. In this contextual context of modern philosophy faced by Lefebvre, from Descartes to Hegel, one of the first forms acquired by the critique to space is the criticism to its intersubjective (social) nature: if the absolute space of modernity is intersubjective, its critique has to be intersubjective as well, i.e., immanent.

When Lefebvre wonders about the determinations of modernity and befalls on the Hegelian, Marxists and Nietzschean problem, he also wonders: “and why not Heidegger?”. The answer is because it “darkens the most concrete history in Hegel and Marx, without reaching the Nietzschean critical force. Heidegger’s philosophy, a “a dissimulated theodicy, barely secularized”, faces the history of philosophy and the history of space “without looking through a radical criticism” (Lefebvre, 1980: 59). Even if Heidegger was one of the first in noticing the tendency toward the instrumental rationalization of modernity, and thereby, toward the technification of the representation of nature, for “him, a Being has language and constructions as a place of abidance”, from which he extracts a “disquieting apology of German language [...] which hinders a criticism if the occidental (European) *logos*” (Lefebvre, 1980: 60). What



does this mean? In Heidegger, the critique of modernity transforms into an intension to return to premodernity where the world of *Being* had not been subsumed by the world of *entities*; that is to say, things. After a first radical opposition to the theses of *Being and time* in 1927, a re-appropriation takes place after WWII, especially after the encounter with *Art and Space* in 1969.<sup>2</sup>

The background of this problem is that in modernity, the abstract form of capital generates the *norm* of order and configuration: that is to say, of social domination. This is the radical aspect of Lefebvre's conceptualization, namely: the subordination of the world of the entities is produced by the capital in an abstract manner, thereby, transgression and the eventual subversion of that abstract domination is only actually concrete when the logics of the capitalist abstraction of modernity transform (are realized). That is to say, an immanent critique to the space of capital is also a criticism to modernity.

### **The *criticism* in the critique to political economy and the *place* of production**

If the project of late Marx of the critique to political economy that began with *Grundrisse* is considered it is possible to substantiate a critique to modernity and in particular, one to the political economy of space with a specific meaning: the critique to the capital. Marx stated that capital is an economic power which dominates everything in bourgeois society [*Das Kapital ist die alles beherrschende ökonomische Macht der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*] (Marx, 1945: 26); therefore, it is a starting and arrival point, it is premise of the modern socialization process, it is a basic concept of the economy and modern society [*der Grundbegriff der modernen Ökonomie (...) die Grundlage der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*] (Marx, 1945: 237). Though, what is this project of critique to political economy about? Indubitably, it is a categorical critique to the economic and liberal thinking that goes from XVIII to XIX centuries, with particular emphasis on the work of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, whom Marx recognizes as founders of classic economy; however, as a

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2 Here, Heidegger distinguishes between the function of space a cartesian recipient (Raumgefäß, the space of beings), and spatialization (Einräumen, the space of Dasein, which enables the meaning of link between beings). Even if the spatialization of Dasein may be understood from the spatial tur, the problem is that space is displayed to accommodate the time of appropriation of the meaning originally lost in the world, such world already present in a pre-thematic and preconceptual way (Heidegger, 2009).

categorial critique, it is also an epistemological criticism, as it deals with the conditions of possibility or the constitutive presuppositions of the basic categories of the mode of production and the mode under which they have to be critically presented [...ist *Kritik der ökonomischen Kategorien* oder, if you like, *das System der bürgerlichen Ökonomie kritisch dargestellt*. Es ist zugleich Darstellung des Systems und durch die Darstellung Kritik desselben] (Marx, 1978: 550).

Well now, the criticism [*Kritik*] in the critique to political economy is not expressed as an alternative to the mode of exposition and the content of the classic categories because it is also a critique to the capitalist socialization process [*Vergesellschaftung*]. Marx builds a critical system of economic categories to understand the modern *commodity-producing system* and inaugurates a critical presentation mode of the internal structure of capitalism, a critical exposure of the categories that configure the capitalist social formation. Only in this way is it possible to speak of a *method* in Marx, far from the reading of classic Marxism (which tried to apply a *dialectical method* as an abstract logical system to specific and determined historical phenomena), as well as the contemporary readings of the traditional method of social sciences exclusively based on the *validation context*.

