

Definitional Essay 1: Spatiality, Marxist Theory, and the Development of Capitalism

As the title implies, this comprehensive field entails both chronology and geography with respect to the capitalist system. It is concerned with the altered landscapes and regions at the advent of capitalism, as well as what these shifts have meant for work and populations over time. This field's overall orientation is Marxist, and it's always bearing in mind the effect of the capitalist class's unequal economic power. Given this, it is paramount that I am able to detail the fundamental aspects of Marxism before anything else, such as the dialectical method and the view of historical modes of production.

Since critical geography is another major component of this field, I could very well derive its epigraph from "The Communist Manifesto," where Marx and Engels discuss "steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, [the] clearing of whole continents for cultivation, [the] canalization of rivers, [and] whole populations conjured out of the ground," which occurred alongside the rise of new markets and the bourgeoisie (Marx, 1994, p. 163). Also gracing the epigraph would be a nod to urbanization, which the bourgeoisie had facilitated with its forging of "enormous cities" (Marx, 1994, p. 162). I hope to trace the history of spatial phenomena—as it relates to capitalist development—such as the English enclosures¹ all the way to more recent incarnations like the explosion of urban slum growth from Cambodian cities to Kinshasa, DRC.²

Understanding capitalism's development and *raison d'être* will allow for the informed critical consciousness necessary to assess the social and economic ills of *today*, such as uneven development, neoliberal policies, technocratic governance, gentrification, unemployment, poverty, crime, and racism. These, by the way, are the very realities I expect to broach in my dissertation (and which I foresee in the tradition of Hall *et al.*'s *Policing the Crisis*, but which I will set in America's deindustrialized centers). All of these social phenomena, I should like to think, are still largely prefigured by Marx, despite academic and political claims to the contrary. For this reason, in addition to articulating the core of Marxist analysis I am also prepared to explain *how* Marxist scholarship has contended with alternative and bourgeois theories. I also hope to detail, of course, how scholars describe the contemporary nature of capitalism.

The lack of engagement with the historical transformation of capitalism—as well as its current state—by contrast, dooms one to adhere to ideologically problematic and truncated "common-sense" interpretations of the world (i.e., reproductions of the ideology of the dominant class). Without this knowledge, taking a look at imposed austerity measures and neoliberal projects, for example, will appear as naturally and as plainly as the "ruling classes" depict them (Mann, 2013, p. 51-52).

I acknowledge that the field I am describing is quite broad. While I've drawn works from the disciplines of geography, history, political economy, sociology, and

¹ Wordie (1983, p. 486) writes that the 'first parliamentary enclosure Act' occurred in 1604, and that by 1760 the country had become "predominantly enclosed" to the tune of about 75% of its land.

² Davis (2006) references these locales on pages 16 and 14 respectively, along with many other regions suffering similar fates.

cultural studies, my quarry remains clear: the social and economic effects of capitalism. The aforementioned disciplines all provide unique ways of understanding such variegated manifestations.

I divided this comp area's reading list into four categories: the origin of capitalism; Marxist theory; the nature of capitalism (since Marx's time); and capitalism's effect on space. I expect overlap to occur within each book no matter the group it falls under. I do find these to be sensible distinctions, allowing for a thorough grasp of where and when capitalism emerged, how it operates, and what it has spelled for those subjected, for instance, to the "familiar landscape of disciplined industrial capitalism, with the time-sheet, the time-keeper, the informers and the fines" (Thompson, 1967, p. 82). The first three categories (origin and nature of capitalism; Marxism) exhibit a mix of European and North American work, and the category on space is relatively global.

The ethos of the British Marxist historians—aka the Communist Party Historians Group (founded in 1946)—influences the first category, regarding origin. These scholars, including Rodney Hilton, Eric Hobsbawm, and E.P. Thompson, researched peasantry, transgression, labor, and revolts in the past, creating in their work a "history from below" (Dworkin, 1997, p. 2). Emerging from this position, then, their work inherently complements my goal of fashioning a consciousness that demystifies the dominant interpretations of the way society appears and operates. Included in the list is Thompson's article on the gradual imposition of clocks and watches in the lives of market town denizens, both in their homes and in the square. In addition, I bring in a foundational book on the subject, *The Transition From Feudalism to Capitalism*, which contains an introduction by Hobsbawm and excerpts from other Group members. Another selection in this category is an important article from the *New Left Review* by Robert Brenner. It evinces a crucial debate within the Marxist tradition I expect to unpack at the writing stage. The repercussions from the debate emerge in an extremely useful article from George Comminel, a scholar from York University's Political Science Department, on capital's roots.

