Nature as Protest: A Tree in the Machine

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How we understand the city is productive, it creates and structures the framework of possibilites which we see as available to interact with and transform it. Such understandings I refer to as 'operative intelligibilities'. They are the prevailing institutional and organisational formations, ideas, practices, values, discourses and knowledge circulating in society at large. In so far as the transformation of the city is effected and structured according to prevailing operative intelligibilities, the city will exclude some and not other patterns of operations for people to effect its transformation. The development of the city, in this sense can be seen to promote and to develop certain 'ways of life', and not others in relation to it. Social change is therefore rooted in a political space in which the transformation of the environment, by specific actors, on whose behalf, in whose interests and to what affect is at stake.

This argument was derived from 'Guerrilla Gardening', in particular a guerrilla gardening event I witnessed in London's Parliament Square. Guerrilla Gardening is the clandestine cultivation of unofficial squattor gardens in specifically urban settings. Despite, at the time, my initial shock at witnessing radical political protest gardeners de-beautifying Parliament Square I was comforted by what this event so explicitly and clearly exposed; public space can only ever fulfill certain needs, and in so doing fails to fulfil others. The decisions as to which needs and whose needs are fulfilled has very real social and ecological effects. Thus by using the uniform urban public space in an unconventional way the guerrilla gardeners fulfilled their own self-determined needs which this city space had not previously afforded them. A garden of herbs, vegetables, sapling trees, fruits and flowers planted during the event, created a space of 'inappropriate contact' with the public space. Although a consciously staged unconventional cultivation, guerrilla gardening clearly exposed the conventional cultivation of the cities public realm as simply a matter of 'operative intelligibilities' which it is possible to contradict and confront. It brought to bear on the productive or operative intelligibilities the political significance

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of what is lost or excluded in human relations with urban environmental transformation. To exemplify their point, I address natures materialisation in the city. How the general course of urbanization operationalises nature. How nature becomes a site of specific knowledges, discourses, activities and values which fundamentally inform the existing political systems and power relations in society and as such can so easily become a part of preventing alternative understandings and different organisational and institutional logics, that could affect different changes in society. The question then becomes, how intelligibilities which do not restrict the possibilities for alternative societal change can be seen to materialise and for this I look to the work of Henri Lefebvre. He understood the city as a spatio-temporal order such that it becomes possible to conceive of possiblities for its negotiation by people in their everyday lives. In other words, Lefebvre's spatio-temporal intelligibility, opened the city to alternative possibilities. Tantamount to the struggle for social transformation, following Lefebvre, are the two fundamental material expressions of society; space and time. To take seriously the political space to which the guerrilla gardeners direct us, I have incorporated a third expression into Lefebvre's analysis, nature. Nature in this sense characterises human relations with the world.

For Karl Marx the 'politics of nature' is the social agents constant and physical relationship to nature and the possibility of social change under industrial delusion. In Marxist analysis people interact with and change their close vicinity, thus they actively produce a different system of material reference that opens new possibilities for changing the social order. Through this interaction with nature, in other words we also change ourselves.

'By working on the external world and transforming it at the same time man transforms his own nature. A natural landscape is the result of this action, and the process of production is captured in its history [Marx, 1983:198].

This relation centred on the labour process, is the point at which society engages systematically with nature, through 'use-values' and 'exchange-values'. Marx encompasses only natures material transformation overlooking the materiality of transformed nature. The

materiality of the social and cultural construction of use-values and exchange-values that structure natures transformation. The questioning of nature and the environment must acknowledge that in the first place 'it is only through specific social human action and interpretation nature can be known and transformed at all' [Castree, 1998:19]. The moment human consciousness constructs and separates itself from the category 'nature', man the subject comes to believe that his new categories of thought are independent of social and historical conditions. The politics of nature cannot be rooted, as in Marxian analysis, in a negative dialectic (reified nature as ideology). Because nature is now information, representation, knowledge and discourse which are materially transformative, they are not simply ideological. Nature is *both* material *and* discursive.

This operative intelligibility of nature is termed third nature. It includes the simulated 'natures' of everyday lives; computer games which allow you to build cities, television, magazines, techno-scientific manipulations of nature as 'information'. Nature is 'collectively, materially and semiotically constructed – that is, put together made to cohere, worked up for and by us in some ways and not in others' [Haraway, 1997:301]. Nature as information is material-semiotic: 'The human genome project, new reproductive technologies, the genetic modification of food within agro-food complexes, geographic information systems' [see Castree, 1998]. The whole gamut of cybernetic systems is making nature known to us in such ways that it can be changed. The reproduction of nature is therefore always about something much more than simply 'nature'. Nature becomes, a focal point, for the matrix of political-economic relations, social identities, cultural orderings and political aspirations in society. To take for example the discourses of environmental transformation; 'waterfront developments', 'sustainable development', and 'biodiversity'. These are the rearticulations of authorised attitudes to and actions upon nature. It becomes necessary to reiterate within these discourses and discursive practices the mechanisms which operate to construct that which is produced and known as nature. As it is also through these discourses that whose nature and which nature comes to be produced and known is established and to what ecological and social consequence and effect.