From this standpoint, the denomination of the theoretical production of late Marx as historicism is inaccurate, not to say equivocal, or at least is not historicist in the sense of the previous paragraphs. Marx does not try to found an ontology of history from the historical development of capitalism in the cities of Manchester or London in the XIX century, or the competence capitalism that would take place—or would reach its expositive validation—exclusively in imperialism (Heinrich, 2018); instead, what it does is to present in a critical manner the general logic of capital and its simplest categories, that is to say, the internal organization of the capitalist mode of production in its ideal term [*die innere Organisation der kapitalistischen Produktionsweise, sozusagen in ihrem idealen Durchschnitt, darzustellen haben*] (Marx, 2012: 839), though not in an evolutionary sense, since these are the social objective forms of the capitalist formation (Postone, 1993).

The Marxian scope of the critique is an epistemological exercise, which in addition to unfolding as a critique of other categorial registers, works as the construction of a new theoretical field to rethink the capitalist economy and the space-time conditions of modernity. In this sense, it is *something more*, as it will be exposed in the following sections.



As stated by Bellofiore, the critique to political economy needs a theoretical mediation which in this case is in the classic economy exposed in the David Ricardo's *On the principles of political economy and taxation*. Neither Smith nor Ricardo —trying to solve the ambiguities of *The wealth of nations*— managed to explain surplus or value as a social relation derived from labor, much less from capital. Political economy was unable to explain *how it produces capital* and *how such capital is produced* because it was incapable of explaining the valued presented in the form of money and also, distinguishing between labor force and live labor, or between concrete and abstract labor (Bellofiore, 2018a and 2018b).

A fundamental category of the critique to political economy is production (*Produktion*), whose use Marx presents briefly though systematically in the two first sections of the famous *1857 Introduction* or *Notebook M* (Marx, 1945:1-21). In political economy (production, distribution, interchange and consumption) lack a meaning of totality, and frequently in the history of economic thinking it is possible to observe a tendency to absolutization each of them, and even their naturalization. Even if the project of the classic political economy stressed production, it did not manage to explain the nature a cause of the (abstract) modern wealth as a derivation from (abstract) labor. After long time, because of J. S. Mill, wrongly, the classic project ended up as an additive theory of production costs (salary, profit and income), leaving in an impasse the theory of value started by Adam Smith. Marginality, for its part, by dissipating the production process and crystalize in the theater of interchange exclusively the determination of value, nullified the conditions of possibility to think of the totality of the social process, fragmenting the field of interchange as regards the other economic activities. On the contrary, Marx developed a *presentation or critical exposition* [*die kritische Darstellung*] of the bourgeoisie society's concrete determinations [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*] (Marx, 2012: 827), whose conceptualization supposes that reality may be represented as a totality, in this case, the logic from which the capitalist production mode works. However, prior to the presentation of the categories —and its mystifying nature— which Marx exposes in *Capital*, it may be said that the concept of “production in general” predates the set of the argumentation as an epistemic supposition.<sup>3</sup>

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3 “We have seen that the capitalist production process is a historically determined form of the social process of general production. Which is a process of production of the material conditions of human life existence as a process that operating in specific historic-economic production relation, produces and reproduces these same production relationships and

In *Introduction*, the production concept (*Produktion*) declines in at least four levels: as production in general, production of a given social state, as a form of specific production, and as totality of production (Dussel, 1984 and 1985). Marxian analytical and methodical effort of *Capital* begins with the *critical presentation* of commodities, a basic and privileged category to define capitalism; it does not start from the totality of bourgeoisie society (objective of the first part of *Introduction*), but assumes the existence of capitalism from the presentation of categories, as in modern bourgeoisie society commodities are the basic for of wealth. Hence, to reach the concept of production as a prelude to commodity at a concrete level, production must be related to distribution, interchange and consumption, that is to say, co-determined. As co-determinations, these articulate the totality, and in their differentiation and no-identity, they are the determining constitutive moments of totality. Here, production is socially determined, i.e., it has received the mark of a society (Dussel, 1984).

