



## Freitag, 26. August: WEGE IN DEN KAPITALISMUS

19:00: Prof. Dr. Ivaylo Ditchev (Kulturtheorie, Kulturgeschichte und Europastudien, Universität Sofia/Universität Nanterre Paris), „Primitive accumulation of space?”

*“We have seen how money is changed into capital; how through capital surplus-value is made, and from surplus-value more capital. But the accumulation of capital pre-supposes surplus-value; surplus-value pre-supposes capitalistic production; capitalistic production presupposes the pre-existence of considerable masses of capital and of labour-power in the hands of producers of commodities. The whole movement, therefore, seems to turn in a vicious circle, out of which we can only get by supposing a primitive accumulation (previous accumulation of Adam Smith) preceding capitalistic accumulation; an accumulation not the result of the capitalistic mode of production, but its starting point. This primitive accumulation plays in Political Economy about the same part as original sin in theology. (Das Kapital, vol. 1, part 8, Primitive accumulation)”*

That paragraph of The Capital was meant to criticize the idyllic Robinsonian vision of equal start in capitalism. At the origin of the peaceful capitalist market exchange, there is war, violence, extra-market coercion. Inequalities are juridicized, they pass from the realm of the political (the battle for power) into the one of law (maintaining the existing balance of forces). I want to play upon the analogy between the accumulation of economic capital and the creation of the outlook of a capital, that is, the spatial arrangement of power in the post-communist world, concentration of symbolic value within space.

The analogy between space and capital hits upon a major difference: money is transferable (it has been invented in order to transfer value), space is not. In order to exchange spaces you need to “translate” them into money. In a way, the utopian limit of primitive accumulation is when places become mediated through money. Another way to define this point is to say it is the moment when political force – be it crude or institutionalized – would have ceased to be active in space, and even the baldest hypercapitalism has not reached this limit.

In a way, space is one of the fundamental limits of capitalism: the intuition of space implies otherness, the underlying belief of capitalism is that everything can be exchanged for another. There is something fundamentally political about space. Even if at some time it seems to have become an integral part of the market, at the origins you see conflict, identities at stake, irrational violence (land ownership is a classic example for some irrational black hole in capitalism).

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Here are some reflections of how space became politicized in the 90s, then calmed down again:

## Communist space

There is a common misunderstanding about communism implying that urban space was public. In fact, you could not beg or just sleep in a city square or park, open up a shop, stage a cultural event, not to speak of a demonstration. The state was run as an enterprise with many social privileges for the workers but not like a territorial – that is composed of different subjects - entity. The structure of power was two-fold: via the working place and via the place of residence. Gradually all important decisions tended to be taken in the various power units within the first, whereas the second lost all importance. For instance, an active communist would exercise his/her membership in the cell at the working place; an old age pensioner could be member of the territorial party unit. The opposition between working place and residence strangely resembled the capitalist one between public and private, residential spaces being dominated by old people, women, children where the main issues to be dealt with would be hygiene, good behavior of the youngsters or grassing of yards.<sup>1</sup>

Thus on one hand you had the "political" space of the enterprise-state where everything was intended to maximize profits and consolidate the company, on the other, the "civilizing" space of the neighborhoods designed to pacify and even out conflicts. I put "political" in brackets as this dimension of space was soon pacified by force, museified and attached to the media as a vast stage for propaganda representations.

The fall of communism implied two simultaneous movements. 1) The spontaneous nationalization of space by the people and 2) its reprivitytization by individuals. (The people and the individuals are opposed here in the way Greeks opposed "polis" and "oikos"). The first move was loud and visible; nevertheless, it was the second that absorbed silently most of the social energy of the period.

Both moves profited from the general dissolution of power: one would write on the wall that the president Jeleu is a Turk (this is meant to be an insult), another would enclose part of the common staircase into his apartment, but a third will get acres of park land for nothing to build gas stations. Thus in a way the absence of order and regulations (including: of a plan for the development of Sofia!) was celebrated by all, only they profited differently by the consequences.

## Property

Was there a limit to restitution go? There was the curious case of one person, who claimed a parcel of the central square of the city of Plovdiv – he had fenced it off the rest and sat beside it giving interviews for the press. Such cases were and still are quite common in agricultural land where a whole plantation often gets ruined because one of the new proprietors would decide to plant some completely different type of crop.

