

# POSTSCRIPT

The two featured articles, *Fire and Ice* and *Spatial Deconcentration*, both deal with the question of space in capitalist society. Like all social categories, it has two sides. In this afterword we wish to briefly discuss some of the implications of the space struggle previously described.

## I. Planning

*Spatial Deconcentration* reveals the method capital increasingly relies on to overcome the "crisis of social democracy" in the U.S.: *planning through the market*. One of the age-old secrets of capitalist magic is the knowledge that in any relatively diffuse market of competing strangers a few billion dollars can direct the market "forces" to attain planned ends without the institution of an overt monopoly. This trick is the essence of all stock manipulations, the control of large corporations by minority stockholders, etc. Equal and randomly opposing forces cancel each other out while a marginal but relatively more organized force can ultimately determine the situation.

The rapidly changing housing patterns in dozens of U.S. cities reveals the effectiveness of this type of state planning. In the last decade the production and reproduction space of this country has been completely transformed with almost no open, concrete governmental action: no highways dividing ghettos from the rest of town, no housing projects, no bulldozers to sit down in front of. This method of planning through the market is not so "precise" as the detailed state plan of the U.S.S.R. but it has the asset of appearing not to be a plan at all. Thus the state has the *advantage* of not offering itself as a *target* of resistance in an area where its police powers are vulnerable: where people live.

Surely capital does not have "it all planned" in some conspiratorial and foolproof pattern. Those are the dreams of total defeat. On the contrary, capitalist planning has many defects:

- 1) plans presume control of the future but the class struggle is not pre-determinable;
- 2) planners may have conflicting interests and may try to impose contradictory plans;
- 3) temporal pressure may cause the plans to be technically inadequate;
- 4) "exogenous" natural events may disrupt plans.

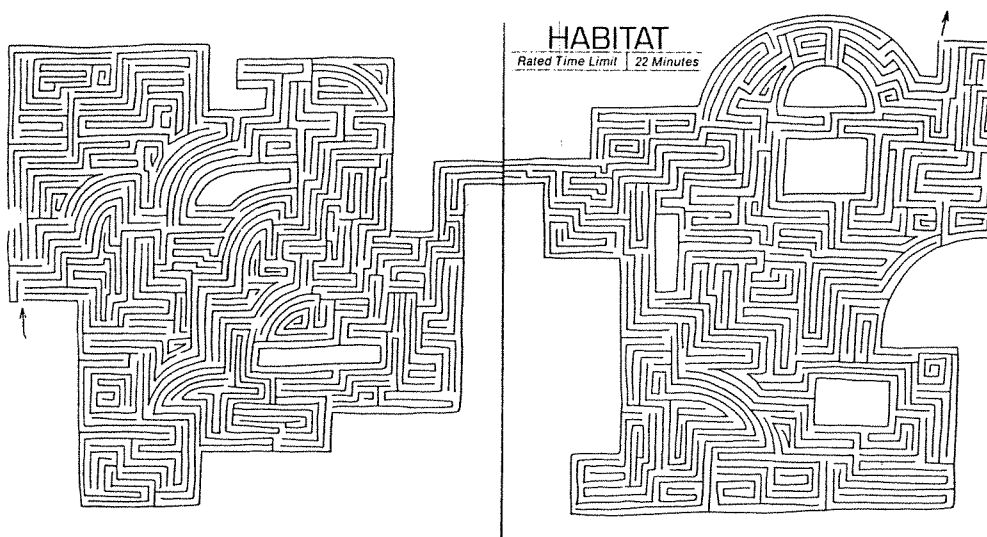
But the primary and essential failure of planning is the one remaining "anarchy of

production": the unplanned desires of working class struggle.

Class struggle, however, is not only the principal disruption of capitalist planning, it is its ultimate cause as well. Planning is needed as capital attempts to continually reorganize the production/reproduction process in ever more "round-about" spatial and temporal arrangements to escape and incorporate working class resistance to work. The future *will not* be like the past--this capital knows--and so the future must be controlled because the present has an essential element of indeterminacy. Thus, the need to plan inner city housing patterns escalated as urban blacks rejected the existing social and geographical arrangement by literally burning it down and threatening to burn much more--capital's "downtown".

