



To Tie Acrat Chaos: Reflexions on Production of Space, Squatting and Ecological Democratic Politics

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Abstract

In this article I explore the notion of an ecological and democratic politics from the Henri Lefebvre's materialist thesis of production of space. In first place I critique the notion of space understood as mere abstraction and I assume the thesis of the material production of space in order to establish the place of politics not as mere abstraction but as a concrete place where our corporeal life is developed. In this sense I present an approximation to a democratic politics from Rancière's perspective, that far from sees this exercise as consensus, introduces it as a conflictive activity in which no one has a definitive title to execute it. In this sense with the aim of radicalize this posture and think the politics outside the limits of anthropocentrism I add to this discussion the ecological critique of Timothy Morton. By last from this theoretical framework I explain two practical cases of squatting in where this democratic and ecological politics has been exercised.

Keywords: Lefebvre; Production of space; Rancière; Democracy; Politics; Ecological thinking; Morton; Squatting

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to introduce the spatial practice of squatting as part of a democratic policies in an ecological sense. For this purpose, the text is integrated of five sections: the first section treats the issue of space not as an abstraction but as a socially produced material work, rescuing from the argument of Myers-Szupinska in the compilation edited by Scott and Swenson, the Henri Lefebvre's space production thesis. In the second section a brief approach is made on how to understand a spatial democratic politics based on Lefebvre's thesis and the theoretical developments of Jacques Rancière. In the third section, Timothy Morton's ecological critique of environmentalism is presented in order to radicalize Rancière's conception of democratic politics and open it to ecological thought. In the fourth section, is introduced the theoretical approach elaborated by Matt Fish on squatting,

this approach is contextualized within the notion of the production of space and the practice of democratic and ecological policies. The fifth section is a corollary in which two practical cases of squatting are reported in where democratic practices have been developed in an ecological sense.

The critique of the notion of space as a mere abstraction and its approach as a socially produced material result is relatively new. This novelty has allowed theorists to approach aesthetic problems much better —especially with regard to urban and architectural criticism—, however, the anthropocentrism implicit in these theoretical developments still limits deeper philosophical analyzes, so resorting to the most current ecological critiques becomes fundamental. In addition, resorting to political philosophers who think on the margins of the most common currents of thought, such

as Ranciere, opens up much more complex and original possibilities for reflection and analysis in order to deal with topics, objects and problems that classically go unnoticed by the aesthetics, as for ethics and political philosophy, but which today, in the midst of an ecological and human emergency, are not only pertinent but also urgent.

To inhabit comes from the latin root *habere*, the meaning of which is “to have”. In turn, the latin word *habere* is linked to the Indo-European root *ghabh*, whose meaning is to give and receive. In order to have, before it is necessary to receive, and to receive it is necessary to give, thus *habere* as having is not possible to understand it as an appropriation, but as a gift. The land and its confines were given to us to live in, not to treat them as property. San Lorenzo and El Tren Negro, which are the specific cases treated in this essay, are two gifts. Gifts as presents but also as gracious, valuable and special qualities. They are habitable places, not susceptible to being possessed but to be sustained. The first is a huge unfinished hotel in which wild magueys, cacti, bats and other beings coexist with transhumants who seek refuge from the climate and the unpostponable progress of the city. The second is a library, but also a games room, but also a community kitchen, but also an orchard, but also a house, but also a refuge for all those who wants to share. In neither of the two cases do its inhabitants hold a title deed. Nobody is an owner, but whoever needs it can be an inhabitant: a space that is given and shared to coexist.

The Spatial Turn

To inhabit it is necessary to be a body. Living is an act that implies materiality. Even in the most idealistic traditions we find that what has been called “soul” or “mind” has — it is given— a body to recognize the universe into which it has been thrown. Even the most idealistic traditions think of the place where the soul lives as a particular matter that expresses itself in a variety of ways, which is procreated and modified throughout a lifetime, yet the place where these incarnated souls live is thought as a neutral container.

