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Separating the Doing and the Deed: Capital and the Continuous Character of Enclosures

I. Orientations

Capital encloses. The diverse movements comprising the current global justice and solidarity movement are increasingly acknowledging and fighting against this truism: by opposing the attempts to relocate communities to make space for dams; by resisting privatisation of public services and basic resources such as water; by creating new commons through occupations of land and the building of communities; by struggling against patents which threaten the lives of millions of AIDS patients; by simply downloading and sharing music and software beyond the cash limits imposed by the market.

Despite the accumulating evidence of real social struggles against the many forms of capitalist enclosure, the fact that capital encloses is not something that has been sufficiently theorised by critical social and economic theory. On the side of mainstream research, the broad question of enclosures appears one of justification and modes of implementation. As regards justification, we have what has been referred to as the 'tragedy of the commons'. The core

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of this argument, first proposed by Hardin, is that commons are incentive and distribution arrangements that inevitably result in environmental degradation and generally resource depletion.[1] This is because the commons are understood as resources for which there is 'free' and 'unmanaged' access. In this framework, no one has an obligation to take care of commons. In societies in which commons are prevalent, Hardin argues, people live by the principle: 'to each according to his needs' formulated by Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. By *assuming* that commons are a free-for-all space from which competing and atomised 'economic men' take as much as they can, Hardin has engineered a justification for privatisation of the commons space rooted in an alleged natural necessity.[2] Hardin forgets that there are no commons without community within which the modalities of access to common resources are negotiated. Incidentally, this also implies that there is no enclosure of commons without *at the same time* the destruction and fragmentation of communities.[3]

There is an extensive literature on the modes of privatisation and methods of implementation, on the alleged benefits that they would bring, not to mention the different fields in which enclosures of commons would emerge and be reinforced following trade liberalisation policies in new areas such as public services. In this immense literature, enclosures are the *basso continuo* of a neoliberal discourse within which we are fully immersed.

On the critical side, there is, of course, plenty of literature opposing this or that privatisation, this or that strategy of trade liberalisation, identifying the effects of WTO-sponsored trade liberalisation policies, or the immense

[1] See Hardin 1968.

[2] For a critique of Hardin's approach, see, for example, Anderson and Simmons 1993. Ronald Coase offers a parallel argument to that of Hardin. The theorem that goes under his name, the 'Coase Theorem', proposes that pollution and other 'externalities' can be efficiently controlled through voluntary negotiations among the affected parties (that is, both polluters and those harmed by pollution). A key to the Coase Theorem is that many pollution problems emerge with common-property goods that have no clear-cut ownership or property rights. With clear-cut property rights, 'owners' would have the incentive to achieve an efficient level of pollution. Thus, pollution can be reduced through voluntary negotiation by assigning private property rights to common-property resources and the consequent development of a market in property rights can be established. Now, the problem with this is that every human action is a social action and therefore bound to produce 'externalities'. In Coase's framework, therefore, everything becomes enclosable. See Coase 1988.

[3] For an analysis of the relation between commons and communities, see De Angelis 2003 and de Marcellus 2003. For an application of this analysis in the area of higher education, see Harvie 2004.

social cost of the building a new dam and relocating millions, or the injustice involved in privatising water.[4] Yet, there are very few systematic works attempting to put it all together, as theoretical constructs, so as to help us to clarify the nature of the enclosing force we are facing.[5]

Apart from few exceptions,[6] it is within Marxist literature that we find the most paradoxical deficiency in the attempt to theorise enclosures as an ongoing feature of capitalist régimes. This is a literature that, in principle, should be very sensitive to issues of struggles and capitalist power, as well as to alternatives to capital. But there is a major fallacy in the way traditional Marxist literature has dealt with the issue of enclosures.[7] It marginalises