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<sup>1</sup> Note the gradual degrading of the "Fatherland front" in Bulgaria that was the political organization that took the power in the mid 40s and in the mid 50s was assigned the task of keeping order in the territorial units.

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You see it in crumbling cooperative houses the cities where the different proprietors never come to terms as to painting the façade or repairing the roof. Integral spaces have no legitimacy: there cannot be planes, but only valleys within it. Thus any allegedly public space is quickly fragmented into private corners, not without corruption (corruption being a sort of continuation of politics with other means).

Property has a rather ambivalent status in Bulgaria: on one side it is capitalism's main tool of domination, on the other, it is through small property that the "human material" resists capital.

As in the rest of the country nine out of ten persons in Sofia own the home they live (note that unlike the DDR, ownership was as high during communism as well). A similar proportion think it natural to keep the same apartment for life and see their children inherit it. Selling property is somehow evil in itself.

Real estate market that had been abolished under communism with the Law for Rents in 1948 is slow to get in motion. People find excuses not to sell in the expectations for prices to go up first with the NATO accession (2004), then joining the EU (2007?). Well, prices went up and yet no boom is to be seen. Typically elderly persons would live in extreme poverty turning off the central heating in but the sleeping room, and still obstinately refuse to sell the bigger, and buy a smaller apartment.

This makes spatial expression of the new social inequalities slow to take shape even after 15 years of "transition". In the same apartment house you have thus growing differences of income, culture and expectations and it is rarely possible to convince all proprietors to pay for the plastering up of the façade (this makes most of the city look as if there have been air attacks). You can also single out the rich guy who covered his floor with a stripe of brand new stucco isolation; and it is said that thieves identify their targets according to the estimated price of the window frame systems.

In a way, for many people the possession of their apartment is the last resort against their own degradation inflicted by the social upheaval in the 90s – such were the conclusions of a research conducted by the Social Democratic Institute in 2001. Even if it is unaffordable for them to maintain, the own lodging maintains the illusion that the effects of "transition" could still be reversed and their status retrieved. Moreover, legislation takes into account this identitarian aspect of property making it extremely cheap to possess crumbling real estate, waste land, or rusting cars.

One might say that status-like urbanity and status-conferring property make up for the unsettled, fluid social identities of the citizens. Aristocracy was slaughtered in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and as to bourgeoisie, it was first destroyed by communists then re-engineered in the 90s by the two conflicting technologies of restitution and privatization. Even national intelligentsia has never created its own standards or hierarchies and has always been dependent on foreign legitimation. If social position is not quite stable, one thing is obvious: your spatial location. It is as if not the people, but the places that have rights, culture, even political will.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Family relations would also account for this strange mixture of demographic mobility and patriarchic ideal of sedentarism. Children are supposed to live near their parents. The normal pattern for the countryside would be for the son to build a storey over or an extension besides the parents' house. In Sofia this is not so easy, and families often try to get apartments in the same block or at least in the same neighborhood. The point is to be able to see the parents several times a week, leave them the child to look after, get home pots of warm food, canned winter supplies, bring

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One might also see the fixation on property in the perspective of the frontier-style urbanization. When the Turks were chased their houses were destroyed so that they could not come back and the plots occupied by Bulgarians. Real estate relations seemed about to be regulated at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the influx of refugees from Thrace and Macedonia created again a pioneer spirit of settlement. A whole district (Koniovitza) was occupied by them in the early 20s. They are said to have tossed up for plots to built houses, and even designed streets and squares on their own, keeping the police out by barricades. According to law, no house that had a roof could be destroyed, so they would work all night staring top-down to confront the authorities with a *fait accompli* in the morning.

One could be astonished that even nowadays a large amount of buildings even in Sofia are illegal (among them some brand new as there are along the periphery road: they were build in order to be sold dearly to the Municipality whet the latter would start to build the highway North-South). Occupation of space is best visible in the appearance of wild markets that are tolerated for many years. One is now to be seen in the bed of the Perlovetz river (a sewage channel, in fact), where second hand or stolen goods, false brands or copylefted discs are sold under the shelter of the river banks, and outside of the normal territory of the city, as the cement bed of Perlovetz is in fact designed to be under the water in times of flood.