For a geometrist like Descartes, space is nothing more than an idealized plane in which abstract and precise magnitudes exist [1]; for a thinker like Kant, arithmetic was a synthetic *a priori* truth of time, while geometry constituted the synthetic *a priori* truths of space, both poles of transcendental aesthetics [1]. In these traditions, the category of space flows into the absolute, pretending to be a guarantee of universal and necessary knowledge, suppressing the concrete subject and making an abstract subject such as the philosophical *cogito* or the transcendental subject appear in its place [2]. Thus, space as absolute is reduced to nothing. From this notion only inventories would be contributed to what exists in space, or in the best of cases

it would give rise to a discourse about space, but never to knowledge about space. In the absence of such knowledge, a good part of the attributes and “properties” of the “social space” is transferred to the discourse *per se* [2].

In accordance with the above, in these traditions a totalitarian disembodied rationality invades the space, on the one hand absolutizing it and making it irrelevant, and on the other hand, faced with the desire for security provided by a universal and necessary knowledge, it exiles the body, putting in its place a mere abstract form without any productive capacity or vitality. However, the geographer and philosopher Henri Lefebvre affirms in his text *The Production of Space* that this way of conceiving space is not the only one because in modernity itself there was a code that was both architectural, urban and political, a language common to the inhabitants of the countryside and the city, which allowed not only to “read” the space but also to produce it [2].

The text *The Production of Space* by Henri Lefebvre had a great impact in the 90s of the last century, giving rise to what is known as “the spatial turn” [3]. Prior to Lefebvre’s work, the most common notion of space strictly referred to a geometric and abstract concept, and the idea it evoked was that of an empty area. This conception of space was only the domain of mathematicians and philosophers: a domain of ‘absolute knowledge’, separated from daily life by an abyss [3]. The definitive collapse of the idea of space as mere abstraction began in 1910. Lefebvre locates this schism with the experiences of the First World War, the Russian Revolution, the radical invention of cubism and the rejection of the tonality of music [3].

Myers-Szupinska explains that geography as “hard science” makes two theoretical assumptions. The first is materialism and the second is the production of space. The first refers to the philosophical tradition that affirms that the world is made up of ‘matter’ and that it can be located from Democritus, Anaxagoras and Epicurus to Hobbes, Hume, Feuerbach and Marx [3]. The second refers properly to Lefebvre’s idea that space is produced by human beings, who when inhabiting it are also produced by it in a dialectical relationship [3].

“The human condition is characterized by a feedback loop between human activity and our material environment. In this sense, space is not a container in which activities only happen, but is actively produced through these human actions. The spaces that humans produce, in turn, sets powerful restrictions on subsequent human activities” [3]. Thus space is not only not a mathematical abstraction, but it is a material production that is created by social forces and that, at the same time that it is produced, it produces ourselves: the producers. Furthermore “if we accept the Marxist argument

that the main characteristic of human existence is ‘the production of material life itself’ (that humans produce their own existence in a dialectical relationship with the rest of the world), and following Lefebvre that production is essentially spatial praxis, then cultural production —like all production is spatial praxis” [3].

Space, Politics and Democracy

The spatial turn criticized and displaced the notion of space as a discarnate absolute to place it within the plane of matter and its processes. Lefebvre argues in favor of considering space not only from its materiality but also as a product of human labor.

Lefebvre says that when we contemplate a wheat field, and we not only attend to verify its mere existence, we are aware that the furrows, the sowing fields, the barriers of the fields, hedgerows or barbed wire indicate relations of production and property [2]. In this sense, the configuration of the space gives an account of the process by which these spaces were produced.

The form of the spatial product accounts for the modes of social relations through which that particular space was produced. These relationships inform us in turn of the divisions that give shape to the collective that we call society. In other words, when we pay attention to the wheat field and see it not as a closed object but as a result of a production process, it is possible to find out what type of property it is and what are the production relations that created it.

Asking ourselves about the social relations of production that made the existence of a space possible is in turn asking about the social divisions in which these relations are organized, or in other words: it means asking ourselves about the political economy that is implicit in each product —whether or not it is a spatial product.

