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In the Distance: Suburbia against the barricades

Haussmann built boulevards to prevent the construction of barricades and completely destroyed the neighborhoods where insurrection was most likely to occur. These neighborhoods reappeared in a different form in the suburbs. North American suburbs are built so that few direct relationships of the sort that Haussmann paved over ever develop. Communication is as much a threat to state control as barricades. In the suburbs, houses are far from shopping areas, places to socialize, and work places. Meanwhile the suburbanite is sold the idea that she likes this on TV, and is bought off with excessive consumption. The suburbanite is lost alone in a labyrinth of reflections. Unable to find anyone to discuss anything of substance with, she is left with only images for companions. While the suburbs were being designed to placate and stupefy, the inner cities were becoming increasingly marginalized economically. Haussmann destroyed slums to prevent insurrection, but in the U.S. slums sprouted up right in the shadow of the American dream. During the Rodney King Riots, suburbanites watched the adventure on TV.

Sources

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helped perpetuate the illusion of the American dream. The American dream is lifeless and as uniform as the suburban lawn; it is produced by the television instead of by subjects that intervene in life in order to transform it. The American dream hides the degrading reality of a processed life from those "lucky" enough to afford it. Where private property reigns the ownership of one's living space, work-space, and just about every other space by capitalists the property poor individual is perpetually constrained. Suburbs conceal alienation from nature and other human beings as well as the lack of power that suburbanites exercise over their own lives at home and at work.

The separate ownership of living and working spaces divides opposition to Capital into labor and rent struggles. On the other hand, the illusion of homeownership (getting bank loans to buy a house) gave millions of workers a vested interest in the system of private property, and diffused any potential struggle against landlords. This has resulted in community action to protect the property values in a given area. Workers have organized to keep other workers out of their neighborhoods. When millions of blacks moved to northern cities, white neighborhoods tried to prevent blacks from moving into their neighborhoods in order to protect their property values. This "community" action" is in many cases the action of illusory communities. The average suburbanite or city dweller doesn't know many of her neighbors. When she chooses to take community action to protect her property value, this is a "community" connection based on money, and seldom on direct human connections.

While Haussmann's Paris served to create an image of the capitol of a powerful empire, city revitalization projects create an image of the new "beautified" city that is sold to us under the guise of community pride. In both of these examples this was achieved through the displacement of the poor. The "community" is sold to us with citywide celebrations, city fairs or official Millennium celebrations. The State and the media help create and perpetuate these imagined communities, that is, communities which lack commonality based on direct human relations but are instead based on an abstract conception of common identity, the most obvious example of this is the Nation. Capitalism destroys human connections but it replaces this vacuum with imagined communities.

Contents

Alienation is built into the city and into the suburbs, in its concrete and asphalt. Take the example of Los Angeles, the city built to accommodate cars but not walking human beings. In LA many people think nothing of driving 45 minutes just to go a bar to have a drink. Instead of having neighborhoods where one finds a whole street of bars or cafes, places to socialize are spread out over the city. North American cities lack any pre-capitalist history; they were built from the beginning by the dictates of capital, with government help. The result: urban blights that are more adapted to the automobile than the human being.

Unfortunately cities that predate capitalism can be also transformed into concrete monsters. In Torino, Italy the gigantic FIAT plant began assembly line mass production based on Ford's model decades before the rest of Europe. The result is the same as occurred in U.S. cities: mass production needed mass consumption to perpetuate itself, a cityscape was built that conformed to the requirements of accumulation. Someone had to buy the cars, to make this possible the car companies made sure that roads were built. Torino is a rare European example of the results of the dominion of a car company and its allies over a cityscape. Concrete partitions between seemingly endless apartments and a proliferation of roads have surrounded the walkable narrow streets of the old city. The FIAT plant employed a large percentage of Torino's residents for many decades. The employees were scattered throughout the city while the FIAT was in one location, the result: auto, boulot, dodo.

Back in the U.S.A., the suburban lawn and backyard were offered to a section of the working class and to the middle classes. The alienation from nature they experienced in their new automobiles and at work was compensated for and then hidden by an equally alienated but much more pleasant relationship to nature at home. Forced to buy what they could easily make at home if there were time, watching adventure on TV, the suburbanite resorts to control over nature where he lacks control over his own life. Therefore we observe bushes trimmed into squares, a neurosis for mowing lawns and meticulously planted rows of flowers. Garden stores have proliferated and the suburban yard has become nature as commodity. The suburban yard, the lies on television and 17 choices of toothpaste all

North American Suburbs: the paved dream.

Before World War II, the U.S. was already a highly industrialized country. Thus, the conditions I describe above were already common to North American cities. From the 30s on, the distance dividing living and working spaces increased exponentially as millions of Americans moved to the suburbs, highways were built and millions of Americans bought cars in an attempt to close this increasing distance.

The federal government employed millions in the thirties to build a new landscape. After WWII the Veteran's Mortgage Guarantee Program provided low cost housing to millions of people. From the late 40s to the mid-60s developers built 23 million new homes. Industry followed these mostly white new suburbanites out of the city, partly because unions were weaker there. In the 40s and 50s the government invested millions of dollars on the suburban infrastructure: gas, electricity, roads, sewer systems and highways. They built thousands of roads and highways allowing for easy movement between suburbs and city centers. Poor neighborhoods were unable to resist the construction of highways through their neighborhoods whereas rich neighborhoods had the clout to prevent this from happening. One more recent example of this is the construction of a highway in South Central Los Angeles while the rich of Beverly Hills were able to stop the construction of a highway in their neighborhood.

