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Alien house, alien life: a critique of heteronomy

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Preamble

There is no learning for liberty without liberty. This is what Kant (2009 [1793]), in a footnote written during the French Revolution, tells his contemporaries insistent on saying that 'the people' could not be free because they were not mature enough for that.

According to such a presupposition, freedom will never arrive; for, one cannot *ripen* to freedom if one has not previously been set free (one must be free in order to be able to use one's powers purposively in freedom). The first attempts will indeed be crude, and will usually also be linked with a more burdensome and dangerous situation than when one was still under the orders but also the care of others; yet one never ripens to reason except through one's *own* attempts (and one must be free on order that one may make them). (Kant, 2009 [1793], p.209; Kant's italics)

More than mere domination in the form of tyranny, the assumption challenged by Kant (2009 [1793]) underpins tutelage and paternalism: like children, 'the people' should be protected from themselves because they tend to act, not according to reasoned and well-informed will, but to satisfy immediate desires and passions, so that control and coercion should be exercised for their own good. Derived from this assumption is the representation of a 'correct' or 'right' model of action that should be universally followed, which is, therefore, a model of society as well.

Evidently, motivation for paternalism can be sincere or blatantly hypocritical. In the first case, some freedom is thought to follow a period of tutelage. In the second case, the predominant notion is that, before being set free from direct religious, political, and economic shackles, 'the people' must incorporate a heteronomous pattern of action so that afterward they will merely

reproduce such heteronomy, thus perpetuating their own subservience and the privileges of others. As sincere motivation (more common among center-left representatives, including engaged public administrators and technicians), it is modeled after a state of affairs that would solve at least part of current social problems, whereas as hypocritical motivation (more common among representatives of all sorts of capital), it is modeled after the *status quo*, which, in view of material deprivation and complete political destitution (DEMO, 2006) of numberless members of this society, is indeed hypocritical. However, it is important to note that these two motivations, distinct in principle, are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the greater the social contradictions are and the more difficult it is to maintain these structures without provisional changes to mitigate tensions, the more these two motivations come together. These changes, sometimes contrary to some private interests, are often structurally useful, even indispensable. Thus, the tutelage assumption may associate freedom and democracy discourses to concrete actions that are paternalistic as well as functional for the amplification of capital reproduction.

It may be claimed that individual liberty and democracy are, indeed, not the same thing, or that they are not they necessarily related to each other. In fact, tutelage over an individual exerted by a democratic forum is often considered legitimate. Berlin stressed this difference:

The connection between democracy and individual liberty is a good deal more tenuous than it has seemed to many advocates of both. The desire to be governed by oneself, or at any rate to participate in the process by which one's life is to be controlled, may be as deep a wish as that for a free area for action, and perhaps historically older. But it is not a desire for the same thing (BERLIN, 1969 [1958], n.p.).

Berlin (1969 [1958]) identifies "the desire for a free area for action" with the notion of liberty as non-interference, also known as 'negative liberty.' According to this notion, the larger is the area in which an individual (or a group of individuals) can act according to his own will, the freer he is, whereas liberty stunting comes from obstacles and constraints created by other people (unlike limitations imposed by nature or personal disabilities). Yet, the desire for democracy derives from a conception of positive liberty or self-government, which is expressed by the metaphor of the individual as the 'master of himself.' In this sense, hampering this liberty implies the individual being determined by any instance over which he has no control, whether his own inner (irrational) nature, a government in which he does not participate or rules with which he cannot identify as a rational human being.

Specifically, this last notion appears to allow the aforementioned inference that tutelage may be legitimate in some cases. Preventing an individual from acting on impulse, based on prejudices or ignorance, for instance, would be equivalent to preserving this liberty; a government that would prevent its people from acting irrationally would be protecting their freedom. But Berlin himself is vehemently against turning positive liberty into paternalism or the "fatal" but "almost imperceptible" transition from the metaphor of the rule of reason over impulses to an individual's rule over another or the rule of an allegedly more rational fraction

of society over its allegedly less rational ones. Upon recalling another of Kant's passages in which paternalism is defined as "the greatest despotism imaginable", Berlin states:

Paternalism is despotic, not because it is more oppressive than naked, brutal, unenlightened tyranny, nor merely because it ignores the transcendental reason embodied in me, but because it is an insult to my conception of myself as a human being, determined to make my own life in accordance with my own (not necessarily rational or benevolent) purposes, and, above all, entitled to be recognized as such by others (BERLIN, 1969 [1958], n.p.).