When Adorno exposed the category of socialization (*Vergesellschaftung*) in the 1968 Course, he stated that its essence is determination by interchange. The abstraction of exchange value turns into the domination of society over its members, of the general on the particular, it is the reduction of human subjectivity to personifications of value or condition of the interchange of commodities. All fall —Adorno states— to the law of independent interchange of their conscience as it is the social basic link of modernity (Adorno, 1975). With the generalization of interchange, the commodity form of goods becomes the generalized form of interchange, which as we have observed, can only be understood in a co-determined relation with production. Partially, that is the reason why in the Marxian analytical exercise of the first tome of *Capital*, the *presentation* begins with commodity, not production itself; that is to say, Marx privileges an abstract approach to commodity already supposing capitalist production.

In the modern social formation, commodities acquire a use value and exchange value as a property socially defined *in* capitalism, product of the

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together with this the bearers of this process, their material conditions of existence and their reciprocal relationships, it is worth stating their determinate social-economic formation, for in the totality of such relationships with nature and one another in which they are and produce the bearers with this production, that totality is indeed society, considered according to its economic structure. As all its predecessors, the capitalist production process operates under determinate material conditions that are at once bearers of certain social relations that individuals acquire in the process of the reproduction of their life” (Marx, 2009: 1042-1045; Marx, 2012: 826-827).

socialization process. Conversely, value as objectification of equivalent human labor —whose form of expression is exchange value— has a social fundament on the labor that produces commodities and as an expression of a social relationship, it is a specter that finds social reality in the body of commodities, which as commodity-money carries value, whose property is expressed in the metamorphosis of commodity (C-M-C); that is to say, money as money and general logic of capital (M-C-M'); that is to say, money as capital. Value manages to valorize and therefore, to increase only in the general logic of capitalism, becoming the surplus value from subsuming abstract labor, the substance of capital.

Capital acquires special social power in modernity. Capitalists personify capital, that is to say, by means of their actions they update the movement of the value subsumed in the logic of capital, hence, it is not the capitalist who conducts the process, but the capitalist logic (the capital) [*das Kapital -und der Kapitalist ist nur das personifizierte Kapital, fungiert im Produktionsprozeß nur als Träger des Kapitals-*], whose social power turns things in *things of value*, in commodities. The social power of this logic does not depend on any law derived from individual, State or market action, neither any social class; nor capitalists nor workers. It is a social law that works hiding from society, is blind and independent from the conscience of the production agents. In its immanence, this law is organized from capital and its social characteristic consists in becoming the abstract universality of modernity —as commodities and abstract labor are generalized as the simple and basic forms of social mediation—.

The development of this functioning logic becomes a false ontologization of the concepts of economy, politics as well as those of public space and private space (Kurz, 1994). According to Robert Kurz, premodern societies do not have such differences spheres, but such differentiation is proper to modern consciousness that de-historicizes the forms of socialization, imposing them as natural conditions of mediation. Kurz (1994), who makes a parallelism between premodern and modern abstract universality, states that in the former *that* universality is determined by a fetishist system, which in modern language we call religion, at once, such fetishist system comprises all the reproduction of life that contains what we modernly distinguish as economy and politics. In premodern abstract universality, religion is not an “ideologic superstructure”, but as the basic form of mediation and reproduction of social life. In this regard, Kurz is not far from the Hegelian exercise: the premodern societies’ *raison d’être* is not more or less volatile than the logic of modern society, but in

its transformation as the curtain opens it changes the entire staging now conducted by the capital. Modernity's abstract universality does not appear as a totality, instead, it is already mediated by differenced spheres and apparently autonomous between each other, where both correspond to the form of totality of the modern fetishist constitution that appears as a functional sphere we call "economy". From this we conclude that it is not possible to deduce that economy, city, the State or market, classes, etcetera, "produce space", such action can only correspond to a mediated activity of capital regarding itself such as abstract universality of modernity.

