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# – THE HIDDEN ABODES OF CAPITALIST SPACE: Rethinking Crisis and the Built Environment

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**Abstract**

*This article develops a new theory of the relationship between the built environment and the reproduction of capitalism. To do so, it pursues a critical engagement with David Harvey's landmark texts on that theme, which provide a comprehensive account of that relationship and which continue to hold considerable sway within urban studies. It begins by situating Harvey in a long history of efforts to spatialize crisis theory. Tracing his relation to G.F.W. Hegel, Johann Heinrich von Thünen, Rosa Luxemburg and V.I. Lenin, it underscores the genuine theoretical revolution that Harvey inaugurated with his crisis-centric account of the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital. Then, it teases out the occluded relations in Harvey's theory. Building on the work of critical theorist Nancy Fraser, among others, the article demonstrates that the recurrent and endemic remaking of the built environment is consistently (if not exclusively) propelled by capital's tendency to undermine its own unwaged and/or undercapitalized hidden abodes behind the abode of production. It demonstrates that the built environment is central not only to the resolution of crises that emerge in the 'formal' economy but to the reproduction of capitalism as an 'institutionalized social order'.*

Capitalism, as a social and ecological system, does not simply attempt to produce a world in its own image. It produces, in the words of British Marxist and state theorist John Holloway, a 'law-bound world'. Of course, there is no reason why such a law-bound world should exist. As Holloway notes, '[t]here is no inherent reason why the production of wealth should follow any set of laws' (Holloway, 2015: 10). Our shared social life and the process of producing goods to facilitate our material reproduction can proceed in any number of ways, so long as it meets the corporeal demands of bodily reproduction—an argument that Holloway himself also makes. And yet, in the *capitalist* world, things are decidedly different. In this world, we do not simply produce 'wealth', but 'wealth' *in the form of commodities*. And because these commodities are 'produced for exchange', this process 'imposes the need to produce them with labour that is socially necessary, [creating] a whole world of functional necessities, [and] of social determinations that operate as laws independent of any conscious control' (Holloway, 2015: 10). Put otherwise, in capitalist contexts, *we collectively* produce a world in which *we collectively* have relatively little say regarding its contours or determinations; a world that is so 'law-bound' that our wants, needs and desires—at least as they pertain to the reproduction of the material world itself—are almost beside the point. Within capitalist contexts, we produce 'a world of alien determination', which structures how the 'richness of human capacities [are] developed' (Holloway, 2015: 14). The 'laws' of capital operate largely behind the backs of social actors who are evermore crushed by the weight of abstract labour and its necessary preconditions, even as it emerges from, and takes shape through, their concrete work and everyday practices of production and social reproduction.[1]

Of course, no scholarly effort to make sense of these laws—and of this law-bound world—has been more influential and incisive than the one pursued by Marx in his mature critique of political economy. And yet, what concerns me in this article is not

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1 This paragraph draws heavily, as is quite clear, on Holloway (2015). For more on these themes, see, especially, Bonefeld (1995) and Elson (1979).

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the attempt to make sense of the internal relations that constitute this law-bound world *as such*—or the laws of capitalist motion themselves, which were so central to Marx's investigative effort and immanent critique. Rather, my intention here is to make sense of how the built environment—that central object of analysis in urban studies and its related disciplines—mediates and structures the reproduction of these invariant laws. In this article, I am concerned to ask: What is the place of the built environment in this law-bound world? Or, put differently, how does the built environment relate to the reproduction of capitalist society at the highest level of conceptual abstraction? And in that context, it is not Marx that has had the most to say on the subject, but his most influential interpreter and popularizer of the last half-century: David Harvey. Beginning in the early 1970s, and continuing through the opening decades of the 21st century, Harvey has developed an entire oeuvre of scholarship predicated upon the notion that capitalism is not only a law-bound world, but that the built environment is *logically and historically integral* to the mediation, materialization and expanded reproduction of these laws. Indeed, Harvey has developed a theory of the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital at the highest level of abstraction, one which centers specifically on the role of the built environment in resolving the inherent and enduring crises that emerge within the realm of capital's 'formal' waged economy.

In this field defining account, Harvey has set as his intellectual agenda not only the development of abstract-theoretical 'proposals for more precisely delineating the constituent features of [capitalist] spaces, processes, transformations, and struggles' (Brenner, 2019: 41). But, going further, the articulation of an abstract-theoretical account of the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital, which attends to the fact that capitalist reproduction is itself governed by abstraction, or by the 'prosaic activity of commodity exchange and its grounding in practically abstract labour' (Toscano, 2008: 70). Harvey has attempted to explicitly isolate the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital's laws of motion, and he has done so with the understanding that abstract processes structure the production of capitalist space itself, processes which are 'previous to and external to [] thought' (Toscano, 2008: 70; see also, for context, Sohn-Rethel, 1978; Stanek, 2008: 67). He has aimed to transcend those 'bad abstractions' regarding capitalist space that are 'bequeathed to us … by the dominant forms of capitalist society', and to develop an abstract-theoretical account of the relationship between the built environment and the reproduction of capital (Toscano, 2008: 66). And, once again, he has done so by suggesting that the built environment is not only central to the expanded reproduction of capital, but—more directly—that it is foundational to the formation and resolution of capitalist crises within the realm of formal waged work, which are immanent and integral to capital at the highest level of abstraction.

This article will attend directly to Harvey's theorization of the relationship between the built environment and the reproduction of capital; it will do so with the express agenda of critically engaging how Harvey's crisis-centric account relates to (what I will refer to as) the hidden abodes of capitalist space. Indeed, in what follows I will use Harvey's account—which not only represents the most comprehensive theorization of the relationship between the built environment and capitalist reproduction, but which continues to hold considerable sway within critical urban studies—as a kind of theoretical foil, in the service of my own effort to offer a revised account of the role of the built environment in the reproduction and stabilization of capitalism and its foreground and background 'abodes' (see Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018; Conroy, 2022; 2024). To that end, I will proceed in several relatively circumscribed parts. First, I will begin by tracing a history of attempts to spatialize crisis theory within (geo)political economy, focussing on several critical figures within that tradition that informed and inspired Harvey's account. I will move from G.F.W. Hegel, and his writing on the political economy of crisis in 1821's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*; to Johann Heinrich von Thünen, and his writing on the 'frontier wage' in the second book of *The Isolated State* (1850); and, finally, to the

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work of both Rosa Luxemburg and V.I. Lenin, two of the most influential theorists of capitalist imperialism in the 20th century. In so doing, I will insist that situating Harvey in this tradition allows us to not only grasp the genuine theoretical revolution that he inaugurated by way of his account of the relationship between the built environment and the reproduction of capital's laws of motion, but—more importantly given our purposes here—to clarify what exactly his landmark account *holds from view*.

After taking stock of Harvey's conceptualization of the relationship between the built environment and the reproduction of capital in this way, this article will then turn to teasing out these occluded relations. Building directly on the work of political philosopher and critical theorist Nancy Fraser, I will demonstrate that the built environment not only mediates the reproduction of a law-bound world—and that it is not only central to the mediation and resolution of capitalist crises in the realm of waged work—but that the recurrent and endemic remaking of the built environment is consistently (if not exclusively) propelled by capital's tendency to undermine its own unwaged and/or undercapitalized hidden abodes behind the abode of production. In other words, I will demonstrate that the focus on waged work in Harvey's account—which remains a field-defining reference in critical urban studies—holds from view the centrality of the built environment in the reproduction of capitalism *as an institutionalized social order*.

## Spatializing crisis theory: Hegel, von Thünen, Luxemburg and Lenin

The four figures named above—Hegel, von Thünen, Luxemburg and Lenin—were not chosen at random. Not only are each of these figures critical reference points in the history of attempts to spatialize crisis theory—and in geopolitical economy more broadly—but they were also central to Harvey's earliest efforts to grasp the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital and the resolution of capitalist crises. Hegel and von Thünen were taken up by Harvey directly in his 1981 classic, 'The Spatial Fix: Hegel, Von Thunen, and Marx'; and so too were Luxemburg and Lenin in his 1975 landmark, 'The Geography of Capitalist Accumulation: A Reconstruction of the Marxian Theory', among other foundational texts.[2] All are positioned, in other words, as critical interlocutors by Harvey himself in some of his most important—and earliest—work on capitalist reproduction and the inherent spatiality of capitalist crisis. Each is presented as part and parcel of a long history of efforts to spatialize crisis theory, and as preempting and structuring Harvey's own engagement with that problematic. And, in that spirit, each of these figures will be reviewed here so as to situate Harvey's account of the built environment and capitalist crisis within a longer tradition; to make sense of the revolution he inaugurated vis-à-vis previous efforts to spatialize crisis theory; and to demonstrate what his enduring account of the relationship between the built environment and the reproduction of capital holds from view.