[4] The literature here is truly, and fortunately so, very extensive. For some examples see Shiva 2002b on intellectual property rights and enclosure of knowledge and Shiva 2002a on water enclosures. On the important wave of struggles against water privatisation in Cochabamba, Bolivia, see the resources in Web 5. On the impact of dam projects on local populations and their struggles see the resources, for example, on the case of the Narmada Valley in Web 1 and 2. On the massive integrated system of enclosures across Central America under the plan Puebla-Panama see Hansen and Wallach 2002. The campaign against GATS (General Agreement on Trade and Services) has highlighted the corporate agenda of 'locking in' past privatisation and 'enclosures' as well as promoting new ones. See the resources in Web 3 and Web 4, as well as Wasselius 2002. On the damaging effects of debt and the struggles against it see the resources in Web 6. For a broad survey and identification of struggles against the enclosures imposed through structural adjustment policies, see Walton and Seddon 1994.

[5] Exceptions derived from three different perspectives are offered for example, firstly in the work of John McMurtry who tries to put it all together by identifying the market as an ethical system and counterposes commons to marketisation; see McMurtry 1998, 1999, 2000. Secondly, another exception is the work of John Holloway 2002, and his important and refreshing analysis on the problematic of revolution today. Finally, Hardt and Negri 2000 open the way for what they call 'commonwealth'. Whatever their strengths and weaknesses, these works leave the strategic question raised by the problematic of capital as enclosing social force in the background, without tackling it directly. In this sense, this paper intends to complement these works.

[6] See for example Bonefeld 2001, De Angelis 2001, Federici 1992, Midnight Notes Collective 1992, Perelman 2000 among others. The web journal *The Commoner* (<http://www.thecommoner.org>) is largely dedicated to pursuing this line of research. For a critique of this approach, see Zarembka 2002 and, for a counter-critique, see Bonefeld 2002a.

[7] In De Angelis 2001, I discuss the main horizons of the interpretation of primitive accumulation within the Marxist tradition. I identify a 'historical primitive accumulation' deriving from Lenin and a 'inherent-continuous primitive accumulation' stemming from Luxemburg. Subsequent more modern interpretations seem to share the basic characteristics of one or other of these two approaches. For example, in his classic *Studies on the Development of Capitalism*, Maurice Dobb (1963, p. 178) uses the category of primitive accumulation to indicate a well-defined age of accumulation of property rights better known as the mercantile age. According to Dobb, therefore, primitive accumulation is accumulation 'in an historical sense'. It is worth noticing that Paul Sweezy, Dobb's main opponent in the famous debate on the transition from feudalism

enclosures from theory by rendering it not just a question of genealogy, but a genealogy within a *linear* model of development. To simplify, the narrative goes something like this: *before* capital*ism* there were enclosures or 'primitive accumulation'. These processes of expropriation are preconditions of capitalism because they *create* and develop markets for commodities such as labour-power and land. Once the job is done, we can stop talking about enclosures (or primitive accumulation) and need to talk about 'capital logic'. 'Primitive accumulation' and 'capital logic' are thus distinctly separated, and therefore become the subject matter of two distinct *Marxist disciplines*. Marxist historians debate issues of genealogy and 'transition' to capitalism in ways which are linked to the issue of primitive accumulation or enclosures. On the other hand, Marxist economists debate the intricate issues of 'capital logic' such as questions of value, accumulation, crises, as if the social practices in front of their noses have nothing to do with real and ongoing enclosures (since, in their framework, these have *already occurred* some time in the past).

This framework is extremely problematic, both theoretically and politically. Theoretically, because, as I will argue in this paper, enclosures are a continuous characteristic of 'capital logic' once we understand capital not as a totalised *system*,[8] *but* as a *force* with totalising drives that exists together with other forces that act as limit on it. This not only at the fringe of capital's reach, in the strategies of imperialism for the creation of new markets. Even if we conceptualise the domain of capital as not having a territorial outside, as in