### **The *annihilation of space by time*, or the space-time relation of the logic of capital**

The critique to political economy is a critique to modernity, that is to say, of the formal and actual subsuming of socialized humanity by the abstract form of the valorization of value. In this sense, the *immanent critique* [*Immanente Kritik*] of Marx not only points at the new science in the making and its epochal consciousness when he criticizes the capitalist mode of production, but also criticizes the bourgeois social relationships of modern life. Being so, should not this formalization imply logically and immanently time and space?

The contemporary exercise of re-reading Marx with the prism of the critique to political economy and specially from the theory of value has been marked more by a concern about the pattern of temporality under the abstract form of value in the era of capital, than an analytical exercise of space-time mediations of capital and their expression in daily life under the rule of capital. Such is the case of Postone (1993), who stated that the centrality of Marxian analysis is in the problem of the tyranny of time in the modern bourgeoisie society.<sup>4</sup>

Against the readings on the undervaluation of space regarding time, Fischbach states that space-time and capital is much more evident than the relationship capital and time, and that Marx had already given an early account of this with the clarifications in *Manifesto* on the expansion and

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<sup>4</sup> Other instances are the dispositions on socialization that Reichelt, Backhaus, Bellofiore, Heinrich, and Finelli discuss, in the context of the Marxist monetary theory of value and the movement from production to circulation, through without explicitly resorting to the spatial problem, when here the concept of space is implicitly operating (Bellofiore, 2018a). Kurz is an exception, as he incorporates the spatial problem and relates it with abstract labor, as essence of capital (Kurz, 2021).

global unification of capital, as well as its tendency to break the empirical differences and geographic barriers.<sup>5</sup> And indeed, in *Manifesto*, the behavior of capital is described as essentially spatial, referring the geographic space as absolute space. However, it is the late Marx of *Grundrisse*, who conceptualized such spatial dynamic under a more robust theory regarding the determination of value and the space-time transformations of capitalism, where despite he did not categorized space, he did use logically and immanently the concepts in its absolute and relative meanings (Harvey, 2012a; 2018).

With the tendency to the universalization of interchange, capital in modernity is generally prone to spatialize things making them commodities, as with the arrival of modern society, value transforms into the concrete essence the real, carrying an unavoidable and immanent space-time determination (Fischbach, 2012: 86). This conclusion made Marx carefully produce a theoretical critique of capitalism categorically alternative regarding the ambiguous explanation that Smith, Ricardo, and S. Mill made of “civilized society” or “commercial society” to give an account of the scope of a theory value-labor. Beyond the classics, and unlike marginalism, in Marx only abstract labor creates value, the rest of categories, up to reaching the capital concept, have value but do not create value, in like manner, neither technology nor market or circulation create value. This entails a problem for capital, since if production time is a time when value is produced, circulation time is de-valorization time (Fischbach, 2012: 88). From here, we might say, the Marxian theory of value seeks to understand a strictly space-time phenomenon: for the capital it is imperative to accelerate the circulation of commodities and abolish the geographic barriers and their empirical difference, that is to say, annihilate space by means of time [*Vernichtung des Raums durch die Zeit*] (Marx, 1945: 438). Here, absolute space takes conceptual centrality, not only terminological, as it is a relation of distances between production and circulation of commodities in the logic and totality of capital, since circulation only occurs spatially. Annihilating space is accelerating the time of capital circulation, consequently, in an analytical space, it is a transformation of the categorial use of the absolute space because of their relative use.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Directly referring to David Harvey, Fischbach questions the widely disseminated idea according to which, Marx would have not paid sufficient attention to space and geography as regards time and history (Fischbach, 2012: 88).

6 This analytical exercise refers, for example, to Neil Smith’s categorial use of relative space or Fischbach’s *re-spatialization*.

The realization of the logic of capital in space, as a geographic and social place, is foundational if it is considered that the expansion of capital by means of navigation, train and communication media —abolishing geographic barriers and unifying space— allows the creation of the global market (Fischbach, 2012: 87). Space is a way of capital realization, it is a crystalized social relationship that is carried out in the economic activity of capital, for as capital cannot annihilate space, it needs to produce space, re-spatializing, i.e., by means of a process of territorial expansion and unification, which is the same as the process of creation of the global market. This is what conceptually we may think of as abstract space, namely: the modern action of the capital of spatialize things and all that is founded in it: capital essentially tends to make the world and daily life a space for the valorization of value; and of modernity, a countenance (uneven and combined) of the commodity-producing system.