Until now, the social systems that we know are founded on a fundamental distortion, a distortion that for a thinker like Jacques Rancière is precisely the starting point of politics. In fact, the French philosopher in *Disagreement* explains that “politics begins where gains and losses cease to balance, where the task consists of dividing the parts of the common” [4].

Rancière’s argument could be summarized as follows: if politics is born at the moment in which gains and losses are no longer balanced, then politics is a conflictive activity. Since on the one hand it has equality as its principle —by this principle seeks to distribute the common—, but on the other hand, this principle of distribution faces the question of what things are and there is not equality, between which and

which; what are these “what” and who are those “which”, and more importantly, how is it that the question of inequality can fit into the principle of equality [4]. To develop this idea, Rancière resorts to the philosophy of Aristotle whose question about the political is the question about justice, which is defined by geometric and arithmetic distribution principles: arithmetic equality that presides over commercial exchanges and judicial penalties, and the geometric equality that, in favor of common harmony, establishes the proportion of the parts of the common thing owned by each part of the community according to the share that it contributes to the common good [4].

Politics has to do with the egalitarian distribution of the common, and according to the Aristotelian criterion that Rancière follows, it is put in terms of geometric accuracy, proportional to what each person contributes to the common good. However, in the account of the parties is the aporia that was indicated at the beginning of the section. The geometric account that claims to be proportional and accurate hides a fundamental and erroneous account that is the distortion of politics itself. Aristotle lists three titles of the community: the wealth of the few (the *oligoi*), the virtue or excellence (*areté*) that gives its name to the best (*aristoi*) and the freedom (*eleutheria*) that belongs to the people (*demos*). The exact combination of these titles seeks the common good, however a secret imbalance disturbs this beautiful construction [4]. Rancière says that Aristotle in Book III of Politics tried to specify this calculation, however, in the supposed harmony of the titles only one is easily recognized: that is the wealth of the oligoi, but this is the one that depends solely on the arithmetic of the exchanges, not of the geometric distribution that interests... But, what about the freedom brought by the *demos* to the community? Another inadequacy occurs, since the freedom of the *demos* is not any determinable property but pure factuality. Here the erroneous account begins to be noticed.

The “proper” of the *demos*, which is freedom, not only is not determined by any positive property, but is not even anything at all. The *populus* is nothing else than the undifferentiated mass of those who do not hold any positive title —neither wealth, nor virtue— but who are recognized the same freedom as those who do possess these titles [4]. Freedom, which is the quality of them who has no other, is as the same time the common virtue that allows the *demos* to group as men without qualities “who have no part in anything” and identify by homonymy with the whole community. This is the fundamental distortion of politics, and what the *demos* brings to the community is nothing but litigation. The *demos* is part of the community without having any title that makes it have a part in the community, that is, it is the part that has no part. But this part by not having any part brings conflict and openness to the exercise of politics, being able to claim

an effective part in the community each time, despite not having a recognized title.

Applying this notion to spatial production will reveal much more clearly the political and economic relationships that make it possible, making it clear who is part that has not part. In the wheat field example, the oligoi part pops into view much faster than the demos part in that space. In the socially produced space called wheat field, the part that the oligoi has is evident: the wheat field as a well-defined space has an owner, however, in the same wheat field, in a hidden way is the part that is up to the *demos*. His part is involved in the work for the production of such space by making the furrows, setting the limits or caring for the land. They have part in space and at the same time they do not have. Here the accounting error of politics can be appreciated by analogy, but reflected in materiality: in political economy. The workers do not have the titles or property of the *oligoi*, nor those of virtue of the *aristoi*, but they provide the necessary work to make the spaces exist and above all to make the spaces persist, a quality that is only partially recognized in the social order. The socially produced space, by carrying this distortion, is also the space of litigation. The political space is also a socially produced material space.