In addition, Berlin (1969 [1958]) claims that being governed by someone that considers you an equal (and, consequently, a rival as well) is preferable to being "treated well" or treated with tolerance by someone who considers himself superior to you and does not acknowledge you for what you want to be for yourself. In other words, the ideal of positive liberty that underpins the notion of democracy does not justify tutelage because tutelage denies the very existence of the autonomous individual, bearer of this (positive) liberty and a founding element of true democracy.

I begin by recalling these arguments because they seem very pertinent to our neoliberal context, in which words like 'democracy,' 'autonomy,' and 'participation' have been increasingly framed by an essentially conservative matrix. The Toyotism found in private enterprises is its more visible evidence: workers have more 'participation' and 'autonomy' in the management of their tasks as long as they incorporate heteronomy to the point of warranting the efficiency of their own exploitation (BERNARDO, 2004). As to state and international development agencies, autonomy has been identified with private property and availability of credit in the financial market, as proposed by Soto (2001), or, in a somewhat different perspective, Muhammad Yanus (1999). Moreover, participation has mostly become an expedient to collect information from and systematically co-opt individuals so as to impose interventions, which otherwise would not be admitted without opposition by those affected (COOKE; KOTHARY, 2001).

In 'places of living,' at least in Brazil, there predominates pseudo-participation justified by "professional mystification of everyday activities" (TURNER, 1976, p. 26). The specialist discourse is increasingly imposed on decisions that house dwellers could make themselves on the alleged grounds that they lack knowledge, information, maturity or organization. Now, this constitutes precisely the tutelage assumption, be it well-intentioned or merely in the interest of maintaining the *status quo* (as aforementioned, these two premises are not incompatible). This should be questioned with the Kantian argument that deprivation of freedom to make one's "own attempts" is equal to deprivation of freedom *per se*. Conversely, liberty is always freedom to make attempts with real risk of creating "a more uncomfortable and dangerous state of affairs than that when one was under the orders [...] of another" (Kant, 2009, p.209). Nothing justifies heteronomy. No anticipation of products (ends) or processes (means) done by the few for the many can be called democratic, even when originated in the most sincere intentions to improve the situation of the economically and politically poor.

Autonomy and everyday space

Heteronomy or subjection to the rule of another (*heteros*) is opposed to autonomy or self-rule. Autonomy involves the right as well as the capacity to establish one's own rule (KAPP, 2004). Such capacity is something like clarity and consistency to reflect on, create, and revise behavior and interaction modes instead of just reproducing them from outside sources, whereas the right to self-governance is equivalent to the acknowledgment of autonomy by external bodies. This distinction is important in that capacity for self-determination does not automatically imply its recognition, nor does the right necessarily imply capacity. Any concrete autonomy is part of a historical process in which the right and capacity to govern oneself evolve asynchronously. In accordance with the Kantian argument that there is no learning for liberty without liberty, the right to autonomy must precede the capacity for it. Autonomy could be defined as matured freedom. Situations in which there is capacity for autonomy without the corresponding right result, as a rule, from suppression of a previously existing liberty. (It is commonplace in totalitarianism to see rebellion being urged by those who have been free or in contact with free individuals.).

Another crucial aspect is that autonomy is not the capacity and right of just a single individual, but of a collectivity. The proper political meaning of autonomy lies in the notion of autonomous groups, i.e., groups that establish, among their members, their own functioning rules (not necessarily formal or written). The fundamental interdependence between individual and collective autonomies was discussed in depth by Marcelo Lopes de Souza (2010 [2001]) based on the work of Greek philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, envisaging the transformation of the "capitalist model of civilization", and focusing on urban planning and management.