We have, in previous issues of *Midnight Notes*, discussed capital's creation and use of time. The capitalist arrangement of space is also crucially important. Capital, especially through its ability to monetarize itself, can now move at light speed to a more "hospitable" climate; but it is always interested in the minutiae of work-life patterns in any environment it decides to land on to maximize the productivity of spatial relations. The working class, on the other side, is continually attempting to subvert the capitalist planning of spatial relations and creating anti-work spaces (sometimes even in the midst of the factory). Such are the conflicting tendencies of the space war continually erupting in capitalist society.





## II. Space

The differing types of state planning of U.S. and European capital have roots in their radically different relations to space. U.S. capital has internal room to move, European capital does not. This simple fact has deep consequences.

The ability to expropriate huge areas at relatively little "cost" made it possible to maintain a relatively "anarchic" planning of production. Indeed, it was essential that capital be able to use this space in order to escape class confrontation. On the other side, the very "emptiness" of North American space, due to the lack of pre-capitalist structures that could easily be turned into fixed capital, required an almost obsessional study and planning of social relations, reproduction and other aspects of the psychological organization of human behavior. "The Land Question" has always been at the center of the class struggle in the U.S. (as the American Indian and parts of the black movement have reminded us recently). For land is not only the repository of potential wealth but it allows for *motion*, it makes it possible for capital to elaborate a strategy of advance, flanking and retreat.

In England, France, Germany and other northern European countries the tendency of the working class in the last century has been toward a fixity in space. With the exception of Hitler's dream of "spacifying" Europe, the class "deal" which helps ensure for capital a more stable work force demands in return a less mobile capital. As a result, the institution of social democracy has an articulation and weight it never has had

in the U.S.

In Washington, D.C. and other U.S. cities, the blacks since the great southern land expropriations of the 30's and 40's, have held the inner city terrain as "its own" (not in the sense of "ownership" but in the sense of "occupation"). The population density was high and the material wealth in the space was low, nonetheless, this space provided terrain for organization of power--bars, corners, churches, stoops, lots, streets, kitchens. A common politics and struggle could emerge out of this commonality of terrain. At first, this massification in a specific space was clearly functional to the place blacks were to occupy in the division of labor in the post-WW II economy, but then this concentration reached critical levels and became dangerous. As the black struggle turned from demonstrations to riots to armed struggle in a space adjacent to high concentrations of capital something had to give, "spatial deconcentration" was clearly called for.

The Zurich struggle is the reverse. Here a new interest, a new cultural/reproductive sector developed but has had no space for itself. For the struggle in Zurich is not a "housing struggle" at all but a struggle for a space *empty of capital*. The problem is not an absolute lack of housing but the lack (or better, the refusal to allow) a type of housing that could generate an anti-work space. The power of this movement and its threat arises from the *location* of its desired anti-work space: at the center of the monetary center of world capital, not in the Alps but near

the computer nodes and telephone systems that form the intricate circuits so essential to the light speed of capitalist circulation. Though there is no gold in the streets of Zurich, it lies buried in tunnels a few feet beneath the rioters.

U.S. capital was faced in the 1960's with a similar problematic that Swiss capital must confront now. Not only with respect to the black ghetto adjacent to the Federal governmental center, but with respect to the white youth "demonstration culture" whose tactics were quite similar to the contemporary Swiss "icebreakers". Capital, thus, had to destroy both the black struggle and the "counter-cultural" anti-war rebellion.

Washington, D.C. was the perfect city to plan this campaign because it was born as a city to thwart revolution. The wide boulevards of the downtown area were designed to prevent and crush a proletarian revolt in the early nineteenth century Napoleonic city planning style. It was a huge construction of "defensible space" built always with the idea of cavalry maneuvers. As the "home" of the state it demands meticulous planning and police "housework" particularly in any period of intense struggle. The whole place is bugged and crawling with agents from every repressive department of the government. (This was graphically revealed to the movement during the Chicago 8 trial in 1969. Far more evidence came from wiretaps in D.C. than from anywhere else even though D.C. was not the "home base" of any of the defendants and the "scene of the crime" was 1000 miles away!)

