

Introduction

Recall, for a moment, the wonder with which you once observed the movements of worker ants. Whether visibly united to move a large object or building an anthill one grain of sand at a time, the ant colony at work is an endless source of fascination. To us on the outside, their regimented movements and often frenetic pace seem strange, comical even, but what would we discover if we turned this outsider's gaze on ourselves? Imagine how our urban spaces would be perceived by someone entirely unfamiliar with our dominant socioeconomic norms. At sunrise, the outsider would likely note the systematic division and subdivision of cities by innumerable highways, forming orderly geometric shapes and patterns. She would see the blocks of concrete and glass jutting into the sky, separated, connected, and framed by the grid of city streets. At the appointed hour, these highways and streets would be overtaken by a seemingly endless procession of cars and buses, and she would watch in astonishment as the lines of machines inch their way along. Zooming in closer, the observer would quickly realize that the city is a space of and for machines that orchestrate the mass movement of humans and commodities between points of production and consumption. To her, we would no doubt look like the most domesticated of all creatures, with our movements incomparably more prescribed than the worker ants we gaze down on.

Perceived in its totality, this scene can give us insight into the truth of our spatial lives that we could never otherwise imagine. It would be inaccurate to say that the millions of people who are on the move en masse at certain times of the day are physically coerced in the way that people are forced to work in labor camps. Still, there must be a force behind these highly organized patterns of movement and spatial

organization. Behind every hegemonic order, there is a system responsible for its creation and reproduction; nothing in our produced environment is natural. In our case, that hegemonic order is capitalism, and it dictates the organization of human activities as well as the ways in which objects are transformed through those activities and the simultaneous transformation of humans within that process. Indeed, the hegemony of capitalism is such that we have not yet been able to comprehend the scope of our unfreedom, the degree to which our lives are mechanized by the power of capital.

Our obsession with time and history has made us neglect the very pressing question of how the capitalist distribution of space affects our everyday lived experience. The dominant mode of spatiality is fundamentally transparent, which is indicative of our non-freedom. We live in a unified space that is chillingly flat, mechanized, and open to the policing gaze of power. And yet we go along with it. We tacitly accept being watched by unknown individuals whom we view as disembodied elements of the institution of the state and its corporate associates. In fact, we do this despite the commonsensical fact that working in the service of the state does not make anyone more ethical, and it certainly should not make anyone more entitled to penetrate other people's lives. Some of us may comfort ourselves with the belief that we have nothing to hide, and that the surveillance is therefore benign. In doing so, we essentially submit to punishment for a crime that we have not committed. To prove her innocence, the citizen must consent to being naked before the gaze of power, conducting herself in such a way that she would never do anything that could not be made public.

When the body becomes an object of inspection, subjectivity is sieged within increasingly narrow boundaries of a disappearing inner space. This has caused us to lose sight of the fact that each of us is entitled to having things to hide from governments, employers, each other, and even ourselves. Without this, freedom can have no meaning, for any restriction of freedom of thought necessarily negates freedom altogether. Obviously, freedom of action may need to be restricted so as not to infringe on other individuals' freedoms, but only under a system of total domination would people be expected to have nothing to hide. Even in what we would typically identify as traditional totalitarian regimes, there were always underground spaces of resistance, spaces where individuals could eat the fruits of the forbidden tree and enjoy some freedom despite all the laws of absolutism. The totalitarian regimes of the twentieth

century relied primarily on human resources, and they therefore never attained anything resembling total domination.¹ In its more advanced stages, however, totalitarianism does not require an omnipresent police force to sustain itself. Instead, it relies on spatial technologies of power and myriad forms of thought policing to wipe out and guard against potential irregularities. For total domination necessarily requires constant policing of each and every individual, and this is virtually impossible without turning people into self-policing inmates confined to a unitary space of complete transparency.

As this book argues, the free world of the market regime has succeeded in obliterating spaces of secrecy and intimacy, achieving a state of hegemony heretofore unprecedented. Let us be clear from the start: no one in her right mind would prefer despotic totalitarianism over liberal democracy. However, something has been destroyed by the capitalist production of space, and it has rendered our contemporary spatial experience fundamentally totalitarian in its transparency and subjugation to technological means of control. This totalitarian space has been so normalized and globalized that critical spatial awareness is imperative for any meaningful emancipatory school of thought or social movement. Notably, this book is not another romantic call for a return to the state of nature, which is neither desirable nor feasible. Regression is not the answer to any problem of modernity, and in fact, romanticizing the imagined lost origins of the past is one of the primary fascist motivations of our time. Rather, the solution is something we cannot hope to discover until we more fully comprehend the scope of the crisis. In other words, for us to be able to imagine and construct different, nonoppressive spaces, we must first be able to articulate what is wrong with the existing spatial order. Though I do not claim to know the path to those other spaces, I believe that for us to know and reject what is wrong, we need not necessarily know what is right.