Collective autonomy refers [...] to institutions and material conditions (including access to sufficient and reliable information), which together should ensure equal opportunities of participation in relevant decision-making processes as regards community dealings. Individual autonomy, in turn, depends on purely individual and psychological circumstances as well as on political and material factors in which socialization processes constantly give rise to lucid individuals, endowed with self-esteem and averse to political tutelage. It is therefore obvious that, rather than interdependent, individual and collective autonomies are two sides of same coin: distinct but inseparable (SOUZA, 2010 [2001], p. 174).

If reflection and discussion are the foundations of the *nomos* in autonomy, discussion is a type of collective reflection in the same way that reflection is a type of individual discussion. There is only collective autonomy when all members of the collectivity have the opportunity to participate directly in discussion and decision-making on a common rule, purpose or process. Therefore, what Castoriadis formulates as the project of an "autonomous society" includes forms of direct democracy as opposed to representative democracy or other more explicit forms of hierarchy and power concentration (see SOUZA, 2010 [2001]).

A society thus constituted would not follow any predetermined model, since it is part of its own logic to reflect, discuss, and transform itself continuously. Hence, it is useless to speculate on

the contents of its constitution or on how it would be exactly. It suffices to know that it would break with the “capitalist model of civilization”, since this model depends on concentration of economic and political power. Souza points out, however, that it is not about waiting for a revolution and dismissing as irrelevant any “small gains of autonomy” (SOUZA, 2010 [2001], p. 177). Even without rupture, some levels of autonomy may be achieved, even if they remain limited and insufficient and tend to occur at the margins, niches, and peripheries.

The terms ‘margins,’ ‘niches,’ and ‘peripheries’ are not entirely metaphorical, as an important part of these gains of autonomy refers to the production of space and, more specifically, production of everyday space. As we have already defined elsewhere, everyday space is unspecialized space or space which does not demand organization for a specialized activity or organization by specialists. Its most prominent example is domestic space, but the same criterion applies to most public and collective spaces, first and foremost in predominantly residential urban areas (KAPP et al. 2009; MILAGRES, KAPP, BALTAZAR, 2010). Autonomy in production of everyday space would be a starting point for a truly autonomous society. It is no coincidence that the territorial formation of the ‘commune’ and its opposition to feudal tutelage are the source of what we now loosely call ‘citizenship,’ as well as the foundation of the earliest idea of communism. “The basis of democracy is the *commune*, a smaller entity, where everything begins.” (DEMO, 2006, p. 49).

The relationship between social emancipation and autonomy in the production of everyday space entered the international debate in the second post-war period, i.e., once modernist architecture, Le Corbusier urbanism, and regulatory planning had been established in Europe and the U.S., particularly through provision of mass housing. More than any other production, housing production highlighted everyday flaws of the assumed administrative and technical efficiency of large-scale operations, typical of Fordist industry as well as of the welfare state. Several architects and urban planners have criticized this production, for example, Yona Friedman (1958, 1971), Reyner Banham et al. (1969), John Turner (1969, 1972, and 1976), Jacob Burckhardt (1971), N. J. Habraken (1972), and Collin Ward (1976). Non-architects have also spoken critically, such as the writer Jane Jacobs (1961), an activist against the destruction of traditional urban fabric, the economist E. F. Schumacher (1973), critical of the “propensity to gigantism,” and the philosopher and theologian Ivan Illich (1973), who links social emancipation directly to “the degree to which society protects the power of individuals and of communities to choose their own styles of life through effective, small-scale renewal” (ILLICH, 1973, p. 43). It is also during this period that the sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre extends his critique of everyday life to an emphatically spatial approach, writing within a few years *Le droit à la ville* (1968), *Du rural à l'urbain* (1970), *La révolution urbaine* (1970), *La survie du capitalism: la reproduction des rapports de production* (1973), and *La production de l'espace* (1974).