In 'The Spatial Fix', for example, Harvey calls attention to the spaces and spatialities present in Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821) and in von Thünen's second book of *The Isolated State* (1850). He recalls that Hegel, specifically, identifies a set of contradictions at the heart of civil society (Harvey, 1981: 1). In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel calls attention to the 'increasing accumulation of wealth at one pole and the increasing mass of the impoverished at the other as the fulcrum of social disruption' within civil society, while also noting that within this context production tends to outpace or overstep the demands of consumption (Harvey, 1981: 2). And, as Harvey also notes, Hegel suggests that this 'inner dialectic'—or this inner tendency towards social disruption within the bounds of civil society—is potentially resolvable through a set of spatial or geographical techniques. The contradictions of civil society

2 For more of Harvey's reflections on these figures, see, for example, Harvey (1982; 2009; 2018).

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can be mitigated against by prying open new markets in geographies that are 'deficient in the goods' that have been overproduced; and they can be circumvented through forms of settler colonialism capable of absorbing the increasingly immiserated mass of surplus populations that sit at one side of the aforementioned 'pole', and who can no longer 'secure the satisfaction of their needs by their own labour' (Hegel, 1967: 151 and 278).

In von Thünen's work, Harvey identifies a comparable attempt to develop a spatialized approach to crisis theory as well. In *The Isolated State* he locates the question of how 'harmony' and stability might be maintained in an economy that is prone to both the intensification of poverty and the escalation of inequality. And he notes that in response to that question von Thünen suggests, much like Hegel before him, that colonial 'outer transformations' could provide a solution. In his late work on the frontier wage, von Thünen insists that the only way in which the 'patriarchal bond' between capital and labour can be reestablished is by first establishing a '*just share* of labor in the product that labor creates' (Harvey, 1981: 3, emphasis original); and, moreover, that this 'just share' is visible if we turn to the space of 'the frontier'—to that (real and imagined) geography in which 'land is to be had in unlimited quantities' such that 'neither the arbitrariness of the capitalists nor the competition of the workers nor the magnitude of the necessary means of subsistence determines the amount of wages, but the product of labour [itself]'. Indeed, what Harvey finds embedded in von Thünen's account is the suggestion that a just wage is precisely that which *stops* would-be settlers from 'setting up a colony', and thereby ensures that they 'continue to work for their former master for wages' (von Thünen quoted in Harvey, 1981: 3). It is *this wage* at which *class struggle and crisis are ostensibly resolved*. But, of course, what that means in practice is that colonization can also function, for von Thünen, as a critical tool for establishing social harmony. In the absence of an effort to reconstruct civil society in the name of justice, settler colonialism and the 'existence of a freely accessible and open frontier' for settlement is understood to provide it; colonization can alleviate social struggle in the face of inequality (Harvey, 1981: 4).

Lest there be any confusion, neither Hegel's account of the geographical dynamics of crisis, nor von Thünen's account of the frontier wage, is central to their intellectual project. In Hegel, this discussion is a blip in a process of dialectical unfolding, a moment in his social and political philosophy prior to his more full-throated discussion of the state—that 'stage of ethical life and ... of mind in which the prodigious unification of self-subsistent individuality with universal substantiality has been achieved' (Hegel, 1967: 234). Indeed, Hegel's discussion of civil society's tendency 'to push beyond its own limits and [to] seek markets ... in other lands' is neatly nestled in the penultimate section of the *Philosophy of Right*; it is given relatively little consideration before he ultimately arrives at the conclusion that the 'natural element for industry, animating its outward movement, is the sea' (Hegel, 1967: 151-152). And von Thünen's account of crisis formation and the frontier wage is similarly secondary. Colonization—as a geographical fix to capitalist crisis—is not even von Thünen's primary concern in his discussion of the frontier wage itself. If von Thünen notes that colonialism might provide a 'laboratory' for the working out of a just wage in practice, even this discussion is wrapped up in a more abstract explication of how to guarantee forms of justice in contexts in which colonization *is not a possibility* (von Thünen quoted in Harvey, 1981: 4). The prospect of a colonial fix to capitalist crisis is embedded within a discussion of how a just wage might be achieved in situations in which the frontier *has been closed*.[3]

Nevertheless, both Hegel and von Thünen did prove to be critical interlocutors for subsequent theorists interested in the spatial dimensions of crisis formation and

3 With this being said, it is worth underscoring that according to von Thünen the just wage had actually 'been attained' on the American frontier in the 19th century. See, on that theme, von Thünen's translated material in Bernard Dempsey's *The Frontier Wage: The Economic Organization of Free Agents* (Dempsey, 1960).

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resolution; and, more specifically, in Harvey's own attempt to develop an account of the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital. But, of course, to properly situate Harvey, we must not stop here. To adequately contextualize his account of the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital, we would do well to turn to the tradition of Marxist efforts to spatialize crisis theory as well—and to Luxemburg and Lenin more specifically. Luxemburg, to begin, is perhaps most readily associated with the 'underconsumptionist' approach to crisis theory within the Marxist canon; or with the claim that crises are not driven by the overaccumulation of capital as a result of falling rates of profit per se, but by patterns of consumption, and the tendency for demand to fall in the face of capitalist dynamism and immiseration (Shaikh, 1978: 222). Crucially, there is nothing definitively Marxist about the underconsumptionist approach, broadly speaking. Underconsumptionist thought was central to the reactionary political economic theorization of Thomas Malthus, just as it was to the (non-Marxist) radicalism of Simonde de Sismondi. For Malthus, underconsumption was an always present potentiality, which emerged as a result of the disruption of a 'sustainable' rate of growth under capitalism, or the excessive savings of capitalists. Meanwhile, in the case of Sismondi the problem was that 'capitalism restricts the consumption of the masses by keeping them in poverty', a problem that he suggested was accentuated with the historical development of capitalism itself (Shaikh, 1978: 224).

What is perhaps most significant in the present context, however, is that Luxemburg came to represent a critical figure in the Marxist turn towards underconsumptionism in the years following Marx's death, and that she did so by focussing sharply on the spatial implications of this claim—or via the contention that spaces that were geographically external to the capitalist system might produce 'sources of consumption demand' (Shaikh, 1978: 225). Luxemburg came to prominence in the closing moments of the 19th century and opening moments of the twentieth by advocating for the claim that 'actual capitalist accumulation can be explained only through some forces external to "pure" capitalist relations'; and by suggesting, going further still, that capital requires not only markets *within* an internally constituted capitalist world-market, but a so-called *non-capitalist strata* in order to secure its reproduction—a 'strata *of buyers* outside of capitalist society who continually buy more from it than they sell to it' in order to resolve the underconsumption problem (Shaikh, 1978: 228, emphasis added).

In this sense, Luxemburg did not simply recapitulate the underconsumptionist theories of figures like Malthus or Sismondi. Animating her thought in political terms is a rejection of the claim (associated with both Mikhail Tugan-Baranowsky and Rudolph Hilferding) that economic planning would 'eliminate crisis' providing a parliamentary road to socialism; and in intellectual terms, she is informed by the assertion that while Marx's conceptualization of expanded reproduction is 'algebraically possible' it remains 'socially impossible' insofar as it fails to answer the question of where new consumers for the ever-growing mass of produced commodities under capitalism would emerge from (Shaikh, 1978: 228). From this position, Luxemburg develops the argument that capital requires a set of spatial strategies to circumvent the putatively 'impossible task' of realizing surplus value in contexts in which society is comprised entirely of either capitalists or workers; and in which it is impossible to maintain requisite levels of consumption to enable capital's reproduction (Luxemburg, 2003: 330).