According to Rancière, politics moves much more in the logic of disagreement than of agreement and in the text *Hated of Democracy* he will explain that democracy is not a well-ordered government regime in which the division between those who rule and obey is well founded, but quite the opposite: “democracy is, in fact, nothing more than the «empire of nothingness»” [5]. To develop this thesis, the French philosopher now turns to Plato and will express that once he has admitted that in every state there are rulers and ruled, he will go on to explain what are the titles that can hold this *arché*. There are seven titles: the first four of them found the order of the State in a law of filiation, the next two titles demand a higher principle —they ask that the one who was born before but the best governs—, however the seventh title is the strangest of all, but also considered the fairest. The seventh title is that of “loved by the gods” and it is about the election by lot that is the democratic procedure by which a people decides the distribution of places. Thus, the seventh title is the absence of title to govern [5].

In this way we have not only that the politics is based on an accounting error that makes it conflictive, but that the attempt to neutralize this conflict through a hierarchical structure is useless because there are not foundations for such a hierarchy. This can be extended to the socially produced space, since it often seems (and in most cases it usually is) that it is created under the logic of hierarchical structures. In this sense, Lefebvre points out that Spanish-American cities are an example of spaces produced under a

violent logic of hierarchical political power embodied in the conquerors that imported and reproduced a space whose geometry allowed and continues to allow extortion and plundering for the benefit to Western Europe’s accumulation [5]. However, we must not be fooled, although it is true that this process has been general, it is not total, because in the same way that in reality there are no natural or absolute titles to govern, there are also no absolute titles to produce space, and in the same way, socially produced space it can always be a matter of dispute.

An Ecological Critique to Extend the Litigation

Politics for Rancière means litigation, however his argument gives the impression that litigation is limited to the human world. When he refers to the part of the community that has no part he points to the ancient poor, the third estate or the modern proletariat, leaving Nature out. To extend this notion of politics and democracy outside the narrow world of the human, we will briefly expose the ecological and cultural critique of Timothy Morton, who from his critique of environmentalism is capable of destabilizing the implicit anthropocentrism in many modern and contemporary theoretical developments.

Morton in his text *Environmentalism* explains the emergence of the split between human beings and Nature. In order to do this he begins by analyzing the period that historians of literature define as Romanticism and that goes more or less from 1780 to 1830 [6]. It is this period that we can recognize the beginning of ways of acting and understanding the world that we could identify today as environmentalism. During romanticism, several events occurred: the rights of animals and children appeared but also eugenics, fascism, nationalism — which invoked the natural environment as an image of the nation as “the earth”— and the idea most important of all, *Nature* itself [6].

Romanticism and its environmentalist tendency were invaded by contradictions or ironies. The industrial revolution appeared during these years and industrialization gave way to the rationalization, ordering and control of social and natural systems. Romantic writers noted the dangers of the industry and its philosophy of reason. At the same time that this was happening, the theory of Evolution, whose first traces appeared at the end of the 18th century, displaced humans from their position at the top of the entire chain of beings, forcing us to recognize ourselves as interconnected with all other species. In this context, responding to the events of the time, some opposed reason promoting some forms of holism and organicism [6]: this was environmentalist romanticism.

Environmental romanticism had both a criticism against industrialization and the recognition of another type of relationship with beings other than our species, but at the same time it included ideas such as holism, organicism and nationalism in something they called Nature. The romantic idea of Nature embraced all human beings, revalued children and non-human animals as part of it while accusing industrialization of being unnatural for violating the organicist, holistic and nationalist balance in which all these beings lived together happily. Thus, holism was constituted in conjunction with a nationalistic sentiment that implied a closed community, like the world-bubble of the Hobbit Shire in *The Lord of the Rings*, in which ‘all of us —those of us who belong to this land— are interconnected in a Everything greater than the sum of its parts’ [6]. But if Nature works like this, as an organized and closed system like a bubble, where are the migratory birds, the hominids, the migrants, the gypsies and the Jews? If irony and movement are not part of environmentalism, these beings are in danger of exclusion, ostracism or worse [6].

The romantic idea of Nature that includes holism, organicism and nationalism as a closed space, implies order, neatness, cleanliness and that nothing moves from its assigned site. Hitler thought the German nation in these terms of living spaces (livinrooms) and that the destiny of Germany was its purity. Thatcher in the 90s also thought about the environment in terms of keeping everything very well ordered [6], however, not so many years after Romanticism we find ourselves in full environmental emergency. Are nineteenth-century ideas about Nature really enough to think about the crisis? Something is real: the risks of this crisis are democratized, that is, the risk does not understand order or hierarchies. Radioactivity, viruses, and plastic are completely ignorant of nationalistic boundaries [6].