Lefebvre claims that the production of space is crucial for the “reproduction of the relations of production” in capitalism. In every new generation, the society organized by and for capital

perpetuates its fundamental structures (and all the growth and innovation dynamics essential to these structures) because it systematically changes the space according to the priorities of this mode of production. That goes for the larger territorial scale, starting with the establishment of nation states and global communication and transport infrastructure, extends to the intermediate scale of large urban agglomerations and corporate farming, and reaches the smaller scale of neighborhoods and domestic environments. Even places where centralizing interference of big capital or the state does not exist or is slow to arrive (e.g., slums, rural areas or some older towns) are defined by exclusion. For Lefebvre (1991 [1974]), the main contradiction in the production of abstract space is its scale disparity.

Where is then the chief contradiction to be found? In the ability to conceive and treat space on a global scale (or a world scale), on the one hand, and its fragmentation by multiple procedures or processes, all fragmentary in themselves, on the other hand. [...] [Fragmentation] is reinforced not only by administrative subdivisions, not only by scientific and technical expertise, but also - in fact, more than anything else - by retailing space (in lots). (LEFEBVRE, 1991 [1974], p. 355).

The contradiction between homogenization of space and fragmentation or fracture of this space is equivalent to the contradiction - and interdependence - between relations of production and productive forces (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974], p. 357). This conjunction, at the same time contradictory and mutually dependent, between homogeneity and fragmentation, is contrary to the notion of collective autonomy. Production of space determined by very comprehensive political, economic, and technical instances is, of course, heteronomous because these instances are inaccessible to most people. Production of space determined by isolated individual decisions remains heteronomous, because a critical or subversive individual decision has nothing to support it. Lefebvre gives a concrete example of these relationships:

Owners of private cars have some space at their disposal, which costs them very little personally, although society, collectively, pays a heavy price for its maintenance. This arrangement leads the number of cars (and car owners) to rise, which is convenient to car manufacturers and favors their continual efforts to expand this space. The productive consumption of space, which produces mostly capital gains, receives huge government subsidies and resources. [...] On the other hand, there are 'green areas', such as trees, squares that are more than just intersections, and urban parks, which obviously give pleasure to the community as a whole, but who pays for this pleasure? How and from whom can fees be collected? Because these spaces serve no one in particular [...], they tend to be wiped out. (LEFEBVRE, 1991 [1974], p. 359).

The contradiction lies in the fact that this occurrence, i.e., the disappearance of public spaces not intended for cars, serves fragmented private interests and 'systemic' interests, but ends up making collective life worse. Then again, if a single car owner decides to abandon its use, it will make no difference. What could indeed make a difference is the establishment of collective debates and negotiations, i.e., political construction processes that promote the exercise of direct democracy on a spatial scale at which there are concrete possibilities for action.

Advancement and regression

The production of everyday space with some degree of autonomy has been exercised continuously in Brazilian cities. Boroughs, slums, and other forms of occupation of urban land without prior approval of formal planning and management bodies have existed since the nineteenth century and even before that (the difference is that there were no formal bodies they could be set against). The undeniable precariousness of spaces so generated does not come primarily from incompetence but from their authors' material and political destitution, since they are the same workforce on whose exploitation the formal city has always depended. On the other hand, the equally undeniable qualities of these spaces come mainly from the fact that they contain "a social life far more intense than the bourgeois portions of cities" (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974], p. 373).

Their poverty notwithstanding, these districts [shanty towns] sometimes so effectively order their space – houses, walls, public space – as to elicit a nervous admiration. *Appropriation* of a remarkably high order is to be found here. The spontaneous architecture and planning [...] prove greatly superior to the organization of space by specialists who effectively translate the social order into territorial reality with or without direct order from economic and political authorities. (LEFEBVRE, 1991 [1974], p. 373-74).