In the end of the third section, we stated that abstract social domination is the modern form of subordination to impersonal and quasi-independent structures, namely: value and capital incorporated in social work defined by the commodity-producing system, hence the need, as we have noticed, of an *immanent critique* [*Immanente Kritik*].

The social domination of capital is carried out and completed in a spatial-temporary manner, as the time of socially necessary labor is a quasi-objective social necessity (Postone, 1993) as spending time on abstract labor, which has absolute space as a way for development and relative and relational space as social relationship crystalized in the spatialization of the things as commodities. This realization of abstract social domination of the capital cannot only be the unfolded social form of the capital logic. It requires a space-time realization, which at general level implicates the subordination of daily (social and individual) experiences to the modern, abstract and logical paradigm in which the determinations of capital constitute, determine and transcend their particular moments and that, consequently, only exist through those moments.

A privileged way to understand this realization process, in spite of its variable use in critical thinking, is the category of real abstraction. When Sohn-Rethel (2017) states that the “abstraction of commodities” is not a product of thoughts, but actions, not only does he contest Adam Smith for intending to attribute consciousness to the acts of change, but also allows rethinking the problem of value as a particular conceptualization or as a real abstraction (Sohn-Rethel, 2017: 28). The conceptualization of value exists analytically in the mind; however, its origin is strictly social, that is to



say, it is in the space-time registration of social relationships, whose mode of social objectivity and subjectivity are real abstractions that come from a space-time activity produced by the capital and extended as effective reality in modernity.

When Lefebvre formulates the theses on the production of space, not only is he interested in understanding the processes of spatial production and reproduction of modern social relationships, but also in the conceptualization of abstraction to think space and production, and their possible categorial extensions to criticize modern urbanism.<sup>7</sup> However, as in Lefebvre the reproduction of social relationships of production go beyond the world of labor and production, he carried out an epistemological endeavor to think the space logically as the privileged place from which to locate production and reproduction. For Neil Smith (2020) —and Castells at the beginning—, this stance of Lefebvre entails a substantive political problem: where to locate the focus of political discussion and class struggle? In the field of reproduction of social relationships or in the world of labor? (Smith, 2020). The questions Smith makes lucidly might as well be answered, on one side, with the reading of capital as a totality, while on the other, with a reading of the political as a dimension in the sphere from production to interchange, but also unavoidably in the wide range of life in late capitalism. About this, we may surmise —following Fani Carlos (2019)— that production of space is immanent to social production (as socialization) and as such, it is neither realized nor can it be carried out as an activity alien to the logic of capital. Instead, on the contrary, following an *immanent criticism*, the reproduction of capital —at least as of the end of the XX century— is carried out by means of the production of space (Carlos, 2019); an issue that remits to the problem of urban space as a space for the reproduction of the capital, and from Lefebvre onwards, to urbanization as social production of space and daily life.

### **The social reproduction of space**

The organization of geography spaces in urban and rural zones has traditionally been associated in the academic, sensual, and administrative spheres, with the technical division of agricultural and industrial work. In point of fact, in Marx and Engels (1969), the division between countryside

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7 Various authors have deepened into the conceptual perspectives opened by Lefebvre from this standpoint: Carlos (2007), Smith (2020), Harvey (2012b and 2007), Stanek (2008), Schmid (2005), Elden (2004), Gottdiener (1985) and Shields (1999).

and city —for the moment, we would say equivalent to rural and urban— is the first spatial manifestation of the technical division of labor, even prior to the formation of large agglomerations associated with industrialization processes. However, after the development of state housing and urbanization policies in the XX century, the urban begins to enter into the political economy from the need of producing the space for the reproduction of capital —mediated by the state— for its part, produced by commodity circulation and the reproduction of labor force (Castells, 1974; Lokjine, 1979; Topalov, 1979).