The late 40s brought about the communist nationalization of big urban property carried out under the cover of revolutionary fervor and covering in fact the desire of the new ascending class to elbow its way onto the urban scene. During those four decades the main concern was to keep what you have and if possible acquire more, obviously not for yourself but for your children as according to the law one family was allowed to have one apartment of a maximum of 120 square meters (communist middleclass put their children on the waiting list since it was born). It seemed completely irrational to sell property as the functions of money was limited and you were not sure you would be allowed to reinvest in real estate. In fact, selling was seen as pure loss and the only transactions done willingly were barters.

The breakdown of 1989 opened the floodgates of property-passions. Acquiring land or living space was not only an imaginary form of imposing oneself, but had a real economic sense: in fact the only safe investment in a crumbling world of closing factories and hyperinflation. Restitution of property acted somewhat like a lottery where distant relatives became rich overnight, others engaged in Punic wars to get back their due, and shiny jeeps turned up in front of shabby blocks. The procedure was intentionally complicated giving lawyers the possibility to charge up to 20% of the price of the restituted good and quarrels between heirs made costly properties in downtown crumble down for many years. Those heirs were not necessarily active and apt for business; they tended to be elderly persons, marginalized by the regime for their bourgeois origins with little experience in public life. As a result in the 90s Sofia was covered with flower shops, boutiques and art galleries that were supposed to fulfill the dreams of a humane, neighborhood capitalism.

Privatization shook the city even stronger. For the needs of money lauderning some visible signs of economic activity had to be put up, so more flower shops, boutiques and art galleries popped up around the city.

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back the empty vessels – in short maintain intensive exchange. The energy you need to break this type of relation is considerable. Parents will hardly understand why their child would go to the other side of the city. To emancipate themselves the younger generations need to do something more, leave the country altogether. In a way, moving to Canada seems easier than just changing your apartment.

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## Signs of conquest

Appropriation of public places for protest does not have anything original. Forms of protest circulate globally and there hardly was any symbol of liberty that would not circulate throughout the whole of Eastern Europe (and later China, Iran, Lebanon...). Take the protest cities of truth camping in the central square of Sofia and some other cities in the beginning of the 90s. The main thing was occupying forcefully the "political space", staying there, staging oneself in public, replacing voice by the body. For many morally minded people spending some time in the tents was a rite of passage and purging guilt feelings of collaborationism. The "occupational strikes" of the students locking themselves up in the University building are another example of such conquest of space.

Just imagine what it was like for a recognizable representative of the opposite camp to traverse those territories – a feminist urban theoretician would know about it. The writer Marko Gantchev – having been declared a traitor by his fellow party members in 1991 for reasons that nowadays seem completely obscure said that it occurred to him to get back home all wet from being spitted at.

It was accompanied by various blasphemous acts (that were again circulating around Eastern European media) in principle against communist symbols of power. Nevertheless, even peaceful naked bronze women were overthrown in the revolutionary élan [ei'l'a:n]. It seems to me that the most radical blasphemy was the degrading of Dimitrov mausoleum into a public toilet with a door keeper and entrance fee for the needs of the tent dwellers.

Within the dimension I called "civilizational" and linked to residence spontaneous adaptation of socialist planned space to the emerging jungle of *Lumpen-Kapitalismus* started to take place. Of course this was by no means a new phenomenon: any Bulgarian having awaited his turn to come to buy the dreamed of apartment started right away adapting it to reality, transforming the glazed balcony into a kitchen and the second toilet into a closed. The state's monopoly of violence kept those changes within the limits of the personal space: the events of 1989 spilled over the creative energy of the citizen becoming in a way a revolt against architecture as a modern practice.

I call what resulted "**architectural folklore**": the ground floor are transformed into a café, doors and windows appear at strange places in the block, façades are redesigned by adding a separate staircase to someone's place, surrounded it with a nice small private garden fenced off the common one.