After the M.L. King riots in 1968 the state deliberately let the ghetto stay burnt down at some cost to its international "image". This was the first step in its slowly evolving "deconcentration" policy towards the blacks.

During that period mass demonstrations of largely white youth against the Vietnam war continually filled the city. For example, there were mass "trashings" in November of '69 and huge demonstrations after the massacres at Kent State and Jackson State. But what really disturbed the government were the Mayday demonstrations of 1971. They were organized with the express purpose of paralyzing and "shutting the city down" by blocking commuter traffic on the highways going into the city. These demos hit a nerve and the veil of "civil liberties" tore. The state responded with literal concentration camps where thousands of demonstrators were kept "illegally". This was also the year of Attica and the violent liquidation of many black militants.

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photo by Bette Keva

This physical repression paved the way for the "oil crisis" and the "politics of scarcity". In D.C. a housing "shortage" developed that appeared to give objective necessity to the increase of rents. The "free market" began to displace the remnants of the youth movement most easily, for after all they were more mobile than blacks. Some "heads" straightened up and became entrepreneurs with shops and condo developments but most simply moved on or altered their life style (from "communal" to "family" to "single"). The blacks and their struggle remained.

Ironically, capital echoed the black struggle to "escape the ghetto" but in its own key: "Go, but go when and where we say." Even the tactic of arson, so potentially used in the black urban riots was turned against them by real estate operators who used fire to drive black tenants and squatters from the now "valuable property". In response, but also continuous with the previous struggles for spatial autonomy, many blacks are now defending the "ghetto". For a ghetto can be a source of strength if it is not a place that keeps you *in* but one that keeps your enemy *out*.

### III. Race space: high & low

The displacement and spatial deconcentration of blacks is being accomplished through the money form. As Mayor Koch of N.Y.C. says, "Everyone should live where they can *afford* to live." But what determines affordability? Surely there exists a hierarchy of wages, and inasmuch as blacks and other "minorities" (immigrant or native) are unable to assume the full range of positions in this hierarchy but are forced overwhelmingly to occupy the bottom of the wage ladder, then they have a qualitatively different relationship to this hierarchy. This wage hierarchy gets mapped point for point into the layout of a city, while changes in the hierarchy lead immediately to spatial changes.

In the late 60's and early 70's blacks sought to open up the full range of the wage ladder and thus eliminate the particular qualitative relation they had to it. The state responded with "anti-discrimination laws" and "affirmative action programs" and for a brief period real gains were made. Study of wage distribution in that period would show an increasing homogenization of wages as well as their average increase. But the crisis of the 70's largely erased these gains with one important new twist. Wages within the working class as a whole have become increasingly dispersed, but this is true among blacks as well. This has showed up in the significant expansion of a black "middle class" of corporate and governmental bureaucrats and well-waged workers who were to provide "leadership" to an ever larger and increasingly poor black working class.

The Miami riots of 1980 revealed the bankruptcy of this "leadership" since the "community leaders" were largely ignored by the rioters. But these riots also revealed the increasing subtlety and power of this ability to use wage hierarchy to organize space in a way that would limit and repress struggle. Throughout the 70's the black ghetto in Miami was increasingly isolated from the "downtown" and "hotel" strip by buffer zones of Cuban immigrants and poorer whites. Thus this riot was not a "commodity riot" like many of the 60's but was bottled up and became a "people riot". While the Miami riot did not explode into a black versus white versus Hispanic race war, the potential for one has been exacerbated through the capitalist strategy of crisis in general and its mediation in spatial composition.

Space, then, is not only the geographic

organization of capital and the working class--communities, ethnic neighborhoods; plant locations; transportation networks, etc.--but also the reflection of the hierarchical relations within the working class as well. Further, it is deployed in a quasi-military manner for the class struggle *is a war* and the mere physical arrangement of the "armies" is crucial. Thus, an important aspect of the spatial deconcentration policy is that the removal of blacks from the urban center will lead to their disaggregation. They will be spread out in the white suburbs or isolated in micro-ghettos in white worker enclaves at the edges of the city proper. This disaggregation will make them increasingly vulnerable to KKK-style terror and intimidation.