While the Marxist debate in Europe and Latin America mainly focused on the reproduction of capital by means of urbanization processes, in parallel Henri Lefebvre started to develop a theory in which the urban is not limited to the spatial organization of the market and labor force, but unfolds as a concept that provides the process of capitalist production with meaning. Lefebvre (2018a) points out that “the dual process of industrialization and urbanization loses all meaning if urban society is not conceived as goal and purpose of industrialization”. It is necessary to clarify that even if *industrialization* is not synonym to *capitalism*, it is one of the main vehicles for its development; and in this sense, it is important to pinpoint that Lefebvre does not state urbanization is the essence of capital, but of industrialization. This allows stating the following thesis: the capital, being a social relationship based on the valorization of values, in exploitation and accumulation, not only produces industrialized means of production, to accomplish its enhanced reproduction, but also *produces a space*, and that same space is an *urban space*. This last meaning reappears in the Hegelian aura of Lefebvre.

Industrialization was the rule, at least of the hegemony of the English systemic cycle of accumulation and possibly of the American as well, but it might have been otherwise, as shown by Ellen Meiksins Wood (2016). Well now, as it was not otherwise, as of the XIX century, industrialization appears as a general and differenced norm of accumulation; therefore, the same may be said about industrialization regarding urbanization. Owing to this, it must be stated to what extent the production of space by the capital is necessarily urban. Considering that we already dealt with the concept of space, it is necessary to observe the way Lefebvre conceptualizes it as urban, discussing with it the thesis of the reproduction of labor force that was the particular contribution of Marxism with the urban studies back then.

To deepen his argument, Lefebvre refers to the problem of suburbanization. If urban rationality consisted in reducing circulation

times and infrastructure unit costs, necessary to optimize the reproduction of labor force, then, how is it explained that American society started mass processes of demographic dispersion, increasing the costs of urbanization measured by infrastructure and transport? Lefebvre (2015) articulates his urban theory with a broader social theory on the creation of that he calls the Bureaucratic Society of Controlled Consumption. From this idea, not only does he criticize modern urbanism in political key, but also makes it ideologic: there is no urban rationality in strict sense, but a planning of the space to direct it toward consumption. Beyond his capability to notice a qualitative change in his object of analysis, therefore, the need to produce a new social theory in the context of historic change, it is important to point at the impossibility of conciliating a Marxist interpretation supported on the theory of value with an affirmation of this nature. There is need to approach minimally this issue to be able to incorporate Lefebvre's statements into a critical theory of value.

From the standpoint of the analysis of the capitalist mode of production that Marx makes in *Capital*, consumption is not part of the reproduction of capital, but the reduction of material conditions of existence, culturally and historically determined. The capital provides value and realizes it in the interchange, not consumption, even if such consumption increases, a situation possible due to various extra-economic factors that require a different sort or research that exceed this word. Wage, social benefits, urban infrastructure, et cetera, are the indistinct conditions of labor reproduction in specific historical-social contexts, as already stated in the sections on the abstract domination of capital. Proposing that urban consumption manages to give an account of the meaning that articulates production of space is not consistent with the specifically capitalist nature of it, and the same is valid for market. Consequently, consumption and market do not define the urban, it is interchange and the demands of circulation what realizes production and within this the reproduction of labor force. Therefore, to incorporate Lefebvre's contribution into the theory of value, it is necessary to understand consumption as a generalized increment in mercantile production associated to historic-cultural changes in the reproduction of labor. The specifically urban forms of these changes are summarized in the category of consumption fund, developed by Harvey (1990) from Marx. Well now, if the consumption fund spatially represented in suburbs is a form of labor reproduction, then it is not possible to speak in this case of the production of space as specifically capitalist. If the consumption fund is supported on a number of forms of revenue (gain, rent and interest), its

existence realizes capitalist production, but does not produce it. Despite the valuable contribution of a critical theory on the real estate sector, Harvey (1990) unnecessarily limits the argument of space production to the secondary circuit of accumulation, which sets the bases for Marx's most disseminated interpretations on the current real estate *boom*. There is only production of space, in the specifically capitalist meaning, to the extent that it is produced in a space for the accumulation of capital, where the realization of commodities, for example, real estate, is only a moment.<sup>8</sup> Considering such limitations in the category of (urban) consumption fund, what is important in this is there is spatiality in the constitution of the historic-cultural conditions on which reproduction is fixed.