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This understanding of nature has emerged from post-structuralist sociology of science. Primarily I refer to the work of Donna Haraway who traces the emergence and the mechanisms underlying nature's materialisation. Primarily her work sites the new possibilities for envisioning and intervening in the world, as the realm of 'big' science, hi-technology and the media. These mechanisms produce the technological and coding devices which increasingly reproduce nature as 'information', nature as both machine and organism. She has revealed that specific social, economic, institutional and power relations organise and contextualise scientific enquiry. Thus the establishment of scientific 'truths' about nature are embedded in social, economic, technical and institutional relations. To stress the historical contingency of scientific truths reveals that 'the effects sedimented out of technologies of observation/representation are radically contingent in the sense that other semiotic-material-technical processes of observation would produce quite different lived worlds' [Haraway, 1997:12]. However volcanic eruptions and earthquakes would seem to contradict this thesis. Donna Haraway however focuses on the mechanisms through which we understand these events, rather than the events themselves, and for which we are responsible. Between these events and our understandings of them are formations of power, discourses, knowledge and practices which are cause and effect of the form of our understanding. She simply proposes that this is the location of where we are truly responsible for socially and ecologically destructive processes and effects.

Nature, as conceived by the category of third nature, as information, knowledge and discourses while inseparable from the construction and habitation of the material world seems to be offering something other than a 'real' space. It seems to limit the experience of nature to a purely mental phenomenon, that is to a realm of immaterial forms and processes. However this experience, as Haraway notes, involves the interaction of bodies and machines which is a material 'event' of complex social and power relations coming together and which cannot be reduced to a 'mental conception'. Therefore in response to thinking of third nature as a problem of the lived material world, the work of Henri Lefebvre provides the analytic solution. In 'The Production of Space' Lefebvre insists that lived social space

emerges where concept and practice intercept. Social space is not an abstraction mapped by a conceptual system, whether mathematical, semiotic or discursive, nor is it an empty container waiting to be filled with subjects or objects, as in Newtonian physics. Social space 'is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products)' [Lefebvre, 1991a:83].

Lefebvrian social space is the production of three trajectories; material, conceptual and experiential. Material he refers to as spatial practices, conceptual are representations of space, and experiential, representational spaces. The understanding and the knowledge we have about our environment and the possible effects of our activities in relation to it (Lefebvrian representations of space) is determined by the physical and material flows, transfers and interactions in and across the social, urban or rural spaces. These flows, Lefebvre notes, ultimately assure the production and social reproduction of capital market relations (Lefebvrian spatial practices). This in turn marks a territory within which the ability to imagine or conceive of new possibilities is established, (Lefebvrian spaces of representation). Nature (third nature) is not simply a representation of 'lived space' but must take into account all three productions of Lefebvrian space. Moreover this implicates all three levels of these forces within the production of nature, which now consists of material, conceptual and experiential spaces. Any discussion of nature, certainly any criticism as to its production would need to take into account all three realms of social interactions.

Lefebvre notes how the dominant social space under post-industrial capitalism involves itself in the creation of a 'technological utopia, a sort of computer simulation of the future, or the possible within the framework of the real - the framework of existing modes of production'[1991a:9]. Within urbanisation the dominant representations of nature is 'nature' repackaged. For example, as aspirational 'lifestylism' in new residential spaces as 'parkside living', 'waterfront development' or in the form of 'green' environmental developments. The contradiction of urbanization is that it involves both the eradication of social and ecological systems, the urban poor, forests, wetlands and farmland by way of development investments in nature. Nature in the city, as both representations and material processes allows the

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market of capital exchange, the dominant post-industrial economic space a new kind of omnipresence. Under capitalism third nature is reducible to capitalist relations of production and reproduction which can be regarded simply as the means to ensure maximum efficiency and best performance. Therefore the legitimating strategies of operative intelligibilities can construct this third nature as simply a matter of establishing the 'best possible input/output equation' [Lyotard quoted in Nunes, 2001:60]. The capital market functions to establish a third nature as representations of space in its own interests. This suggests the urban experience of nature is governed by circulation and exchange, in-keeping with the dominant social spaces of post-industrial capitalism. However it would also suggest the 'urban' itself has become incorporeal, a simulation of nature. Third nature provides spaces of 'simulated comfort', away from and distinct from the 'reality' of the city. A 'private city' is established sanitised of its social encounters but leaving in tact its function as a site of exchange and consumption. This third nature in the city is in no way offering liberatory potentials, it is simply offering the possibility of a 'spatial restructuring of society that accompanies the rise of a new form of capitalism'[Soja,1989:61-2]. The dominant space of nature in the city is therefore simply the processes of 'capitalist urbanisation' or 'uneven spatio-temporal development' [Harvey, 1996:414]. This parallels with the analysis of what Lefebvre has called 'the globalisation of the city' the course of 'a general urbanism under capitalism' [1991b:208]. The 'urban fabric' becomes an 'uneven mesh' that spreads indeterminably over suburbs and countryside. The everyday life experiences of this global mesh is an increasing disappearance of 'remoteness' from the post-industrial world. Geography becomes insignificant: distances, situated locations and urban public spaces are held together by an urban fabric of 'information flows'. Places become 'nodes' in the networked world of information exchange. The space of places is replaced by the space of flows.