Take the common case of the garage transformed into a shop. It necessarily has no warehouse, thus necessarily it offers an extremely limited choice of articles and the salesperson will often ask you to wait and hop over the street to fetch what you are asking. This became a sort of style and even today it is impossible to find a shop in Sofia where they have all the sizes of the shoes they sell - you usually buy whatever is exposed in the shop window that plays, in fact, the role of warehouse.

The most exotic commerce installation are the so-called "crouch-shops" where a cellar is used to start a trade (usually cigarettes, alcohol, food) and one needs to crouch down in order to interact with the salesperson.

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An American friend on his trip was shooting those, fascinated by the possibility for the buyer to bow down before the seller. Would his be a remnant of real socialism where the client was at the mercy of the supplier?

The triumph of private **capital** over the city became visible by the end of the 90s. The new architecture is explicitly meant to express the act of conquest. Besides the emergence of national and corporate banners, brand names and logos, you will be shocked by the amazing amount of pinnacles have suddenly appeared in the flat-roofed communist cities especially in squares where there are open perspectives. The pointed pylons concluding them invite easy Freudian interpretations. Consider putting on top of your building a watch-tower with no practical use whatsoever (I have never seen some one on them). Isn't this some sort of boyish dream world of power? In the countryside you even see real fortresses with crenels that make you think you are in the world of Disney.

Some elements of this conquest architecture draw upon the former communist urban arrangements. The building of "Bulbank" for instance has taken the place of the unaccomplished palace of Soviets facing the House of the party, the red of Coca Cola appears where there were communist banners of the same color before, the highest prefabricated blocks are the most expensive in terms of advertisements, etc.

### Undulating urban space

Space is become even less homogenous after the fall of a regime that had forcefully territorialized population by means of residence permits, political banning from the cities and hidden segregation of minorities.

The undulating character of the urban space has best been analyzed by feminist authors. Not all parts of the city, they will tell you, are equally accessible for men and women: e.g. men are much more numerous and visible in the street at night.<sup>3</sup>

Under communism it was the unparalleled gravity center of the State that organized space. The sudden disappearance of the "monopoly of violence" made it possible for numerous alternative centers to appear around bandit groups, privately guarded spaces of the rich, Gypsy ghettos where police no longer dares to enter.

Under communism there weren't many places of public resort where you would spontaneously not feel you could enter. You might not be in the possession of a pass to enter, say, the restaurant of the Writers' union but passes are an external, arbitrary limit and whenever you knew the door-keeper you did not hesitate to enter. According to the ideology of the epoch, places were not supposed to be qualitatively different, but just temporarily marked off by political will. One of the effects of "transition" was not only that places started to become differentiated, but also that difference was internalized: there are revolting places now, dangerous places, unaffordable places and so on.

Another factor is criminality. The plundering of national wealth throughout the 90s was in fact made possible by the hegemony of terror that reduced the citizen's will to resist and push them away from public life. (I do not say this was some conspiracy!).

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Жаклин Кутра, Кризи на града. Мъжки и женски пространства, HURA, София, 2002, 30.



The figure of the former wrestler transformed into a bandit – thick-necked, square shouldered, with broken ears, small front and a heavy golden chain – was folding the space in a new way. You'd rather not put up a boot or drive a taxi on their territory unless you would put yourself under their "protection". On the average 120 bombs exploded each year settling accounts between "businessmen", show killings in the central parts of the cities marked the areas. The appearance of gated communities is no surprise (e.g. "Residential park Sofia" constructed by Linder; Bulgaria) – they incarnate and visualize the areas of security established by force.

## Normalization

Normalization of spatial relations could be seen as the end of conquest. It is as if at one point the panic of freedom is over and space is again sedimentarized into class layers. The average man is no longer directly concerned by violence – real gangsters are not really interested in his old TV set and shabby Lada. Restitution is over, and it has become clear that privatization will never been possible for his type of incomes. More severe standards for commerce and business makes architectural folklore out of place, whereas baroque plastic expressions of conquest and triumph contradict the harder economic realities of the 2000s. I thus come to a conclusion that sounds sad and paradoxical. The advent of the market becomes possible – not of homogenization – by of stratification. Space needs to be conquered, redistributed and stratified in order for capitalist accumulation to take place.

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