To be sure, this is not the only reason that capital might pursue re-territorialization. As Luxemburg notes, capital might spatially expand to secure access to the so-called 'facilities afforded by nature and soil'—or, more simply, in order to secure access to natural resources that might lower the cost of production (Luxemburg, 2003: 338). It might also pursue such a process of expansion into non-capitalist space in order to secure new sources of labour, or to guarantee the 'natural increase of the working class' (Luxemburg, 2003: 341). But what is most central in

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Luxemburg's account—and thus what typically drives this process of expansion and reterritorialization—is capital's endemic need to find new sources of effective demand and to 'find productive employment for the surplus value' that capital itself has created (Luxemburg, 2003: 338). This is a dynamic that for Luxemburg animates the kinds of violent force that are so central to capital accumulation and which sutures the relationship between capital and interimperialist rivalry. And it is this imperative to find productive outlets for surplus value in the form of a non-capitalist strata that stands as the central contradiction in capitalist society in Luxemburg's account. In their spatialized move to address the problem of underconsumption—and to colonize the aforementioned non-capitalist strata—imperialist states (acting on behalf of capital) introduce capitalist relations into noncapitalist spheres (Shaikh, 1978: 228–29); in so doing, they undercut the conditions of possibility for capitalist reproduction.[4]

Lenin develops quite a different understanding of capitalist crisis and of capitalist space. Where Luxemburg concerned herself with the problem of low rates of consumption in advanced capitalist contexts, Lenin attended primarily to the barriers thrown up by monopolist concentration and integration, and the superprofits that centralized firms accumulated over and above 'non-combined' enterprises (Lenin, 2011). And, further still, where Luxemburg attended to the structural centrality of imperial expansion to capital as such, Lenin made sense of imperialism as an historical phase of capitalist development, which coincided with the rise of monopoly capital in the 1860s and 1870s, and which was putatively realized in full in the first decades of the 20th century (Lenin, 2011: 22). It was this historical phase that concerned Lenin most, which he suggested was witness to the uneven movement of monopolization and concentration across capitalist sectors; and which he understood to have culminated when the '"personal union" between the banks and industry'—described in work like Hilferding's *Finance Capital* (1910)—was 'completed by the "personal union" between both and the state', giving birth to state-backed imperial expansion beyond the advanced capitalist world (Lenin, 2011: 42).

In other words, central to Lenin's account of the relationship between crisis formation and the production of space was not a theorization of the necessity of imperial expansion in all capitalist contexts but the notion that capital had reached a specific historical 'threshold' in the waning decades of the 19th century, such that capitalist production had become almost completely socialized all while the appropriation of profit remained privatized (Lenin, 2011: 25). Capitalists were being effectively 'dragged … into a new social order'—'a transitional social order from complete free competition to complete socialisation' (Lenin, 2011: 25). And yet, because these transformations did not organically give way to socialism, the advanced capitalist countries faced down a crisis of monopolistic overaccumulation, which impelled them to export capital to dependent countries, giving rise to interstate struggles over 'spheres of influence'. The problem in this specific context was, in other words, what Lenin referred to as the 'superabundance of capital' in core states, which required export in order to be put to productive use (Lenin, 2011: 62). As he puts it, 'under the old capitalism, when free competition prevailed, the export of *goods* was the most typical feature. Under modern capitalism, when monopolies prevail, the export of *capital* has become the typical feature', effectively necessitating imperialism (Lenin, 2011: 62, emphasis original).

### David Harvey's theoretical revolution

As noted above, David Harvey has clearly situated his own account of the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital in relation to this history of efforts to spatialize crisis theory. And yet, as I will demonstrate below, he has done so in a way

4 At her clearest, Luxemburg writes that as soon as the noncapitalist strata has been absorbed by capital, 'accumulation must come to a stop. The realisation and capitalisation of surplus value become impossible to accomplish' (Luxemburg, 2003: 397).

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that breaks sharply with these received accounts, inaugurating what we might refer to as an 'immense theoretical revolution'—to use the language of Louis Althusser, albeit with tongue in cheek (see Althusser and Balibar, 1970)—vis-à-vis the literature on capitalist crisis. Of course, not all aspects of Harvey's theorization constitute an 'epistemic break'. His understanding of capitalist crisis begins from the fairly well-established Marxist claim that within capitalist contexts, each individual capitalist faces the pressures of intercapitalist competition, and the 'mute compulsions' of the market (Mau, 2023). And, with that in view, Harvey goes on to note that in the face of such pressure each individual capitalist is compelled to increase the productivity of labour, and to expand production in an effort to reduce costs below the levels attained by their competitors (see also Mau, 2023: 306). More precisely put, Harvey begins from the claim that the pressures of capitalist competition—which are 'independent of the volition of individual capitalists' themselves (Heinrich, 2012: 108)—induce technological transformations to increase the productivity of labour; and, moreover, that these transformations tend to undercut the possibility of balanced growth, leading to moments in which capital is faced not only with surpluses of commodities, but with surpluses of money, productive capacity and of labour power as well (Harvey, 1981: 7). He recalls, as many Marxists have, that capitalists are structurally driven to 'economize in the use of living labour and the elements of constant capital', throwing more and more workers out of productive work and leading to crises of overproduction and overaccumulation (Clarke, 1990: 455).[5]

That said, if Harvey shares these basic presuppositions with a number of other figures in the history of Marxist thought, his approach diverges from such accounts insofar as it takes up the spatial inclination of figures like Hegel and von Thünen, and suggests that this process of crisis production is necessarily spatial. In developing these claims, Harvey notes not only that value is a social relation, 'impossible to measure except by way of its effects' (Harvey, 2006: 141). But, more completely, that abstract social labor does not exist outside of the 'concrete activities of production and exchange which give rise to it', and that those concrete activities necessarily take place within a spatialized 'structured coherence' (Harvey, 2006: 76). They take place within an absolute space with its own natural resource endowments and its own social and physical infrastructures to facilitate and support the accumulation of capital. Capital presupposes, in other words, a geography of built forms and logistical networks of transport, communication and social reproduction, which maintain 'an active influence over profit rates' and the prevailing place-specific determination of the value of labour power itself (Sheppard, 2006: 126; see also Heinrich, 2012: 94–95). The crises of overaccumulation that Harvey describes are thus formed not only in the productive sphere but in the context of particular built environments. The 'tendency for capital to accumulate over and above what can be reinvested profitably in the production and exchange of commodities'—the tendency for crises to emerge within the realm of commodity production—presupposes a built environment (Arrighi, 2003: 528; see also Jessop, 2006).

Indeed, what turns out to be most significant, in this respect, are thus not simply the basic parameters of overproduction and overaccumulation sketched above, but Harvey's subsequent claim that these crisis dynamics always play out *in situ*. As Harvey puts it, capital's tendency towards crisis in the productive sphere 'is manifest in a variety of guises'. These include: '(1) Overproduction of commodities—a glut on the market. (2) Falling rates of profit (in pricing terms, to be distinguished from the falling rate of profit in value terms which is a theoretical construct). (3) Surplus capital which can be manifest either as idle productive capacity or as money capital lacking opportunities for profitable employment. [And] (4) [s]urplus labour and/or [a] rising rate of exploitation

5 In the third volume of *Capital*, Marx refers to this process with reference to capital's tendency to produce 'a permanent apparent surplus working population' (Marx, 1991: 330).

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of labour power' (Harvey, 1978: 106). The pressures of market competition produce a structuring imperative such that each individual capitalist must accumulate ever more capital, incentivizing investment in productive technology, driving down the aggregate rate of profit and leading to a situation in which too much capital (in its various forms) is produced 'in the aggregate relative to the opportunities to employ that capital' (Christophers, 2011: 1360; see also Harvey, 1982: 188–89). And, crucially, Harvey extends these insights to demonstrate that this tendency towards overaccumulation within the realm of commodity production is necessarily a spatial process.