In this way, the following may be stated: wage must reproduce labor in a determined place *in the* market, though not necessary *by the* market. As in the case of money, which Marx systematized in the Theories of capital gain, industry, trade, market, etc. are not *a priori* capitalist experiences of modernity or reality in general (Mann, 2012: 112-116). Even if one wanted to insist on the problem of the market, it would be necessary to clarify that the problem is the capitalist market or, even, the impossibility of exteriority of immanence of the capitalist market in modernity as Kurz states.<sup>9</sup>

From this standpoint the suburban experience is then a new space for reproduction, fixed by new historical-cultural conditions marked by wage reassertions, social policy, postwar, American and European hegemony, among others. The point here is to understand that production of space cannot be the results of none of them in particular. Only is it possible a concept of production of space specifically capitalist if it manages to valorize value, increase the magnitude of the capital. Households, as many as they may be, are sold and realized at the interchange, regardless if they are for workers or not. Affirming they are production of space would be to underestimate their importance in commodity realization, even at a widened scale as proposed by Harvey (1978 and 2012b).

Well now, it may be stated that the formation of fixed capital of a country (total fixed investment on machinery and equipment) is the production of space. By the way, the infrastructure that supports the long logistic chains, but also the structuring vitality inside the large population agglomerations, are part of the production of space of the capital. However, the urban

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8 In his discussion with Harvey, Michael Roberts develops that same critique, but around the law of value in general, without including space. On this debate, see Roberts (2018).

9 Inversely, the local, the territory, etc. are no anti-capitalist *a priori* experiences despite the insistence from the readings supported on Hegelian or Foucauldian genealogies.

problems Lefebvre invites to is not well defined from the concept of the recently stated space production. Lefebvre's space production emerges together with his urban theory, at once, it surpasses it. When he presents the real estate *booms* as a form of space production, and later Harvey (1978) builds his theory on capitalist urbanization from such *booms*, they do not clarify that these are only the production of a space for the realization of capital, that is, the production of a space of production.

Such reclusiveness is not as problematic if it is thought that the production of space has been historically the conquest of America, colonialization projects, deforestation, the extension of the telegraph, the Internet, or the recent macroinfrastructure projects to extract natural resources, as Arboleda (2016) states. To an increasing extent, such production of space has been capitalist, and so is today. The complex in Lefebvre is that such production of space of production is at once, indissolubly capitalist and urban. Let us go back to the beginning of this section; if Lefebvre says that "urbanization becomes the meaning of industrialization", what is industrialization? Frequently mistaken by manufacture, machinism, robotization, etc. industrialization is nothing but the production of means of production. It is not a formal exercise, though clearly the replacement between the midterm and space before production expresses the core of the problem.

Even in this manner, it is not possible to understand how the production of space is a historic development of the urban. What is quite clear is that for Lefebvre the production of the space melts into a disperse fabric that makes it indistinguishable the urban from the nonurban. Even if the explosion-implosion nuclear metaphors used by Lefebvre and retaken by Brenner (2013) does not seem to explain anything about the urban or nonurban character of space production, they disclose the geographically expansive characters of what presently may be summarized in the thesis of planetary urbanization (Brenner, 2013); at once they allow interpreting urbanization as a decentered process, where the urban does not constitute the gravitational center of rural migrations and the rural-urban division disappears to the extent that global geographic space stops constituting from regions and moves to be composed as an expansive space of global productive and extractive circuits (Arboleda, 2016; Katsikis, 2018).

Precisely because of this, Brenner (2013) alludes to Amazonia, Siberia and other extreme regions to illustrate planetary urbanization, calling the human settlements in this exploitation regions (frequently extractive enclaves) operational landscapes characterized by a set of formal attributes unthought for the urban: disperse, reduced in size, little dense, etc. When

Brenner (2013) and later Katsikis (2018) build the category of operational landscapes and impute it the urban character, they are making the theoretical exercise of thinking the urban in its relation with the production of the space of production. However, in the explanation they frequently allude that such spaces are urban because they are part of the urban process, without ever indicating what the specifically capitalist character of such processes consists in.