In Lefebvre's analysis human relations (lived, experiential and conceptual) are placed, by operative intelligibilities into a system of 'traffic' and 'circulation' rather than encounter [1996:98]. Under such opertiave intelligibilities, the city is claimed to be defined 'as a network of circulations and communication as a centre for information

and decision making' [1996:98]. The 'spontaneous theatre' of the street is 'colonised' by the modes of rendering the city intelligible, by the dominant institutional and organisational bureaucracy [1996:170]. Lefebvre was arguing against such materialisations. It is, he argued a form of technological utopia that creates a rationalist city that no longer gathers together people and things, but rather data and knowledge. The dominant space of post-industrial capitalism, the operative intelligibilities which create third natures as representations of social spaces, seem to function to maintain, in a global network city, the premise on which it is being lived as only through abstract exchange-based social practices. How then to define a space which both interpenetrates and differentiates itself from this incorporeal materialisation of third nature.

Lefebvre notes that while dominated by a social space of urban planning and capitalist exchange, the city belongs to the order of human use: 'places of simultaneity and encounters, places where exchange would not go through exchange values, commerce and profit [1996:148].

'The eminent use of the city, that is of the streets and square, the edifices and monuments, is Le fete (a celebration which consumes unproductively, without other advantage of pleasure or prestige and enormous riches in money and objects)' [1996:66]

The use made of the urban fabric is conceived as the site of the convergence of capitalisms social relations. The strategic panoptic vision of the master planner , that is the materialisation of rationalist intelligibilities in disparate relation to the heterogenous, confused and labyrinthine negotiations of subjects within their everyday lives in the city. The claims to knowledge which are made when 'botanising the asphalt', Walter Benjamins flaneur, render the ordinary everyday practices of people in cities, the little narratives and local knowledges as the sites of real events of possible divergences, deviations and resistance. Resistances such as the student uprising in Paris, in May '68, transformed the Leninist question 'What is to be done?' into 'Where do we go next in the city? 'The creation of heterogeneous spaces which can resist co-ordinating into the totalising rationalist city, are those divergences and differences which are irreducible to the homogenising

tendencies of capitalist space of flows. They are lived social spaces, 'enacted environments', producing and produced by the actions of people. 'People are both the users and the creators of space. People activate settings merely by their presence' (Hayden, 1997).

The guerrilla gardeners are an instance, however temporary of this potential emergence of resistant social spaces. A social formation that disrupts the logic of the mechanisms of abstraction of operative intelligibilities. They do not simply use, they disrupt the intended functions of an urban site. They make material use of the site, for food and plant life, for political purposes and for fun. They pose differing utilizations of material resources and differing experiences of interaction. The guerrilla gardeners create lived social spaces which allow for relations to be established which are not based on exchange value, production and consumption of regular urbanisation. Guerrilla gardening establishes a difference which is not reducible to what David Harvey defines as 'a difference produced in space through the simple logic of uneven capitalist investment' [Harvey, 1996:295]. Nature constructed as an abstract space of a general urbanism does not allow heterogeneity to occur on all three levels; material, experiential and conceptual as the guerrilla gardening event proposes. The guerrilla gardeners therefore pose a challenge to the general course of urbanisation. That is how to preserve and allow for 'differences' heterogeneous elements within the homogenising tendencies of capitalist social relations of production.

Lefebvre positioned the contemporary moment in a struggle between a post-industrial resistance to the dominant/dominating social space and a proliferating abstract space that is global and ever more discrete in its organisation. This 'contemporary moment' is the guerrilla gardeners struggle. Against the dominant processes in society circulating the power, wealth and information through the space of flows their rhetoric asserts 'the primacy of locality, social interaction and institutional organisation' (Castells, 2000) . The reassertion of physical contiguity of lived social spaces and social relations draws attention to social agents intentional and causal interaction with nature and to the internal dynamics of politics and the functionality of the operations of power which frame it. It draws attention to social agents rela-

tion to nature premised as consisting of the actual site, the actual experience by actual people against the operations of reified economic and technical interests in nature. The defensive localised struggles against social disenfranchisement, unwanted urban developments, implicitly deny priveleging principles of abstract representations of nature mediated by multi-national capital and technocractic government interests. Guerrilla Gardening wages an issue oriented space of places against the reified productions of nature in the space of flows.

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