In fact, with this spatial presupposition in view, Harvey goes one step further. He emphasizes not only this dynamic of spatialized crisis formation, but the ways in which such crises are resolved in space as well. He notes not only that capital 'relies upon fixed capital (including that embedded in a specific landscape of production)' in order to 'revolutionize the value productivity of labour' and maintain profitability in the face of competition; but, moreover, that this dynamic ultimately finds its culmination in the respatialization of the built environment, insofar as capital's geography poses a 'barrier to be overcome'. As surpluses mount within the context of these geographical parameters and crises erupt, capital is incentivized to 'break with past technological mixes and spatial configurations', and to produce *a new space for accumulation*; these new spaces establish a new set of physical and social infrastructures that will speed up the circulation time of capital, mop up the surpluses of capital and labor produced in and through the aforementioned crisis, and reestablish the basis for growth (Harvey, 1982: 394; see also Harvey, 1996: 296). In such moments, capital produces not only the conditions for renewed accumulation, but a new 'geographical grounding [for] that process through the patterning of labor and commodity markets', and through the remaking of the 'spatial division of production and consumption' (Harvey, 1989: 22). It produces a new 'rational landscape' for capital's circulation and capital mobility in the commodity form, while leaving a landscape of devalorization in its wake (Harvey, 1982: 380).

How exactly these dynamics manifest in practice is variegated and quite difficult to predict. According to Harvey, the endemic and integral pressures of capitalist society might be momentarily 'resolved' through either the 'external' reconfiguration of space, or in the form of an 'internal' sociospatial reorganization. In the case of the former, capital might turn to overseas or distant geographies in order to (1) lend money abroad 'as a means of payment to buy-up surplus commodities produced domestically'; (2) to send surpluses of money 'to create fresh productive powers there'; and/or (3) to 'access overseas-based reserves of labour and put them to work' (Castree *et al*., 2023: 98). While this kind of external spatial fix to capital's crisis tendencies need not necessarily entail imperial domination, it quite often does. Efforts to create external markets for consumption, 'to implant fresh productive powers in new regions and to bring all labor, everywhere, under the dominion of capital', tend also to bring with them interimperial rivalry and violent forms of territorial domination (Harvey, 1981: 7). And yet, capital's efforts to resolve such crises may involve the reconfiguration of capitalist space closer to home as well; they may involve the 'internal' reorganization of the inherited built environment, understood by Harvey to name 'a complex composite' made up of 'roads, canals, docks and harbors, factories, warehouses, sewers, public offices, schools and hospitals, houses, offices, [and] shops' (Harvey quoted in Christophers, 2011: 1349; see also Castree *et al*., 2023: 100).

In other words, across Harvey's corpus he attends to a wide range of internal and external socio-spatial strategies that capital might pursue in order to mitigate the effects of crisis, all of which implicate the built environment. For him, the crisis dynamics sketched above give a kind of rhythm to the making and remaking of the built environment under capitalism, *tout court*. Waves of investment in the built environment tend to take place, according to Harvey, somewhere between the 10-year ebbs and flows

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of the business cycle and the 50-year waves of growth and collapse first identified by Kondratieff in 1922's *The World Economy and its Conjunctures During and After the War* (see, for context, Day, 1976). These waves of investment allow for overaccumulated capital within the productive sphere to be 'syphoned off' and moved into fixed capital investments (or 'difficult to alter,  immobile … lumpy investments' in space) (Harvey, 1978: 115-116); and, more broadly, into new geographies of production, consumption and exchange within and beyond the received geography of accumulation (Harvey, 1982: 223). A new rational landscape of accumulation is produced in such moments of crisis, which effectively overcomes received barriers to profitable accumulation by absorbing overaccumulated capital (and unemployed labour), with capital often paying particular attention to the construction of new avenues of capital mobility that will accelerate the turnover time of capital in these moments.[6] And yet, as Harvey also underscores, the ever intensifying need for capital to accumulate—and to speed up the circulation of capital itself—leads to 'massive devaluations' in *even this geographical configuration* (Harvey, 1978: 123).[7] 'Thus does capital constitute barriers to its own dynamic within itself' (Harvey, 1982: 123).

This broad theorization goes far beyond the received attempts to spatialize crisis theory that Harvey himself invokes—and the work of Hegel, von Thünen, Luxemburg and Lenin, specifically—constituting a crucial reconceptualization of the inherent spatiality of capitalist reproduction and the role of the built environment in that context. Take Hegel and von Thünen to begin. With secondary scholarship on Hegel's political economy in view, it is quite clear that his account of 'mature civil society' is capable only of identifying the role of ostensibly *external* geographies in absorbing overproduced commodities and surplus populations; and that it is, as such, rather ill equipped to conceptualize the compulsions that drive crisis dynamics, their relation to geographical reorganization within inherited landscapes of accumulation, and the extent to which geographical 'solutions' to capitalist crisis might stabilize accumulation in the long run (see Hirschman, 1976; Plant, 1977; Pradella, 2014). In other words, Hegel, as Harvey himself notes, is rather restrictively focussed on 'geographical expansion'—and the production of external geographies—and he is 'not clear' on whether or not such processes of expansion would even serve to 'stabilise matters' in the medium to long term (Harvey, 2018: 133). And, in relation to the work of von Thünen, Harvey again provides much needed theoretical clarity. After all, for von Thünen, the frontier appears as a source of normative orientation that might compel capitalists to absolve capitalist economies of inequality and pauperization. But why this equilibrium wage is so rarely produced, and why capital is so consistently compelled to revolutionize its geographical parameters of accumulation in ways that far exceed settler colonialism, goes entirely unaddressed.

If these are the problems that Harvey's approach allows us to supersede in Hegel and von Thünen, there are several in Luxemburg and Lenin as well. With Harvey once again in view, we glean not only an account of the transformation rules that structure the remaking of capitalist space. But, contra both Luxemburg and Lenin, an explanation as to why the periodic respatialization of the parameters of capital accumulation is *endemic and ongoing* within capitalist society, rather than merely a moment in the stagist historical-geographical evolution of capitalism, or a process that implicates non-capitalist space (until it has been wholly dissolved).[8] Harvey allows us to move beyond

6 Throughout his corpus, Harvey typically exemplifies this point with reference to Second Empire Paris (between 1852 and 1870) and post-second world war USA.

7 As Harvey puts it *Marx, Capital, and the Madness of Economic Reason* (p. 150): '[f]ixed capital investment, particularly of an independent kind in the built environment, can provide temporary relief from problems of overaccumulation and relieve stress during phases of crisis when surpluses of capital and of labour exist side by side without otherwise profitable sources of employment'.

8 While Lenin's text is often mistranslated as suggesting that imperialism is the 'highest stage' of capitalist development—when it names, in fact, imperialism as the 'latest stage' in that process—there is no avoiding the 'stagism in Lenin's approach', as Salar Mohandesi has put it (see, Mohandesi, 2018: npn).

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the teleology and eschatology attendant to both Luxemburg and Lenin—as many Marxists throughout the 20th century sought to do—and to suggest that the rhythm of crisis formation and resolution is *a cyclical one*, with the making and remaking of the socio-spatial infrastructures of accumulation mediating the formation and resolution of capitalist crises over time. Harvey also productively moves beyond the relatively uncomplicated geographies that both Luxemburg and Lenin presuppose. We come to learn that a contradiction of fixity and motion is immanent to capitalist economies and that the forms of spatial fix that ultimately 'resolve' it implicate not only external geographies in the form of imperial expansion, but the received geographies of capitalist space, *tout court*.

In other words, Harvey's theoretical revolution suggests that those that follow Luxemburg and Lenin are not so much wrong as misguided. Luxemburg is correct insofar as she argues that 'capitalist development *may* become contingent upon other modes of production'; or, insofar as the reproduction of capital may come to hinge, in particular contexts, upon markets in non-capitalist societies (if they do in fact exist) (Harvey, 2001: 260, emphasis added). Lenin, for his part, is correct insofar as his account helps to draw attention to the phenomenal sociospatial forms 'assumed by capitalism during a particular stage of its development' (Harvey, 2001: 261). The problem arises, however, when the spatiality of crisis and capitalist reproduction is conceived '*solely* in these terms' (Harvey, 2001: 260, emphasis original). Luxemburg and Lenin run into problems, in Harvey's view, because the former posits the *necessity* of imperial expansion into a noncapitalist strata, and the terminal barriers to accumulation that the dissolution of noncapitalist space throws up; and because the latter largely reduces the problem of capitalism's spatiality to 'the phenomenal appearance of imperialism' that he traces via a reading of the first years of the 20th century (Harvey, 2001: 261). And what they both obscure, in so doing, is the radical flexibility of capital and its capacity to reproduce itself in ways that go well beyond these strategies so as to stave off terminal decline. What they obscure, in other words, are capitalism's variegated spatialities and the role of the built environment in the recurrent reproduction and stabilization of capitalism over time.