With a view to contributing to the theoretical construction started by Lefebvre and updated by Brenner, we may affirm that operational landscapes are urban because they implicate production of space reproduction subsumed in the production of space production. Being the concept of operation landscape categorically useful, the issue not resolved in Brenner's (2013) theory of planetary urbanization is that it assumes the inherence of an "urban process" as though the goal of society were urbanization. This is not compatible with a critique of the political economy of space, due to what we previously pointed out: urbanization is subsumed in the production space. Indeed, in Lefebvre there is a concept of urban process, though not autonomous, considering that, as we have stated, urbanization is the sense of industrialization, not of capitalist production.

Brenner's (2013) contribution to the development of Lefebvre's statements allows deepening into some questions that might connect the planetary urbanization thesis with the capitalist production of space. In the first place, if scattered human settlements abound in the operation landscapes, why do not call such settlements rural? Is not in any case the rural space subsumed in the capitalist production of space? Here a substantial matter is at stake? The belief that the rural expresses exteriority to the capital is equivocal and seems to be among Brenner's (2013) suppositions. Did rural China need urbanization to complete its capitalist integration in the form of market socialism? Is not it supposed that, according to the largest part of Marxists historiography, capitalism has an agrarian origin? Should we not moderate the importance of the city in the dawn of capital?

The rural and the agricultural are different dimensions, but if the difference between industry and agriculture is based on that this does not produce its main production means, something similar takes places with the rural: there is no production of the space of reproduction. If agricultural work is not peasant, but fundamentally salaried,<sup>10</sup> does the market manage to expand salary goods and services to the rural space?

<sup>10</sup> The debates of rural geography and agrarian political economy are marked by the transformation of peasant into salaried laborer who must realize their wage.



Or should rural population travel to an urban space to realize their wage? The same occurs with the set of reproduction infrastructures that are the material base for urbanization. Albeit, this does not prevent the global market from being reproduced and consumed in an increasingly articulated manner in the rural space.

The relevant issue is that if we were able to define the rural, we might say that it is characterized by a sub-provision of urban infrastructure and equipment, at once, rurality is experienced in practice not daily but periodically, in strict sense, monthly, traveling to the center of the reference town to realize the salary, a specifically urban interchange practice, which if becomes stronger turns into rural-urban migration of agricultural laborers even without public reconversion, since agricultural workers may be urban. In this sense, without a specific theory that integrates the production of the space of reproduction in the capitalist production, the Lefebvre's argument does not allow positioning the urban in the immanent critique to modern society.

## Conclusion

From the critique of political economy, late Marx's project, we have set to dialogue with some of the basic theories on the production of modern space. We coined the term critique to the political economy of space, whose conceptual use, as we have seen, entails an immanent criticism to modernity. This critique is to the abstract logic of value and its expression in the social production of abstract space-time. We have stated that abstract space-time and its indivisible unit are one single great moment of modern social production, whose concrete realization, the urban space, is the geographic space produced for the reproduction of capital, the interchange place, where the totality of mercantile production is realized, while urbanization is presented as the production of interdependent human settlements, socialized by capital, though their meaning is industrialization, not capitalist production. We consider that it is necessary to understand the subsuming of the rural but at once, the limits of such subsuming, since the categorical pair urban-rural refers reproduction not production. Owing to that, it may be said that Marx and Engels (1974) —in spite of having conception of the urban/rural remitted to the technical division of labor— managed to grasp that a dissolution of the urban and the rural is not possible without surpassing abstract human labor, a requirement for building the *common*, or at least to think post-capitalism: “the abolition of the antithesis between

city and countryside is one of the first conditions for community” (1974: 55-56). If we assume that every modern production of space is urban, we may think that the challenge is not to dissolve the urban and the rural, a task elicited, though not concluded in urbanization, but to overcome the urban and the socialized humanity by the abstract logic of valorization that produces, subsumes and dominates modern space-time.

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