By the same token, critical spatial theory may not be capable of envisioning the form those other spaces should take, but it should be able to guard our actions against the reproduction of more spaces of domination. This improved spatial awareness may not lead us to spatial emancipation, but without such awareness, we are doomed to eternalize our unfreedom. Perhaps we are not in a position to describe an alternative space, but we must find ways to know/feel what is absent, or, more accurately, to know/feel that *something* is absent. As such, this book aims to problematize our spatial experience, to seek out what has been

lost in the unified contemporary space under capitalism, and to name the dominant space of our time. For although we may feel alienated in dominated spaces, the fundamentally spatial nature of this alienation is rarely recognized, in large part because normalcy does not strike us as something to be named. It is rather the abnormal, the pathological, that we insist on diagnosing, naming, and “fixing.” Yet, just as the “abnormal” is not necessarily “unnatural,” the normal does not necessarily originate in “natural laws” because the norm itself is determined by relations of domination. A critical philosophy of space must necessarily aim to denormalize that which is unquestioned by problematizing the history and functions of our spatial norms, as well as the conditions they help to sustain.

To start, a critical philosophy of space should name the dominant spatial norm, which is so debilitating to thought and so restrictive to our very mode of existence that its threat is not only social and political but also ontological. Living in such a space makes us unable to experience our most crucial existential potentialities. This book simply puts a name to something that we have been living in too deeply and too continuously to be able to accurately perceive. Today, the state of being constantly under watch is no longer a form of control exercised primarily on the incarcerated. The gaze of power follows all citizens wherever they may be. As an individual walks on a street, shops online, or makes a phone call, her actions are recorded in various ways for a range of actual and potential purposes. Particularly in an online context, her consumption history, personality, political orientation, social relations, and much more fall under the never-sleeping gaze of power. Whether manifested in surveillance cameras, drones, or mechanically reproduced symbols of the state, the gaze of power destroys the uniqueness of all spaces to produce a single, lifeless space in which every undesirable body is easily recognizable. Such a space can only be called totalitarian.

Totalitarianism is not exclusively a label to be applied to certain despotic political systems, but rather to any system that aims to achieve the unlimited exercise of power. By the same token, the gaze that recognizes no spatial limit to its vision is inherently totalitarian, as is the resulting produced space. The politicality of social space is not merely a hermeneutical, aesthetic, or epistemological conclusion that theorists of space seek to draw within abstract projects. Rather, social space is inseparable from the question of politics in both the broad and specific senses of the word. Sovereignty, as the state’s legitimization of its own use

of violence (Lefebvre 1991a, 280), ensures that the subject's perception and experience in space and of space will be continually constrained. Accordingly, what the subject is required to submit to within the borders of a state is more than just a set of laws and regulations; a certain spatial experience is literally imposed on the subject. The state is the master institution that has the decisive say in spatial distribution and thereby determines the movement of bodies between and within the geographies of everyday life.

All states, from the most terroristic to the least undemocratic, affirm their statehood first and foremost by territorializing space, which inherently violates the purportedly communal nature of social spaces. Acting as the commanding brain of the society, the state sees itself as the legitimate engineer of social space. The state's violent spatial politics are manifested clearly at international borders, where the surgical spatial operations are more visible because that is where the subject directly witnesses the shift between two normalized worlds. At a border, the contrast between the two worlds renders the spatial coercion normalized within each state visible, alerting us to the fact that the laws of the state are not the natural laws of the land, as the state's ideological apparatuses would have us believe. Rather, the state is quite literally constructed on the basis of the production and reproduction of space (Lefebvre 1991a, 281), and it continually asserts itself via symbolic materiality. A symbol, by virtue of being a symbol, is never merely a symbol. The function of a flag waving in the wind attributes a political function to the wind and the sky, just as border signs oppressively attribute political functions to the air and the earth.

This fully legitimized, unlimited spatial power of the state is by definition totalitarian, the ultimate result of which is the entrenchment of the belief that the state is the natural distributor of all spaces. What is worse, the more powerful and technologically advanced the state, the more difficult it becomes to find a place to hide or a space to dream. The gaze of the state, and its psychological effects, can penetrate not only all social spaces, but also the very natural solitude we enjoy within the space of our bodies. It can render our bodies an extension of its totally illuminated space of control. People internalize the gaze of power, and the necessity of using physical violence is subsequently minimized. In other words, we ourselves are the daily reproducers and sustainers of the totalitarian space in which we live.

While the hallmark of a traditional totalitarian system may be terror, the more effective the methods of ideological indoctrination

become, the less necessary physical terror becomes. In capitalist democracies, we end up with a form of totalitarianism that is more advanced in terms of its sustainability and ideological hegemony, as well as its use of technologies of power. Advanced totalitarianism, or what Sheldon Wolin terms “inverted totalitarianism” (2010, 213), relies greatly on ideological hegemony wrought by the culture industry, as opposed to methods of terrorizing the population. Of course, the state is not the sole producer of totalitarian space because the state itself is continually sustained by more fundamental relations of production. Capitalism, as today’s dominant mode of production, is fundamentally involved in the production of totalitarian space. Under capitalism, the state functions as the umbrella institution that facilitates the institutional and legal conditions necessary for production and consumption.