During romanticism, not was Tolkien and his closed shire the only expression in which the issue of nature was adressed, also there were others who reflected on the same issue, but whose conclusions lead neither to organicism nor to holism, one of them was Mary Shelly. Dr. Frankenstein’s creature is another way of thinking about what is alive outside of holism, neatness and everything well ordered and immovable, an expression that takes us from environmental thinking to ecological thinking.

Morton explains that Romantic Nature is understood as both essence and substance. As essence “it is a kind of ghost that travels the world as a possibility or promise. That essence is ethical, political and scientific. In the romantic period, ‘Natural History’ became ‘biology’ [...]. The facts of Natural History consisted of classifications together with a pre-established template, such as the Linnaean system of genera and species. Biology, on the other hand, sought to

discover the essence of life itself” [6]. Nature as substance “is a thing, indeed, fanciful, palpable, squishable and self-generating —life itself we could say.” [6]

The romantic conception of Nature, understood as essence, refers us to something formal and fixed: a system of pre-established classifications that fit into a template, something that we can learn or apprehend once and for all. It refers to absolute certainty and Truth. As a substance, it refers us to a similar idea: to something given, which is palpable, squishable, controllable, and which ultimately, as “life itself”, can be susceptible to having a value in itself. “Nature can be an abstract principle, an intrinsic value that includes an extended circle of beings: ‘man’, woman, child, slave, animal... plant? Mineral?” [6]. Although the romantic idea of Nature wishes to be something definite and solid to be one of those concepts from which our knowledge and relationship with the world can start with safety and certainty, it seems not to achieve it, when, for example, questions about plants, minerals or Frankenstein’s creature appear. Environmentalism supports this idea of Nature, ecology, far from thinking in pre-established and eternal templates or classifications, directs thought away from the ‘given’, and leads us to think about the relationship.

Morton’s argument continues: “Like structuralism, ecological thinking is thinking in relationships. Although as we think about these relationships, strange and paradoxical things begin to happen” [8]. According to this argument, structuralism and ecological thinking hold such closeness: that of thinking the relationship. It also implies a much deeper proximity, which is to think from the *structurality of the structure*: “the structure, or rather, the structurality of the structure, although it has always been working, has always been neutralized, reduced through a gesture that consists in giving it center, in referring it to a point of presence, to a fixed origin. The function of this center was not only to guide, balance and organize the structure —indeed, one cannot think of a disorganized structure— but, above all, to make the principle of the organization of the structure limit what we can call the game of structure” [7]. The idea of romantic nature is one of those concepts that served to organize and balance the structure from a point of presence. Ecological thinking, for its part, is thinking about the relationship and thinking from the structurality of the structure: from the play of the structure. This means abandoning the gesture that consists of organizing the structure from a center or a fixed origin that limits such play. In the text *Derrida and Ecology*, Morton expresses the following:

“We discovered that what ecology names is an open ‘structure’ with no center or edge. And we found that this strange gathering of open and scattered beings is particularly scalable. That is, at all scales,

wherever we look in the sets of relationships that define ecology, we will find paradoxical, open, centerless, borderless phenomena. This applies to the differences between a human and a chimpanzee that share 98% of human DNA. Applies to the difference between human and hominid. Applies to the difference between one ecosystem and another. It applies to the difference between inside and outside the biosphere (...) [8].

Ecological thinking assumes that boundaries between beings exist. A homo sapiens and a chimpanzee are not the same, however what distinguishes one from the other is not an abysmal difference: it is only 2%, a percentage that does make us different, but not alien. There is a 98% evolutionary memory that connects us. Indeed, in this sense Morton asserts: "Definitively determining the interior from the exterior implies violence; in fact, it is the original violence of metaphysics, metaphysical violence" [8].