The second category integrates a classic work from Marx as well as secondary writings on what Marxism entails—which represents effectively what I'm most interested in addressing for the exam. I say this because Marxism in some way or another permeates both comp fields. The next category on the trajectory of capital represents titles from Marxist geographer and current professor of anthropology, David Harvey. Implementing these books, along with some other selections—Lenin among them—has the benefit of illustrating a timeline of how capital has functioned since Marx's time to the twenty-first century.

The focus on Harvey naturally segues into the fourth category on spatiality. The issues I intend to explore here entail, among others: (1) How space is "produced" a la Henri Lefebvre's formulations. (2) How capital moves in the form of, say, a "corporate settler" in a job-poor region (Palmer, 1994, p. 35), as well as what capital flight entails. (3) The toll the economic system has taken on residents of marginalized spaces such as slums and low-income neighborhoods—Involving everything from "accumulation by dispossession" as Harvey calls it (2005, p. 160) to the inability for Blacks to purchase homes outside of ghettos (Davis, 2006, p. 161). (4) The condition of spaces marked by their extremely concentrated wealth (5) How space and architecture can be "read" as a language.

Readings

Origin of capitalism

1. Berman, M. (1988). *All that is solid melts into air*. New York: Penguin.
2. Brenner, R. (1977). Origins of capitalist development. *New Left Review* I (104): 25-92.
3. Comninel, G.C. (2000). English feudalism and the origins of capitalism. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 27 (4): 1-53.
4. Hilton, R. (Ed.). (1976). *The transition from feudalism to capitalism*. London: Humanities.
5. Moore, B. (1966). *The social origins of dictatorship and democracy*. Boston: Beacon.
6. Thompson, E.P. (1967). Work, time-discipline, and industrial capitalism. *Past & Present* 38: 56-97.
7. Wordie, J.R. (1983). The chronology of English enclosure, 1500-1914. *Economic History Review* 36 (4): 483-505.

Marxist theory

8. Cleaver, H. (1979). *Reading Capital politically*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
9. Cole, G.D.H. (1948). *The meaning of Marxism*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
10. Giddens, A. (1971). *Capitalism and modern social theory*. London and New York: Cambridge University Press. Introduction, Part I: Marx.
11. Harvey, D. (2010). *A companion to Marx's Capital*. London and New York: Verso.
12. Heilbroner, R. (1980). *Marxism: For and against*. New York and London: W.W. Norton.
13. Ilyin, S. and A. Motylev. (1986). *What is political economy?* Moscow: Progress.
14. Marx, K. (1967). *Capital*. New York: International Publishers. Commodities.
15. Shapiro, S. (2008). *How to read Marx's Capital*. London: Pluto.

Nature of capitalism

16. Dean, J. (2005). Communicative capitalism. *Cultural Politics* 1 (1): 51-74.
17. Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
18. Harvey, D. (1990). *The condition of post-modernity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
19. Krugman, P. (2012). *End this depression now!* New York and London: W.W. Norton.
20. Lenin, V.I. (1966). *Imperialism*. New York: International Publishers.
21. Mann, G. (2013). *Disassembly required*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.

Capitalist effect on space

22. Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Chapter 2.
23. Davis, M. (2006). *City of quartz*. London and New York: Verso.
24. Davis, M. (2006). *Planet of slums*. London and New York: Verso.
25. Daylight, R. (2008). The language of postmodern space. *Philament*: 1-21.

26. Fainstein, S.S. and S. Campbell. (2011). *Readings in urban theory*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
27. French, S. *et al.* (2011). Financializing space, spacing financialization. *Progress in Human Geography* 35: 798-819.
28. Harvey, D. (2013). *Rebel Cities*. London and New York: Verso.
29. Lefebvre, H. (1992). *The production of space*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
30. Mitchell, K. (2004). *Crossing the neoliberal line*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Chapters 1-2.
31. Palmer, B.D. (1994). *Capitalism comes to the backcountry*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
32. Sassen, S. (2001). *The global city*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
33. Smith, N. (2008). *Uneven development*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
34. Tsing, A. (2005). *Friction*. Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Supplements:

1. Dworkin, D. (1997). *Cultural Marxism in postwar Britain*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
2. Goonewardena, K. *et al.* (Eds.). (2008). *Space, difference, everyday life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*. New York: Routledge. Chapters 1-2, 16.
3. Le Blanc, P. (2010). Lenin and revolutionary democracy. *Critique* 38 (4): 617-630.
4. Marx, K. and F. Engels. (1994). The communist manifesto. In L.H. Simon (Ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected writings* (157-186). Indianapolis: Hackett.
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5. McLellan, D. (1973). *Marx's Grundrisse*. St. Alban's: Paladin.