The defense department spent millions of dollars on freeways after the war. Just as Haussmann's boulevards were strategically useful to the military, highways could potentially be used as runways to land bombers. More significant though was the alliance between, car companies, the oil and rubber industries that lobbied for the construction of highways, and the state. These companies used the coercive power of the built environment to insure the consumption of their products. Suburbanization was a perfect accompaniment to the construction of roads, highways, and mass produced automobiles. Greater distances between work and home along with terrible public transportation (again thanks to the friendship between government and car and oil companies) created a need for automobiles.

Haussmann and City Planning: the birth of the human tide.

"Having, as they do the appearance of walling in a massive eternity, Haussmann's urban works are a wholly appropriate representation of the absolute governing principles of the Empire: repression of every individual formation, every organic self-development, 'fundamental' hatred of all individuality." — JJ Honeger 1874 (Benjamin, 122)

"But by the any standpoint other than that of facilitating police control, Haussmann's Paris is a city built by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Guy De Bord

Haussmann did not invent city planning, the Romans and ancient Chinese planned cities. Modern cities were planned and built in the British and French colonies earlier than in Europe. Washington DC was planned and built on an empty field decades before Haussmann refashioned Paris. What was different about Haussmann's Paris is that he built his new national capitol on top of the old Paris, a pre-industrial city. Haussmann's Paris reveals more about the architecture of capitalism and of the nation state than L'Enfant's D.C because it shows us what Haussmann chose to destroy as well as what he chose to build. In his demolition of poor neighborhoods and narrow streets we can see what he considered a threat to the new state and economy.

Boulevards were already replacing narrow streets in Paris two decades earlier than Haussmann took office, but on a much smaller scale. During the July revolution of 1830 an ironic twist befell government soldiers. The large squares of granite that were being used to pave new boulevards were dragged up to the top floor of houses and dropped on the heads of soldiers. These stones became a common source of barricade building materials. In 1830 there were 6,000 barricades. Haussmann took office after both the 1830 and 1848 insurrections, in 1853. In an attempt to prevent other insurrections,

Haussmann tried to eliminate the construction of barricades by destroying narrow streets and replacing them with wide boulevards. He also built boulevards in order to allow for the easy transport of troops "connecting the government with the troops and the troops with the suburbs" and allowing troops to surround neighborhoods in the city. (Benjamin, 137–8) By paving boulevards Haussmann facilitated the regulated and regular movement of troops.

Haussmann's Paris was more than just a city. It was a symbol; its monuments and boulevards created an image of the capitol of a powerful empire. The fancy new boulevards that were part of this image pushed rents up just like recent "urban revitalization" projects. In 1864 Haussmann gave a speech venting "his hatred of the rootless urban population." (Benjamin, 12). The construction of boulevards drove the proletariat into the suburbs and increased the population of wandering homeless. Working class neighborhoods were destroyed to literally pave the way for boulevards, and when this didn't drive workers out of the city rising rents did. Haussmann's destruction and construction placed neighborhoods that were likely to revolt outside of the city. Boulevards allowed traffic to flow to the center of the city. The movement of workers' homes to the suburbs meant that 'commuting' to and from work was born on a mass scale.

> "Hundreds of thousands of families, who work in the center of the capital, sleep in the outskirts. The movement resembles the tide: in the morning the workers stream into Paris, and in the evening the same wave of people flows out. It is a melancholy image...I would add...that it is the first time that humanity has assisted in a spectacle so dispiriting for the people." A. Gravneau, *L'ouvrier devant la societe*, Paris, 1868 (Benjamin, 137)

Haussmann aimed to detain and fix the rootless and to channel workers into linear movement: from home to work, from work to home, a precursor to metro, boulot, dodo.

Haussmann planned the construction of railway links between the center of Paris and its outskirts during a period in which the European railways expanded considerably.

"Space is killed by the railways and we are left with time alone."
— Heinrich Heine (Rice, 207)

Space may not have been killed by the railways but high-speed travel has made travel time a greater consideration than travel distance. What Georg Simmel said of money can be said of the modern city. They both allow connections between previously distant things but make that which is close more difficult to reach. While distances were conquered by the railways, the nearby slipped further away. That is, at the same time as transportation and communications allowed one to reach far away places in a short period of time, ones neighbors became more distant: industrialization demanded more hours of work and more travel time to and from work, there was less time to socialize.

Let's not forget that the separation between work and leisure time is accompanied by the separation between living and working spaces. Industrialization and the subsequent proletarianization of large sectors of the population created this separation on a mass scale. Peasants had worked at or near home, those that had worked and lived in separate quarters generally found that the distance between these 2 points increased with industrialization. The increasing partition of time into working and living in separate spaces effected customary meal times, household labor and its sexual division, family relations and leisure activities. This separation began a process of increased dependence on consumer goods for previously home produced items. The creation of suburbs increased the distance of this separation. This separation corrodes the type of relationships that could form a basis for attacks on the established order. This separation organizes the spatial and temporal imposition of consumption and production. The prevalence of the spatial and temporal separation between work and 'life' was born with industrialization but has come to appear timeless and natural. The naturalness of this separation kills the passion for freedom by limiting our capacity to imagine any other organization of space and time than the repetitive constriction which capital imposes on us.