Determining sharp separations between one and the other is metaphysical violence. Ecology shows us another way of thinking about the relationship between one and the other that does not imply this violence, it invites us to think about the relationships between the two. This is another moment in which a very important concept of Nature's romantic environmentalism collapses: "the more you think about the interrelationships between grasses, microbes, nitrogen, exhaust pipes, the less clear and holistic the "web "becomes, until it resembles something that poststructuralism used to call textuality. Holism collapses [8]. In this same sense, the closed notion of environment that Nature sustained from holism also collapses. Our environment also moves, its course moves and flows uncanny [8]. It is no longer the image of the clean and orderly Nation in which we live comfortably without changes or anguish.

Unlike environmentalist that thinks only about life and its defense, ecological thought embraces what, in this violent metaphysical dichotomy, we assume as the non-living. Ecological entities refuse to enter the normative box called Nature. Nature only works when some things are natural and others are not. Thus, ecological thought, in addition to thinking about the connection that exists with the non-living, is also capable of re-connecting with everything that metaphysical violence has put on the side of the abject. "Ecological awareness means being able to tolerate [...] what Western philosophy has called 'evil'" [8]. The ecological thinking is, especially how everything is interconnected [8]. If we want to be ecological, we cannot exclude or turn our back on all these other things that seem evil to us: garbage, cancer cells, viruses, sewage, migrants, homeless people or weeds. Such entities are not alien to us, no matter how strange they may be. "Ecological thought has to do with coexistence" [9].

Squatting

According to Lefebvre's thesis, space is material and is a product of socially organized human labor. Matt Fish, to distinguish the notion of abstract space from socially produced material space, will call it 'place' [10]. Fish explains that place, unlike abstract space, is the immediate environment of my living body, the arena of action that is at once physical, historical, social, and cultural [10]. What Matt Fish calls 'place' as produced space is dialectical; since at the same time that it is produced, subjective bodies through the experience in which these bodies not only make sense of the world but also themselves [10].

Fish writes that the growth and renewal of contemporary cities guided and defined by neoliberalism endangers both places and the ability of both people and non-human beings to establish relationships on their own terms without hindrance. This subsequently has negative effects on the type of subjectivities (and agencies) predicated of these relationships [10]. In other words, the logic of the neoliberal development of cities not only causes physical displacement of people, but the consequence of these displacements can be the loss of agency in the subjects and the deterioration of their relationships. Neoliberal development, 'renewal', gentrification and their symptomatic effects such as 'decanting', ghettification, stigmatization and criminalization of certain sectors of the urban population constitute psychic and corporal processes [10], since the loss of place likewise constitutes loss of personality [10].

It is true that the violent processes of growth and renewal of neoliberal cities cause the loss of places and personalities but there are tactics that confront this logic. One of these tactics is squatting. The squatting has probably existed since the advent of private property. Squatting is openly in opposition to the validity of private property [10]. Squatting exists in direct opposition to dominant trends, it is a trend that is seen by those who squat places as a means through which they preserve a sense of individual and collective agency, giving rise to subjectivities that are anything but abject through the production of these locations at the least likely places [10]. It is in this sense only a look not subordinate to the dominant narratives allows us to discover and penetrate these "unlikely" places in which other types of subjectivities can be produced.

The process of creating a place through squatting requires struggle and physical and mental work [10]. The place is produced through the action and the direct encounter with the space. The constitution of the produced subjectivity is actually won. The relationship established with the place and the process of subjectivation has to do with the ways in which people reconstruct or interact with their physical

space, according to their own desires from a new way of being [10].

The squatting, in addition to the production of other types of subjectivities and therefore relationships, is a unique example of “making place” in locations that for the dominant narratives would be unlikely, forgotten, that constitute interstices. It is from these places that unlikely and equally interstitial subjectivities come to be, existing and directly opposing neoliberal subjective positions [10]. It is important to add that the experience of squatting is not merely an intellectual experience, but is also a sensory experience in which we inhabit the created place at the same time that the created place inhabits us [10], that is why squatting is capable of creating identities linked to space, not in a closed sense but in a dynamic, temporal and open sense through individual and collective labor.