To put my argument much more plainly, Harvey's account of the spatiality of capitalist reproduction constitutes a revolution vis-à-vis these received approaches insofar as it expands our view beyond putatively external geographies and beyond the role of space in historically specific crisis conditions. The vast set of sociospatial strategies that capital might pursue to 'create fresh room for accumulation' are engaged in his account, not just imperialistic practices (Harvey, 2001: 260). And, moreover, Harvey is also able to productively demonstrate that capital is not simply doomed to collapse 'without an external solution to its market imbalances and its resource constraints' (Harvey, 2018: 134). The production of the built environment in all of its forms appears as central to the *ongoing* production and resolution of crises of overproduction and overaccumulation, which—as Harvey underscores—emerge primarily as a result of dynamism within the realm of commodity production. Harvey offers a revolutionary account of capitalist space, which insists on the claim that to make sense of it we must peer beyond the site of exchange, so as to see 'not only how capital produces, but how capital is itself produced' (Marx, 1990: 280); and which notes the centrality of the 'internal' and 'external' built environment to the reproduction of capital itself. His account constitutes a theoretical revolution not insofar as it crosses 'the threshold of scientificity and attains cognitive autonomy' (as Althusser described Marx's scientific break); but because it insists on the *profound and enduring* role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital (Elliot, 2006: 82). And it is this theorization that has, not without reason, come to define thinking on crisis and the built environment within critical urban studies over the last five decades.

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## The hidden abodes of capitalism

To this stage, this article has developed a relatively straightforward argument. I have suggested that Harvey inaugurated a theoretical revolution beginning in the 1970s in and through his theorization of the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital. In his understanding of capitalism's spatial fix, Harvey was able to break crisis theory out of the 'a-spatial mould' in which it is often cast, and to move beyond even those spatializations provided by figures such as Hegel, von Thünen, Luxemburg and Lenin (Harvey, 1981: 10). My contention is thus surely not that Harvey's theorization should be dismissed out of hand. Nevertheless, in the remainder of this article, I will develop a critique of it. I will move beyond Harvey's emphasis on the relationship between the built environment and the hidden abode of production—which is Harvey's primary concern, insofar as he attends strictly to crises of overaccumulation that have their roots in the realm of commodity production—and turn our focus to its relation to the hidden abodes *behind* the abode of production as well. I will insist that to make sense of the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital—and to move beyond the dominant account of capitalist crisis and the built environment that has long held sway within critical urban studies and its cognate fields—we must make sense of the built environment's place within capitalism as an *institutionalized social order* constituted by both foreground and background abodes. But of course, at this stage, a natural question arises: what exactly does it mean to posit capitalism as *an institutionalized social order*, constituted by *multiple* hidden abodes? What does it mean to posit abodes behind the hidden abode of production?

To answer this question, we must now turn to the political philosopher and critical theorist Nancy Fraser. Fraser has worked tirelessly over the last decade to establish the claim that capitalism is not—as it might appear in Harvey's account—merely an economic system; but rather, an institutionalized social order comprised of economic *and* noneconomic domains. Indeed, for Fraser, in addition to the so-called 'formal economy'—or what we have referred to above as the hidden abode of production—capitalism *definitionally presupposes* background conditions of possibility. These are the hidden abodes 'behind markets in labor power and other major direct inputs to commodity production, behind private property in the means of production and private appropriation of surplus, and behind the dynamic of self-expanding value' (Jaeggi in Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 29). And these abodes become clear when we 'move from the front-story' told about capitalism—with its focus on waged exploitation—'to the back-story' of unwaged, noncommodified and/or undercapitalized work, so central to dissident literatures within Marxist thought (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 29). Fraser suggests that capitalist society not only maintains a foreground abode of waged work, but that it necessarily rests upon a set of tightly inter-related and mutually constituted background abodes, including the spheres of (gendered) social reproductive work, (racialized) expropriation and ecological theft. Capitalist society—in Fraser's quasi-Polanyian formulation—'cannot be commodities all the way down', precisely because commodification and exploitation 'rest [] on *another level of social reality*' (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 30, emphasis added).

In tracing the contours of this complex topography of capitalist society, Fraser typically engages these hidden abodes, or background spheres, one by one. The first, in that spirit, is that of social reproduction. 'Variously called "care," "affective labor" or "subjectivation"', the work undertaken within the background abode of social reproduction 'forms capitalism's human subjects, sustaining them as embodied, natural beings, while also constituting them as social beings'. As Fraser notes, within capitalist society 'much'—though, crucially, not all—'of this activity goes on outside the market' and the wage nexus, and takes place in the context of 'households, neighborhoods, civil society associations, and a host of public institutions'. Waged labor itself would be a *logical and historical impossibility* without the existence of this kind of (often)

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noncommodified work, which functions to both produce workers, and reproduce and 'replenish existing generations' (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 31). And, following a range of sources within Marxist feminism—from the autonomous Marxism of Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James to the structuralist Marxism of Juliet Mitchell—Fraser notes that such social reproductive work has long been the disproportionate burden of women, who are enlisted in both the labor of bodily reproduction, and in the 'making and remaking of ... the various swaths of intersubjectivity that human beings inhabit' (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 32). Fraser underscores that capital presupposes a distinction between productive and reproductive work, and that much of the latter category (though not all) falls outside of 'direct market mediation' and is tightly linked to (and in fact roots) the oppression of women within capitalist societies (Endnotes, 2013).

If Fraser casts a relatively wide net in articulating her influences—gesturing, again, towards figures such as Mitchell, Dalla Costa and James—we should not overlook the specificity of her account. Indeed, while Fraser suggests an affinity with these authors (and many others), we might recall that for Mitchell the place of women within capitalist society emerges as a result of the articulation of four distinctive structures: production, reproduction, socialization and sexuality. The key to understanding 'woman's condition', that is, lies in situating that question in relation to these separate structures, 'which together form a complex—not a simple—unity' (Mitchell, 1966: 16). And, for figures such as Dalla Costa and James, the subjugation of women is, contrastingly, understood in relation to the claim that capitalist relations are generalized beyond the abode of production, *rendering all of social life* 'productive in the manner of manufacture' (Clover, 2018: 1574). As Kathi Weeks reminds us, the tradition of autonomist thought that produced Dalla Costa and James is rooted in a politics of refusal: 'a refusal of the privatization and depoliticization of the personal, a refusal of the naturalization of allegedly nonproductive domestic practices, and a refusal of the gendering of the division between production and reproduction' (Weeks, 2011: 140). And at the core of that politics of refusal is the claim that the norms of commodity production have been effectively diffused across every realm of society, rendering domestic work as *directly* productive of surplus value.

Fraser takes up a different tact. In her account, women's oppression is rooted not in a combination of relatively autonomous structures, nor in domestic labor's neat subsumption within the capitalist 'social factory', but rather in women's particular association with the (largely noncommodified) background abode of reproduction; a sphere that enables waged exploitation, to be sure, but which continues to maintain its own relative autonomy as a result of its status as a distinctive sphere within capitalist society, largely located beyond the wage nexus. In other words, in Fraser's engagement with this literature, she posits a distinctive account of the nature of capitalist reproduction in general.