As long as blacks, hispanics and the "new immigrants" are kept at the bottom of the wage hierarchy there will be little choice. Macro-ghetto, mini-ghetto or "integration"? None of these "choices" is a solution so long as blacks and other people of color do not have the power to define their own desires and needs and have the space to realize them. This lack of choice has its historical base in slavery and Jim Crow for the blacks, but the existence of the wage hierarchy that lies behind it is no historical accident.

Though a racial and sexual identification of specific types of work with given "races" and sexes aids in capitalist control it is not absolutely necessary. Surely one can imagine a capitalist society where blacks are on the top and whites on the bottom. But a capitalist society without a wage hierarchy is impossible for capital must organize the division of labors and skills and must *recognize* the different quantities of capital invested or, better, incarnated in persons. The hierarchy of wages arises from this simple principle of capitalist "justice". Capital finds the qualitative dimension of systematically infusing different amounts of value in different workers based on the workers' permanent bodily characteristics to be an enormously useful tool of control over the working class as a whole by complexifying and intensifying the reproduction of the hierarchy.

The international flows of capital, the control of immigration, the social stereotyping that identifies work with self, all indicate the deep value capital places on an ethnic, racial and sexual hierarchy. The mechanism through which this hierarchy is produced

is simplicity itself. If certain "job slots" are reserved only for a specific type of person (incorporating a given type of capital) then less competition exists for those "slots". If black workers are systematically excluded from these better paying jobs then whites do not have to compete with blacks for those jobs, meaning that any particular white has a better chance of "rising" on the wage ladder. The most visible example of this mechanism is in South Africa; the operational principle is no different though many times more subtle and diffuse in the U.S.

The drive of blacks to shatter the racial hierarchy has met a good deal of white resistance (as well as some white support). But aside from the open racists and anti-racists, there are many whites who claim simultaneously to support equality of individuals and reject any demands for reparations in any form. Their line goes something like this: "Slavery and Jim Crow were wrong, but they don't exist any more and neither I nor my ancestors were here when they did." This has been a mass sentiment in the crisis, a "reverse discrimination" equality that is not racism per se but rather a profound capitulation to capitalist double-think. For if a white man refuses the "guilt" of historical oppression he must not then claim the rewards gained from that oppression as the products of his own, individual qualities. For example, if a white student has attained a piece of knowledge that is salable as a commodity, that knowledge is not a quality of the student but a product of the accumulated wealth generated by the class struggles of the past. Though the student might not be responsible for exploitation in the past, neither is he "guilty" of creating the knowledge, tools, and experience that arose from the exploitation.

The capitalist system, however, encourages each individual to believe these attributes are due to his or her own efforts, and that one is rewarded (paid) solely for these attributes. In a period when the most

powerful form of productive force is the accumulated knowledge of past generations stretching back perhaps a million years, we are seeing a revival of "I made it to the top on my own merits" thinking!

Thus when white workers refuse to support or actively resist the demand of black workers for higher wages they accept the racism that is an essential part of the capitalist hierarchy of labor powers. Clearly, then, many white workers do have concrete reasons to support the perpetuation of blacks as an "underclass". The price they pay for their racism is very high and obvious, for it allows capital to undercut their wage struggle by continually threatening them with the use of black, lower paid labor. So why does racism continue? People are not stupid and it doesn't take a genius to see the "costs" as well as the "benefits" of racism. Do the "benefits" outweigh the "costs" for white workers? No. If computed in a hypothetical, economic calculus, anti-racism is certainly a better maximizing strategy. So why don't whites follow their "reason"?

The answer to this lies in a deeper place: every worker knows that a serious class unity would so undermine the exploitative relations that capital must act violently to preserve itself. Such a unity would have the most serious of life and death consequences and it is fear of these consequences that keeps many from acting. To destroy the hierarchy of labor powers is to literally step out of the system of "costs and benefits" and open up entirely new possibilities. Many refuse to take the risk that can't be measured. Thus, though racism and sexism as well is the basis for keeping all wages lower--for the hierarchy starts at the bottom with the unwaged--it continues. On the other side, class unity is the primary weapon the working class can wield against capital and so any revolutionary action must address the *materiality* of the labor hierarchy.

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