It is likely that Lefebvre views slums in a more romantic light than that to which they are entitled (which, incidentally, is a common element of many of the aforementioned theorists working in the 1970s). What I have earlier called 'some level of autonomy' is in fact very tenuous. It is certainly not the full right to self-government because, in principle, the occupations in question have violated the law and have always run the risk of eviction. And also the ability of self-government is largely limited by immediate needs imposed by poverty and by the heteronomies to which poverty forces people to submit.

Still, the origin of activism and urban social movements opposed to the production of abstract space lies in these marginal territories. From them derives engagement to effective democratic elements incorporated to the 1988 Constitution, the Estatuto da Cidade (Statute of the City), and several other laws, even to be found in some self-managed endeavors and programs. In 2001, Souza summarized the legacy of these movements and activism as "the awareness and achievement of social rights [...], the politicization of cities [...] and the creation of a margin of maneuver to humanize the urban" (SOUZA, 2010 [2001], p. 193). Despite all the provisos and criticisms also presented by the author, there is a prospect of advancement. There was a period when the production of urban space seemed headed for greater autonomy.

Yet, the most recent developments indicate the opposite. Among them are: the Planos Diretores Municipais (Municipal Master Plans), along with their more rhetorical than effective use of the legal tools provided in the Estatuto da Cidade (SANTOS; MONTANDON, 2011), the opening of capital of large development and construction companies that, among other things, enabled the formation of significant land stocks, and in particular, the Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento-PAC (Growth Acceleration Program) and Programa Minha Casa Minha Vida-

PMCMV (Program My House My Life). As way of illustration, one could take the latter program (PMCMV), launched in April 2009 to mitigate the economic crisis; it promotes housing projects financed by public resources, however proposed, planned, and executed by private companies in spite of the structure arduously established for the - albeit relative - democratization of space.

The package was drawn up by the Casa Civil [Chief of Staff] and Ministério da Fazenda [Ministry of Finance], in direct negotiation with the real estate and construction sectors, disregarding several institutional improvements in the area of urban development and without conferring with the rest of society. [...] The Ministério das Cidades [Ministry of Cities] was set aside at the program's inception, the Plano Nacional de Habitação [National Housing Plan] was virtually ignored, the Estatuto da Cidade [Statute of the City] was not employed as a defining element with respect to investment, the Conselho das Cidades [Council of Cities] was not even consulted, the Fundo Nacional de Habitação de Interesse Social-FNHIS [National Social Housing Fund] and its council were dismissed. In addition, the package decree defines a follow-up committee composed exclusively of government members (ARANTES; FIX, 2009).

The above criticism, formulated soon after the launching of PMCMV, lists a number of other deficiencies that were not substantially reversed in subsequent adjustments of the program and have had concrete effects on cities (as we have seen empirically in the metropolitan area of Belo Horizonte; KAPP et al., 2010). The PMCMV reinforces the ideology of home ownership and housing commodification, subsidizing corporate profits, not the families; it does not promote any improvement on environmental and social sustainability of housing construction processes and products; it tends to worsen conditions at construction sites, increasing exploitation of workers; it undermines local governments and leads to inconsistent changes in urban legislation resulting in even more pronounced formation of urban peripheries; it does not promote the social function of property because it ignores real estate vacancy and presses the price of land; it does not foster parity between the countryside and the city; and it weakens urban social movements because, in addition to promoting "a context of appeasement of social struggles and conformity to the system structures," it apportions most of the resources to projects managed by private companies, while resources for self-managed enterprises are minimal (see ARANTES; FIX, 2009). In short, PMCMV is a kind of neo-liberal variety of all errors committed by the former Banco Nacional de Habitação-BNH (National Housing Bank), which have been criticized so often.

These PMCMV characteristics can be also be verified in PAC interventions in slum areas, in which, however, I shall not linger here. The fact is that the wave of government-funded heteronomous production of everyday space has shattered learning processes started during a period of few housing policies, when social movements and organized groups were, as Kant would say, free to make their own attempts. Instead of an evolution of these attempts, we now have almost exclusively heteronomous processes and as a result, new neighborhoods worse than those of the BNH era, real estate commodities of low spatial and constructive

quality and urban interventions in slums whose benefits for residents are, to put it mildly, questionable.