From this engagement with social reproduction, Fraser then turns to her second hidden abode *behind* the abode of production—or to a second presupposition of waged exploitation; she turns to the sphere of ecological 'work'. In discussing this background condition, Fraser engages the problematic of nonhuman nature, or of capital's necessary 'annexation (*Landnahme*) of nature, both as a "tap" to provide "inputs" to production and [] as a "sink" to absorb the latter's waste' (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 35). She emphasizes that nonhuman nature is not solely necessary for the reproduction of capital; after all, 'owners, producers, reproducers, and expropriated or colonized subjects' all rely upon a socio-ecological web of life (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 36). And yet, Fraser also underscores that capital in particular relies upon noncommodified, 'cheap', or undercapitalized ecological inputs, whose 'value is both presupposed and disavowed' in the process of accumulation (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 35). Indeed, according to Fraser, capitalism inaugurates a strict distinction 'between [the] natural realm, conceived as a free, unproduced supply of 'raw materials', available for appropriation'; and—on the other hand—the 'economic realm, conceived as a sphere of

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value, produced by and for human beings' (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 36). She helps to demonstrate that capitalism's value form 'qualitatively and quantitatively abstracts from nature's useful and life-giving characteristics, even though value is a particular social form of wealth—a particular social objectification of *both nature and labor*' (Burkett, 1999: 80, emphasis added); she demonstrates that capital is a 'monetized abstraction engineered to self-expand', and that, moreover, capital disavows the material and ecological world through which it proceeds (Fraser, 2021: 100).[9]

But if capital relies upon nature while simultaneously disavowing it—and if 'capitalism represents wealth by a purely quantitative, socio-formal abstraction: labor time in general'—Fraser is quick to emphasize that nonhuman nature cannot remain 'free' for good (Burkett, 1999: 82). The dynamism attendant to capitalist economies—and the treadmill effect produced by the temporal determination of value—incentivizes the rapacious consumption of nonhuman nature, accelerating its depletion, and raising the cost of production (see Postone, 1993; Alami *et al*., 2024). Fraser recalls, in other words, that capitalist firms are incentivized to 'really subsume' nature, and to 'take hold of and transform natural production' in order to lubricate the process of valorization (see Boyd *et al*., 2001: 557; see also Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 37). And she also notes that this ultimately leads to the increasing capitalization of nature, the escalating externalization of waste, and the rising cost of production as a result. Each round of accumulation, therefore, tends to bring with it new articulations of the nature/society relation, precisely in order to resolve this contradiction. Capital periodically re-articulates the boundary between nature and society so as to reestablish the conditions for profitable accumulation, and to mitigate against rising costs in its ecological background sphere. Drawing on the language of Kohei Saito, we might say that Fraser's account underscores that ever-greater 'increases in [] social productivity are accompanied by a decrease in natural productivity' due to the robbery of nature (Saito, 2022: 29).

Finally, with the hidden abodes of reproduction and of ecology in view, Fraser then turns to what she refers to as the hidden abode of (racialized) expropriation. Once again understood as a prerequisite for profitable accumulation, Fraser suggests that expropriation, including in the form of imperialism and colonial domination, is an 'abode behind the abode' of production, 'which makes exploitation possible' (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 40). If exploitation is pursued in capitalism's foreground 'under the guise of a free contractual exchange, expropriation[—its necessary precondition—]dispenses with all such niceties in favor of brute confiscation', with this latter economic process typically carrying with it a fairly rigid set of racialized status distinctions (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 41). Here, we should underscore that for Fraser expropriated work need not be *fully* un-commodified. Much like capital's hidden abodes of social reproduction and ecological work, the hidden abode of expropriation maintains an uneasy and unstable relation to commodification and the wage nexus; capital prefers for these inputs to be as cheap as possible, but the boundary between exploitable and expropriable work is in a constant process of flux. And yet, whereas 'purely' exploited work is typically paid the full cost of its reproduction in wages, expropriated work is, for Fraser, definitionally seized 'without [capital] paying for [its] costs of reproduction' (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 41). To use the parlance of Ruy Mauro Marini, we might thus say that much expropriated work is 'superexploited' (Osorio, 2015: 96).[10] Expropriation suggests in such contexts a 'reduction of wages' to the point that 'the labourer's necessary consumption fund' is transformed into 'a fund for the accumulation of capital' (Marini quoted in Osorio, 2015: 96).

9 Fraser's suggestion that capital 'disavows' its reliance upon nature arguably obscures the fact that it is capital's 'economic forms' that are 'independent from the material world' (see, for additional context, Saito, 2017: 289).

10 To be clear, Fraser herself avoids the language of superexploitation on the basis that it obscures the 'status differential' attendant to expropriation.

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In developing these arguments regarding capitalism's necessary hidden abode of expropriated work, Fraser relies upon and diverges from a (relatively ambiguously defined) tradition of 'black Marxism', in which she includes scholars as distinctive and divergent as C.L.R. James, Barbara Fields, Cedric Robinson and Adolph Reed Jr., among many others (Fraser, 2018). It would be hard to precisely identify the commonalities within that category of thought. After all, for a figure like Robinson, racism and racialization are not simply structural features of capitalist society—or of capitalism as an institutionalized social order—but situated at a higher level of conceptual abstraction than capitalism itself; 'racialism' is conceived by Robinson as a necessary and integral part of Western civilization, and thus only surmountable through the 'confrontation of an African consciousness' (Haider, 2017: npn). And figures such as Barbara Fields and Adolph Reed Jr. are similarly divergent in their approach to the problematic. Fields, for example, is principally concerned with the rituals and ideologies that make 'race in its characteristic American form' and assign it causal significance (Fields, 1990: 97); and Reed Jr. with the relatively anti-theoretical assertion that we must attend strictly to the conjunctural combinations of racially mediated labor relations in thinking about race and capitalism—and not the question of capitalism's necessary features (Reed Jr, 2002). In this respect, Fraser's account of expropriation situates her perhaps closest to a figure like Immanuel Wallerstein, for whom 'race' is functionally imbricated in 'the axial division of labour in the world-economy' (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991: 79).

Regardless of how we might situate Fraser within a broader literature, what is crucial for our purposes, however, is that each of these spheres or abodes that she outlines sit together in her account within the same sociospatial totality. Each abode is imprinted or 'impress[ed]' by the 'stamp' of the market and the hidden abode of production, which operates as a kind of gravitational field, shaping the nature of the other background abodes (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 26). And yet, each abode is also home to its own distinctive and relatively autonomous social ontologies and normative grammars. In this sense, Fraser maintains the dialectical language of totality, all while rejecting the image of capitalist society as a 'single totalizing system'—an image often associated with Georg Lukács, and his suggestion that a 'ubiquitous' commodity logic 'supplie[s] a template for objects in general and for all subject-object relations' (Jaeggi in Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 48–49).[11] She insists that the abode of social reproduction, for example, harbours 'ideals of care, mutual responsibility, and solidarity', and that the abode of ecology maintains values such as 'sustainability, stewardship … and justice between generations' (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 50). She is not naïve or saccharin about the politics that follow from these relatively autonomous normative grammars: they are laden with hierarchy and parochialism. But Fraser nevertheless insists that these distinctions persist—even if we can rightly say that 'the [c]ommodity involves and envelops the social relations between [all] living men' (Lefebvre, 2009: 80)—and constitute capitalism as a normatively differentiated totality of foreground and background relations; and she goes as far as suggesting each abode provides in itself *the possible home* for distinctive forms of anticapitalist struggle.

Indeed, if there appears to be a Habermasian tenor to this song, we would do well to emphasize that Fraser sharply rejects the system/lifeworld framework as 'far too dualistic and dichotomizing' (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 52; see also Fraser, 1985). In the place of a distinction between an 'exploitative system and an innocent lifeworld', she insists that capitalist society is constituted by *several* normative orders and ontological grammars, each of which is associated with a distinctive background abode, but which can also move uneasily across different moments of social life (Doherty, 2023: 34). As she

11 In Lukács' own words, in capitalist society, 'there is no problem that does not ultimately lead back to [the analysis of commodities] and there is no solution that could not be found in the solution to the riddle of commodity-*structure*' (Lukács, 1971: 83, emphasis original).

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puts it, 'there are sedimented patterns of action and interpretation, which are themselves subject to contestation, disruption, and transformation' (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 52). And, moreover, Fraser insists that putatively capitalist logics do not simply 'colonize' these background spheres as Habermas's system colonizes its lifeworld; but rather, that capitalism is *constituted through these variegated abodes*. 'Each of these spheres', as Fraser puts it, 'is permeated with [a] normativity'; and each has its own progressive 'normative surplus' that might function in the service of anti-capitalist struggle (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 147 and 152). What Fraser provides, in other words, is thus a sharp departure from the model of capitalism supplied in Harvey's above-sketched account of the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital. Capitalism appears as a social order that contains *within it* an economic foreground of waged exploitation, as it does in Harvey's account; but Fraser identifies a range of hidden abodes behind that abode as well. These abodes are not external to capitalism but 'embedded in the very texture' of capitalist life (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018: 179).