Ecological Squats: San Lorenzo and El Tren Negro

Environmentalism and the narrative of Nature set limits that cause exclusions in which some entities take place and others do not. The recognition of an ecological reality, on the contrary, implies thinking about relationship and coexistence in which, although there are differences, these are not sharp enough to deny their existence. With Rancière, politics and democracy, far from being activities that legitimize or strive to create these differences and limits, question and dispute them. In this sense, an ecological democratic politics would imply recognizing that every existing being is in a position to dispute its part in space. Also in this very sense, squatting is a tactic that could take part in a democratic politics in an ecological way, not only because it is openly in opposition to the validity of private property—a social agreement that precisely produces exclusive and excluding spaces— but because it gives the possibility to the corporeality considered as abject: dispossessed, vagabonds, homeless animals, plant beings, among others, produce a space in which to inhabit. The *Hotel de San Lorenzo* and the libertarian library *El Tren Negro* are two spaces in which democratic relations take place, and at least one of them is an openly political space.

The *Hotel de San Lorenzo* is an abandoned building situated on a privatized beach located on the Gulf of Mexico. After the Spanish conquest of the territory known as Ah-Kin-Pech, this beach was produced as an *hacienda*¹ in which both the workforce of some human beings was used and

non-human beings were exploited. Already in contemporary times, this former *hacienda*—despite the fact that the post-revolutionary Mexican Law prohibits the privatization of the beaches— became an exclusive area in which some of the most economically powerful people in the city has their beach houses. Around the eighties of the last century, when tourism became the promise of economic development for third world countries, the spatial production of two hotels also began: one continues today in operation and the other remained unfinished. The unfinished space is known to the city’s alternative cultural scene simply as *El Hotel*.

El hotel is not only a ruin of the tourist nightmare, but it became a space for all those who do not own a private beach house in San Lorenzo. The space is used to coexist during the dates on which people traditionally go to the beach: The Holly Week, Easter and Christmas festivities. Keeping it clean is an unspoken agreement between the roaming occupants of the space. In addition, in terms of space production, various occupants have marked the place to avoid accidents, since due to their material characteristics there are some destroyed areas in which accidents can occur; but there are not only warning signs, but many of its walls have become canvases for the most varied expression: common graffiti, poems and murals that have produced the hotel, as well as a space for coexistence, as a place of free aesthetic manifestation.

The San Lorenzo hotel not only hosts some human beings during religious festivals, but is also the permanent home of many plants and non-human beings, who with their own agency have also been transforming the space, doing what It would have been an exclusive place for wealthy tourists, an exotic surrealist garden in which by dint of pure life colonies of wild maguey and some spray paint cans occupy the rooms with the best ocean views. Although it is true that *El Hotel* of San Lorenzo is not a permanent squat, it is a space in which the housing policy is democratic—therefore there are moments of dissent, disputes and negotiations— and ecological, since its logic is not that of separate the abject from the acceptable, human beings from non-human beings, but their logic is that of coexistence.

The Libertarian Library *El Tren Negro* (The Black Train) is located approximately 1,139 kilometers away from *El Hotel* of San Lorenzo and is placed on the outskirts of Mexico City. It is called a “train” because it is located on some disused railroad tracks. Along these train tracks, many people displaced by the violent processes of gentrification, dispossession and social cleansing undertaken by the economic policies of “rescue” of the central zone of Mexico City, directed by both the government of the City and the the billionaire Carlos Slim, came to live in difficult conditions: without electricity, without access to drinking water or drains; simply with a roof, often of poor quality, over their

1 An *hacienda* was the cell of economic administration brought by the Spanish conquerors to the New Spain. This cell of economic administration legitimized both a veiled mode of slavery and a hierarchical system of castes. This mode of production was extinguished by the Mexican Revolution that started in 1910

heads that protected them from the acid rain and the burning sun of the deforested Valley of Mexico.