The proliferation of consumerism as a lifestyle has made standardization and repetition desirable aspects of public space. Commodities have become the flattening agents of space. They reach into all spaces that consumers use, and they carry with them commodity forms, thereby creating the conditions for spatial uniformity. Essential to this is, again, the culture industry, which has molded the mass individual’s mode of perception to fit the consumerist order of things. Familiarity might otherwise be thought of as the addictive appeal of repetition, and the culture industry achieves exactly that: it simplifies anything and everything it touches to make it consumer friendly, that is, unchallenging, depthless, ready to be effortlessly consumed. The culture industry’s standardized patterns of repetition aim to provide a sense of complete familiarity in all experiences, from shopping and traveling to reading and listening to music. Spatial experience is no exception.

The question, then, is how we can account for totalitarian space, given that its production entails much more than simply the employment of the means of terror. Following the opening chapter on totalitarianism, chapter 2 introduces Lefebvre’s theory, being both the historically and dialectically most important theory of the production of space. His theory of the production of space opens the door for the kind of critical thinking essential for capturing the dynamics, contradictions, constant transformation, and infusion inherent in social space. Lefebvre teaches us that space is simultaneously perceived, conceived, and lived. He avoids reducing space to the mental or the physical, but, at the same time, his theory encompasses both the mental and the physical in a dialectical relationship that culminates in a third “moment.” Symbols and signs play

a pivotal role in this dialectical production of space. In fact, images are crucial determinants of the production of space, especially when those images allude to an existing symbol of absolute power and create endless visual patterns through their proliferation.

Yet before moving on to explore this point further, chapter 3 demonstrates how the technology of power is used spatially. Relying on Foucault's work, I illuminate the principles and functions of the Panopticon as an iconic example of the technology of spatial production. Spatial transparency is crucial to panopticism insofar as it is a technique of observation aimed at total control and discipline. The Panopticon makes the space of the governed subjects transparent, the subjects visible to the gaze of power, and the gaze of power ultravisible to the subjects. In doing so, it cultivates within each subject a state of being continually watched by the disciplinary power, with the chief goal being the implementation of self-policing. Another very important principle that is explored vis-à-vis panopticism is that of maximum utility, which seeks to control the greatest number of people with the absolute minimum number of policing personnel. As chapter 6 shows, these same ideas can be applied to the symbols of the state, namely mechanically reproduced images.

First, however, I further refine the notion of totalitarian space by identifying what is destroyed through its production. Something is fundamentally lost when space is stripped of its uniqueness, and I term that which is lost "aura." Chapters 4 and 5 detail the merits and shortcomings of Benjamin's work on aura. While I would argue that his greatest pursuit was to secularize the notion of aura, emancipating it from its religious/mythological history, he ultimately betrayed his secular version of aura by reassociating it with the cult value. Staying faithful to Benjamin's secular understanding of the concept, I present aura as the negative concept capable of capturing the presence of absence, the appearance of distance, and the trace of what once was. Moving to Benjamin's work on the aura of original works of art, I argue that just as mechanically reproduced works of art are auraless, mechanically reproduced images render the spaces they invade auraless. In this particular context, it is the mechanically reproduced symbols of the state, such as images of a fascist leader, that destroy "spatial aura," thereby turning all spaces into a singular, flat space of totalitarianism.

Having clarified my use of the term "totalitarian," explained the production of space, analyzed panopticism as a spatial technology of power, and defined aura in the first five chapters, chapter 6 brings each

of these components together. It reasserts my argument that totalitarian space is produced through the systematic destruction of aura by illustrating the particular case of mechanically reproduced images. More specifically, I show that mechanically reproduced images produce totalitarian space by functioning on four intertwined levels, namely as simulacra creating hyperreality (per Baudrillard), symbolic Panopticons, means of visual hegemony producing an omnipresent cult, and endless repetitive patterns imposing spatial sameness. The systematic distribution of mechanically reproduced symbols renders all spaces auraless. Also in chapter 6, I explain the role commodities play in the systematic destruction of aura. This chapter ultimately aims to provide a concrete case of how the systemic destruction of aura lies at the heart of the production of totalitarian space.

Finally, chapter 7 explores the commodification of public space and the alienation that it engenders. The chapter also revisits the negativity of aura, particularly in relation to the politics of dissent. I argue that commodification simultaneously fragments space, in accordance with the predefined activities of consumerism, and unifies space through the totalizing logic of reproduction. Because familiarity requires repeated duplication, space is both distributed and consumed on the basis of similar patterns. It becomes both a mass commodity and a commodifying force. The resulting spatial patterns of sameness eradicate the conditions for unique, different, individual experiences. This chapter concludes by arguing that the negation of totalitarian space is imperative for regaining the ability to imagine an auratic world. For as much as interrogating the production of space is a question of demasking domination and denormalizing prevailing sociopolitical systems, it is also a matter of imagining spaces of resistance.