### The hidden abodes and the built environment

In the pages that follow I will insist that Fraser's above-sketched account constitutes—whatever our critiques might be—not only a key reference in our effort to push beyond Harvey's spatialization of crisis theory; but, in fact, the lynchpin of a revised approach to the relationship between the built environment and the reproduction and stabilization of capitalism. Of course, this is perhaps a surprising theoretical move to some. After all, not only is Fraser's account decidedly *a-spatial*, but it is also relatively weak on the problem of crisis. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, the ways in which capitalist crisis is produced and resolved in space is almost entirely absent from Fraser's account (Conroy, 2022). She suggests that capitalist history is divisible into four regimes of accumulation: mercantile capitalism, competitive liberal capitalism, state-managed monopoly capitalism and financialized-neoliberal capitalism. And moreover, that each of these regimes culminates with so-called boundary struggles, which entail a negotiation and restabilization of the relationship between the foreground and each of her hidden abodes—between production and reproduction, nature and society, and exploitation and expropriation. *The nature of the crisis dynamics that propel such boundary struggles*—and which ultimately give birth to these new regimes of accumulation—is, however, almost entirely opaque.

Fraser insists that the foreground of exploitation effectively 'cannibalizes' its background conditions of possibility: that the 'drive for profits' ultimately 'ravag[es] the "non-economic" realms' that she so painstakingly traces (Doherty, 2023: 47). And she argues that this dynamic gives rise to struggles, or normative conflicts, 'between these realms on the level of "social action," which resolve in the making of new regimes of accumulation (O'Kane, 2021: 219). But this is hardly, we must admit, a complete social-theoretical account of the nature of crisis, let alone of its production and resolution in space. We are left rather ambiguously with the image of capitalist destabilization, which takes place, at least in large part, because of the encroachment of capitalist dynamism and the norms of capital's foreground of exploitation into the background abodes that constitute its conditions of possibility. It is not clear what exactly propels this process of destabilization, and how this account relates to Harvey's suggestion that the built environment plays a critical role in both the production and resolution of capitalist crises. In light of Fraser's theorization we are left to wonder: What would it look like to extend Harvey's genuinely revolutionary crisis-centric account of the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital by way of Fraser's account of capitalism's multiple abodes?

While we are perhaps at risk of putting the cart before the horse, my contention in what follows is that the solution to this question of synthesis is to be found in the lexicon of 'underproduction'. It is found in the claim that capitalist development tends

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over time to produce situations not only of overproduction and overaccumulation within its received geographical parameters, as Harvey's account suggests; but that it tends also to produce situations in which it is increasingly difficult for capital to secure its necessarily noncommodified and/or undercapitalized social reproductive, ecological and expropriative background conditions, raising the cost of production; and, most crucially, forcing a reterritorialization of the received built environment, and a re-articulation of the relationship between capital's foreground and its various (normatively differentiated) background spheres. Indeed, in what follows I will argue that the built environment in capitalist contexts constitutes the 'material frame' that is *produced through* the reproduction of capitalist society; that it is the material presupposition and product of the ever-evolving 'social division of labour' (Poulantzas, 2000: 98). It 'appear[s] at the same time as [its] presupposition' (Poulantzas, 2000: 99) and is thus not a distinct moment in the reproduction of capitalist life, but the material manifestation of that phenomena. And, going further still, I will suggest that the making and remaking of the capitalist built environment is driven not only by crisis dynamics within the hidden abode of production—or within the foreground of exploitation and its received geographical parameters—but by capital's tendency to undermine the abodes that sit behind the hidden abode of production as well.[12]

In using the language of underproduction for this purpose, I am not entirely unique. Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, the political economist and state theorist James O'Connor, for example, developed the claim that capitalist economies not only tend towards crises of overproduction (of capital, commodities and (idle) laborers), as Harvey (and many more) would have it; but that they also tend to underproduce what he referred to as the conditions of production (or production conditions), particularly without the concerted involvement of the state. In other words, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, O'Connor, in an effort to establish a theoretical grounding for ecological Marxist analysis and politics, turned to both the ways in which capital throws up its own barriers to value realization as a result of its dynamism in production; and, moreover, to its tendency to 'impair [] its own social and environmental conditions, hence increasing the costs and expenses of capital, and thereby threatening capital's ability to produce profits' (O'Connor, 1996: 159). O'Connor was sharply attuned to the fact that each individual capitalist is incentivized to contribute to those dynamics that produce crises of underproduction for capital in general, exacerbating the development of these crises and compounding their growth over time. He reintroduced the language of scarcity back into an account of capitalist crisis, albeit in decidedly non-Malthusian terms, engaging the compounding effects of putatively 'rational' firm-level calculations on not just the natural environment, but on labour power and the spatial parameters of accumulation as well (O'Connor, 1996: 166).

And, perhaps even more closely related to my agenda here is the work of Jason W. Moore, a key interlocutor and inheritor of O'Connor's legacy, and of his lexicon of underproduction. Moore's underproductionist account of crisis is particularly relevant insofar as it attends directly to the underproduction of 'cheap inputs' beyond the domain of waged exploitation. In his account of capitalist society, the 'substance of value' remains 'socially necessary labor-time', meaning that '[t]he drive to advance labor productivity is fundamental to competitive fitness' (Moore, 2015: 62). And yet, this alone is not the end of the story. Abstract social labor—the *value form* under capitalism, which is 'consolidat[ed]' through the 'proliferation of exchange' (Harvey, 2010: 42)—requires for its reproduction an *ever-greater* set of noncommodified or undercapitalized socio-ecological *value relations*.[13] It requires the 'appropriation' of unpaid work/energy,

12 For an allied account, see Sevilla-Buitrago (2022).

13 In a useful turn of phrase that resonates with Fraser's account, Moore writes that 'value-relations are a *systemic* phenomenon with a pivotal economic moment' (Moore, 2015: 64, emphasis original).

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without which the 'costs of production would rise, and accumulation would slow' (Moore, 2015: 64). And, according to Moore, this is also precisely where all regimes of accumulation end up. Capital's historical and logical *nonidentity* (or necessary disequilibrium) of value form and value relation is periodically and necessarily undermined and undercut as capital exhausts, depletes and capitalizes those relations that 'extend □ beyond the immediate process of production' and stand behind the wage nexus, joining up 'definite 'modes of production' and definite 'modes of life' in concrete historical unities' (Moore, 2015: 71). These conditions of noncommodified or undercapitalized work tend toward underproduction, signalling a 'rising value composition of capital, and the inflection point of decline for a given production complex' (Moore, 2015: 75).

I take particular inspiration from this account of underproduction and its role in the production and resolution of capitalist crises. It enables us to see that capitalist crises are driven not only by capital's tendency towards overproduction within the realm of commodity production, or within the hidden abode of production; but, moreover, to see that capital also tends toward the underproduction of its noncommodified and/or undercapitalized inputs and conditions of possibility. Either tendency can become dominant within a particular conjuncture, but they are internally related due to capital's tendency to both revolutionize production in the name of increased labor productivity and to undercut its capacity to 'yield a rising stream of unpaid work' (Moore, 2015: 75). And yet, with that said, the understanding of the capitalist built environment that I am articulating here—which explicitly aims to go beyond the theoretical revolution initiated by Harvey—takes up the language of underproduction in a rather distinctive way. After all, alongside my turn to the language of underproduction as a means of extending Harvey's revolutionary conceptualization of the built environment, is the contention that we must retain Fraser's suggestion that capitalist society is *constituted by various normatively differentiated hidden abodes*, and that we must attend to their underproduction in the face of capitalist dynamism specifically. What I am suggesting, in other words, is that while crises of the overaccumulation of capital—which are constitutively spatial, or '*always particular to a place*' (Harvey, 1982: 378, emphasis original)—arise either as a result of capital's tendency towards overproduction *or* underproduction, Fraser's account allows us to see that the former finds its roots in the intensification of production within *capitalism's foreground*, and the latter in rising costs in capitalism's *background abodes*, due to the effects of exhaustion, depletion, overcapitalization or normative contestation.[14]