The first antecedent of the library is located when a group of organized students belonging to various public schools (high schools and social work schools), who had participated in various movements of social resistance against the neoliberal policies promoted by the OECD, the IMF and the World Bank, found that human settlement. The first thing that caught their attention was the number of children who lived there, so they decided to organize donations so that this vulnerable childhood had the minimum of materials to continue attending school. By showing solidarity and listening to the neighbors, they became their friends. The fellows came and went carrying out activities and integrating with the local people until one day they proposed to the neighbors the idea of staying to build a library. The people accepted, and they assigned a space so that they could produce that space. It began as a small room in which there were donated books and the fellows who came and went to share with the little ones of the place and enthuse them with letters and knowledge.

The library formally began when, after the earthquake of 2017, the fellows also lost their home in the earthquake, and participating in the citizen rescue brigades, they realized that they too were victims; however, they already knew that they could produce their own space. When they proposed to the neighbors to join the neighborhood, they accepted them again and assigned them another space to build a house. In such a way, by that time the library and the librarians' house already existed, in which to solve the drainage problem, they installed a dry bathroom that was an example for both the neighbors and for all those who came to the space, which it made the library as a center for critical and alternative education work much better.

El Tren Negro library began to grow, and from a room with some books, it began to have games, to receive supplies for school, clothes and medicines, which were not only accessible to the residents of the tracks, but to everyone to come amicably to share in that space. The library was built with the solidarity work of both the neighbors — including the infants, who were the ones who enjoyed the place much more— and many volunteers who, through organizational networks, found out that this squatter existed. There, workshops of all kinds are still given, regularizations of all fields of knowledge are given to support the education of infants, they celebrate, dance, sing, play theater, play games, laugh, and even before The COVID-19 pandemic also started a cornfield and a community kitchen in which healthy and vegan food is prepared. The self-managed library *El Tren Negro* is a critical space, built through the solidarity and conscious work of many people who work under the idea

that dignity is possible and, by working this idea spatially, they have made it a reality in themselves and in the tangible reality that we share.

To inhabit is not to possess. Neither the library nor *El Hotel* belong to those who inhabit it; far from this, those who hold the title of possession or property do not even care about them, believing their part in the space secure, ignoring that the space can be disputed. However, both the library and the *Hotel* are supported by those who inhabit them: humans —including childhood—, plants, animals and even rubbish. Although the coexistence in this places are not exempt of conflict, they persevere in their democratic identity, demonstrating that the space belongs to whoever works it.

Conclusion

The materialist notion of space that is recognized from Henri Lefebvre makes possible a much more acute approach to aesthetic and political problems, since the recognition of space, not as an *a priori* condition of the subject's sensitivity but as objective geography in which we exist, with which we interact and above all which we transform through the force of our socially organized labor, forces us to become aware as humans of the consequences of our spatial works, that is, to take responsibility for the habitat that we have created by and for ourselves. When we become aware, and that this awareness goes through the sensory experience of living, for example: being in the middle of a storm without having a nearby roof where we can shelter from the inclement weather because all the socially produced spaces that surround us are private, we necessarily realize that the spaces produced exist exclusions.

In order to explain these exclusions that occur in the flesh and blood, it is necessary to resort to notions of the political that not only recognize inequalities without pretending to produce a neutralizing discourse, but also explain how these inequalities actually operate in reality, opening possibilities, through dissent and dispute of new distributions of the sensible, or in other words, that explain how justice is practiced not from the abstraction of law, but through daily practices, which include spatial practices. In this sense, the very notion of democracy, which is nothing other than the notion that there are no titles for the exercise of power, needs to be adequate to this much more realistic approach to politics, constituting itself, once again, not at the formal level of law but on the plane of force intensities in the objectivity of material space, declaring in this case that the possibility of spatial dispute is always present and that no title recognized by the hierarchical system is required nor to dispute spaces or to build them. The ecological critique to environmentalism, on the other hand, radicalizes this conception of democratic politics, since it is not only

compatible with this idea of democratic politics, but also extends the invitation to dispute spaces and to construct them not only to human beings, but to any existing potency.

These ecological and democratic politics not only exist as theoretical models, but in reality they have been experimented and verified through the squatting tactic in different spaces and times. Although each experience is different and each one has its limitations and specific problems, reality has proven that these interstitial spaces are not only possible but that they are operative and constitute actual alternatives to the human crisis that we face in the present.

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