It is not particularly surprising that the urban-architectural variety known as *conjunto habitacional* (housing complex) gained radical monopoly in this context of mass heteronomous production of everyday space. What Illich (1973) calls 'radical monopoly' is not the exclusivity of a brand or company, but the situation in which a product gets such a grip on the social imaginary that it is seen as the only possibility to meet certain needs, excluding any other competing products and processes. Using the abovementioned car example: when the car is seen as the individual transportation mode *par excellence*, thereby substantially restricting or eliminating pedestrians, bicycles, animals, and the like by shaping the space in its way, then there is radical monopoly. Housing complexes or popular housing, preferably vertical and composed of 500 units (upper limit of a PMCMV project), has become the automatic response to 'housing shortage' in virtually all discussions, whether in businesses, public bodies, financial agencies or even in participatory public forums. (In Wikipedia Portuguese, the words "habitação social" (social housing) and "conjunto habitacional" (housing complex) are gathered into a single entry...).

The housing complex is the essence of what Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) calls 'abstract space.' Its scale makes it necessarily peripheral and hidden in the urban fabric, while not entirely isolated; its domestic spaces are ideally restricted to activities for elementary reproduction of the workforce; its public spaces are passageways, at most, garnished by some public facilities whose uses are also predetermined; commercial activities are excluded by definition; uses and transformations of space implemented at the initiative of residents are seen as transgressions. The problem, therefore, is not only the housing complex as a tedious, stiff, and uninteresting architectural form, requiring a type of urban design that devastates the landscape and natural substrate; it is the housing complex and the like as an economic and political category. The only 'advantages' to this type of spatial product are optimizing the productive cycle of construction capitals in particular and releasing urban space for productive and speculative operations of capitals in general. Or, by backward reasoning, even if heteronomous production were to generate quality housing (pleasant, environmentally sustainable, well-articulated to public transportation and facilities, and so forth), a veritable right to the city would not be granted. The right to the city is not simply access to products and resources that the city, as it is, has to offer, but the right to decide what the city where one lives should be. According to Harvey:

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right, since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the process of urbanization (HARVEY, 2008, p.23).

In short

The legitimacy of the new wave of heteronomous production of everyday space is the alleged efficiency of private in opposition to public management and self-management. Heteronomous production would serve more people in less time, with less money and more predictable results. As for public management, it is noteworthy that the possibilities of state action should be restricted just when participatory processes start to permeate it. As for self-management, the inefficiency argument ignores its purposes completely. In fact, it is not difficult to show that processes imposed from the top down take less time than collective discussion, negotiation, decision, and action processes. It is also clear that actors of a self-managed process or, using a more comprehensive and less institutionalized term, actors of an autonomous production, when truly free from direct constraints, do unpredicted things. But the virtues of autonomous production are the very collective processes and the novel and diversified socio-spatial outcomes that can be continually generated.

It is not the case, therefore, of using the institutional figure of self-management as a tool to multiply exactly the same products advocated by heteronomous production. On the contrary, we should seek individual and collective autonomy as an end in itself, which, moreover, makes it possible to formulate alternatives in terms of work organization (cooperatives, mutual aid, salaried work fronts), material execution (non-hegemonic building technologies), and space products (occupation and eventual restoration of idle buildings, spreading new units about the urban fabric, building flexible and changeable housing, building collective and public spaces with no predetermined purposes, and conceiving new modes of articulation between the rural and the urban, for instance).

One final comment: this essay did not revisit the old argument about the role played by 'the architect' in heteronomous production of space, because this has been done elsewhere (KAPP et al. 2008; BALTAZAR, KAPP, 2006). Nevertheless, it should be reminded that these professionals' practices are not limited by nature to the design of finished products that comply with all sorts of heteronomy and are depicted as if they were technically unavoidable. Creativity, technical expertise, spatial vision, and other architectural virtues can become much more socially useful and personally satisfying if they are free themselves.

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