In fact, if existing engagements with the underproduction of capital's conditions of possibility have noted the centrality of the noncommodified or undercapitalized work of 'women, nature, and colonies' (following Maria Mies) in this dynamic, Fraser allows us to go further still. She enables us to say that if capital eventually and invariably underproduces the geographically specific inputs upon which it relies, it does so unevenly and distinctly across its normatively differentiated background spheres (Moore, 2015: 103). For example, it is quite clearly the case that the *underproduction of non-human nature*—or of Fraser's ecological background sphere—is rooted in capital's tendency to both exhaust and eventually capitalize its ecological resources, raising the cost of production in general. The competitive dynamism of capitalist production in the foreground of exploitation and the temporal determination of value leads to situations in which ecologies are exhausted, increasing the cost of production in a fairly linear dynamic. And yet, in maintaining the notion that capitalist society is comprised of several differentiated spheres, we see that the underproduction of the other background abodes generally proceeds according to a different logic. The underproduction of expropriated

14 See, on the conflation of overaccumulation and overproduction in Marxist thought, Moore (2015: 98).

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racialized work (by way of imperial plunder) and social reproductive inputs (by way of gendered domination) has historically not been driven by the rising tide of capitalization in the face of exhaustion, but by the normative struggles of colonized subjects and by women themselves. In those contexts the dynamism of capitalist production is often mitigated against not by increasing capitalization (and raising the cost of production directly), but by intensifying existing forms of expropriation. The competitive pressures of capitalist competition typically compel capitalists to cut costs via hyperexpropriation and social reproductive squeeze. And, as such, the problem of underproduction in those spheres typically arises only by way of normative contestation.

To put this claim more simply, Fraser's language of capitalist society's constitutive spheres helps to bring into view the notion that capital tends toward both crises of overproduction in the foreground of exploitation and, moreover, that it is often plagued by the underproduction of its background abodes, *albeit unevenly and in distinctive ways*. While the dynamism of capitalist production—and the tendency towards overproduction in the foreground of exploitation—is tightly linked to the underproduction of capital's background abodes, how and why those abodes are underproduced is quite variegated. Their underproduction might be driven by depletion and exhaustion, but—in the case of the reproductive and expropriative abodes especially—it is more typically driven by normative struggles against the prevailing distribution of the burdens of accumulation and the intensification of expropriation in the light of a falling rate of profit. We might even say that insofar as these spheres are relatively autonomous and distinct, Fraser's account enables us to see that transformations in one might lead to transformations in another in relatively unpredictable ways. And taken together, this broad conceptualization of crisis is crucial to our account of the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capital for two reasons. First, we can now underscore that capital does not simply tend toward place-specific forms of overaccumulation as a result of its dynamism in the productive sphere; it is driven to location-specific crises by the effect of distinctive and interacting forms of underproduction across capitalism's background abodes as well. And second, we can suggest that the reterritorialization of the built environment is profoundly linked to the re-establishment of profitability across capitalism's foreground and background spheres, which—as noted above—are often plagued by distinctive if interrelated forms of crises.

Indeed, contra Harvey, we can now see that the persistent remaking of the built environment occurs not simply when capitalists fail to secure outlets for profitable accumulation within the established geohistorical parameters of exploitation, or within the existing spatialization of capital's foreground of production. It occurs, more completely, in those contexts in which it can no longer find profitable opportunities for investment given the established spatialization of capital's foreground and background abodes (or given the received spatialization and conditions of production, reproduction, expropriation and ecological plunder). The respatialization of the built environment is necessary in order to renew the conditions for profitable investment, and this is not only because capital is in need of a new 'technological and organizational mix' that will speed up the turnover time of capital and 'increase the physical and value productivity of labour' in production (Harvey, 1982: 189 and 307); but also, at least in certain contexts, because the existing articulation and spatialization of capitalism's background spheres is functioning to inhibit capitalist reproduction. And, as such, the respatialization of the built environment often functions to absorb or 'mop up' surplus capital that has been overaccumulated, and to mediate its movement into new geographies of production, consumption and circulation; and, also, to simultaneously chart out and secure new sites of racialized expropriation and cheap sources of social reproductive work (in which normative struggles are more easily suppressed or circumscribed), and new geographies of ecological plunder. The capitalist built environment is the presupposition and result

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of capitalist reproduction. It 'appear[s] historically as the product of [] struggle' around capitalism's constitutive abodes (Poulantzas, 2000: 115).

The precise nature of this moment of reterritorialization in the face of crises of overaccumulation will vary in practice for a host of reasons, including whether overproduction or underproduction is the dominant tendency within a given historical-geographical conjuncture and depending upon the specific location(s) of underproduction within the background abodes. The movement of crisis across capitalism's various abodes is, again, an uneven and variegated process. The received spatialization of ecological expropriation might prove too costly as a result of ecological exhaustion and rising rates of nonhuman capitalization within the established geographical parameters of accumulation; normative conflicts might arise over capital's efforts to intensify racialized expropriation in particular geographies, a practice that is '[a]dvantageous' in 'normal times', and which becomes 'especially appealing in periods of crisis, when competition is intense …and/or rates of profit fall below what are considered acceptable levels' (Fraser, 2018: 5); or struggles might emerge in response to squeezes on social reproductive capacities, as capital tries to maintain profitability in and through practices that 'stretch' social reproduction to a 'breaking point', such as intensified exploitation, expropriation and/or 'forced underconsumption' (Fraser, 2016: 105; see also Araghi, 2003). And yet, *what is certain regardless of context* is that capital tends toward crisis as a result of overproduction and/or as a result of its tendency to decrease its access to its own background conditions of possibility; and, moreover, that the built environment is the presupposition and result of that crisis dynamic. These two moments—of overproduction and underproduction—are both interlinked and spatially constituted, and together they explain the overaccumulation of capital and the periodic respatialization of the built environment.

## Conclusion

This article has set out to articulate several closely linked arguments. It began by taking stock of David Harvey's crisis-centric conceptualization of the role of the built environment in the reproduction of capitalist society, which represents the most complete effort to develop a theorization of that relationship, and which continues to hold considerable sway within critical urban studies and adjacent fields. In so doing, it situated Harvey—as he himself has done—in a long history of efforts to spatialize crisis theory, which spans the work of Hegel and von Thünen, and Luxemburg and Lenin; and, moreover, it emphasized the genuine theoretical revolution that he inaugurated relative to those sources. With Harvey's theoretical revolution properly in view, this article then developed an account of the built environment and capitalist crisis that takes seriously those normatively differentiated background spheres that constitute capitalism as an institutionalized social order, and that fall from view in Harvey's account. I argued that the built environment emerges through—or appears at the same time as—the ongoing and uneven re-articulation of capitalism's foreground and background abodes. Integrating the language of underproduction into our lexicon, I suggested that capitalist crises are driven either by overproduction in the foreground of exploitation and/or in the underproduction of noncommodified and/or undercapitalized inputs produced via capitalism's background abodes. And, ultimately, I argued that both of these crisis tendencies are spatially constituted and resolved, providing a distinctive account of the role of the built environment in the reproduction and stabilization of capitalism.

Indeed, perhaps above all else, in this article I have attempted to recast the conceptualization of 'capitalism' that sits at the core of urban studies and its cognate fields. Since the 1970s, and the landmark work of Harvey himself, capitalism has largely been associated with the formal economy of waged work, and the built environment has been understood as centrally implicated in the production and resolution of crises within that domain. In contrast, I have suggested that capitalism is better understood as

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an institutionalized social order—comprised of normatively differentiated foreground and background abodes—and that it presupposes and produces a built environment in the course of its reproduction. The political and normative implications of this argument are far from straightforward. Nevertheless, at the very least it demands renewed engagement with what, exactly, constitutes an anticapitalist politics—given this revised conceptualization—and a consideration of how the built environment might factor in postcapitalist projects.

**Data availability statement**
Research data are not shared.

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