to capitalism published in *Science and Society* 1950–3, also acknowledges Dobb's 'excellent treatment of the essential problems of the period of original accumulation' (Sweezy 1950, p. 157). The now historic debate on 'transition' (collected in Hilton et al. 1978) and its later developments and transfigurations such as the Brenner debate in the pages of the journal *Past and Present* of the 1970s (collected in Aston and Philpin (eds.) 1985) and later exchanges in *Science and Society* (Gottlieb 1984; Laibman 1984; Sweezy 1986; McLennan 1986) is characterised by a general and shared acceptance of this historical definition of primitive accumulation. It is fair to point out however, that the approach by Samir Amin (1974, p. 3) is different from Dobb's treatment of primitive accumulation as an historically prior period and is closer to the notion of inherent and continuous primitive accumulation that occurs through what Amin defines as transfer of value within the world economy. Another interpretation within this general framework may also include Wallerstein's notion of a world-system, see Wallerstein 1979. Differently from the approach here taken, the continuous character of primitive accumulation in these accounts seem to stress only 'objective' mechanisms of accumulation and circulation of capital.

[8] The capital*ism* that Marx *never* refers to, referring instead to the capitalist mode of production. See Smith 1996. This opens the way to conceptualising its coexistence with other *modes* of production, other modes of doing things and relating to each other, hence to regarding the social field as a strategic field of relations among forces.

Empire,[9] there is a theoretical and political need to recognise the central role of enclosures as part of the world we live in. In this world, enclosures are one of the strategic horizons clashing with others. It is either capital that makes the world *through commodification and enclosures*, or it is the rest of us – whoever that 'us' is – that makes the world through counter-enclosures and commons. The net results of the clashes among these social forces Marx called 'class struggle', while Polanyi theorised it in terms of the 'double movement of society'.

The capital-logic framework is also problematic politically, because the confinement of enclosures to a question of genealogy *within* a linear model of capitalist development paralyses Marxian-inspired contributions on the question of 'alternatives'. Paralysis is understood here as state of powerlessness or incapacity to act. Indeed, in the linear model of historical development inherited and practised by classical Marxism, the alternative to capital*ism* can only be another 'ism'. The ongoing struggles for commons within the current global justice and solidarity movement are thus not appreciated and problematised for what they are: the active development of alternatives to capital. Marxian-inspired thinking cannot add its weight to intellectual and political endeavours to shape alternatives in the here-and-now because its framework is *for* another 'ism' projected onto an indeterminate future, and generally defined by a model of power that needs a political élite to tell the rest of us why power cannot be exercised from the ground-up, starting from now.[10] Thus, while current movements around the world are practising, producing and fighting for a variety of different commons – thus posing the strategic question of their political articulation – traditional Marxist theoreticians cannot conceptualise these movements in terms of categories familiar to them. They thus endeavour to *reduce* these movements to these familiar categories, and when they do that, their contribution to the rich debate on alternatives is poor indeed – too often a repetition of the simple mantra: 'one solution, revolution'.

This paper is divided in three sections. First, I propose an alternative reading of Marx's analysis of 'primitive accumulation', one that shows the continuing relevance of 'enclosures' as constituent element of capitalist relations and accumulation. In this perspective, enclosures are characteristics of capital's

[9] See Hardt and Negri 2000.

[10] For a discussion of this model of power – understood as 'power over' or *potestas*, vis-à-vis another emancipatory model of power, as 'power to', or *potentia*, see Holloway 2002.

strategies at *all* levels of capitalist development. Second, I briefly propose an analytical framework to study current new enclosures. Third, I offer a few concluding reflections on the question capitalist enclosures as 'discursive practices'.

II. Marx and the continuous character of enclosures[11]

II.i. *Definitions*

According to the traditional interpretation, Marx's concept of primitive accumulation[12] indicates the historical process that gave birth to the preconditions of a capitalist mode of production. These preconditions refer mainly to the creation of a section of the population with no other means of livelihood but their labour-power, to be sold in a nascent labour market, and to the accumulation of capital that may be used for nascent industries. In this conception, the adjective 'primitive' corresponds to a clear-cut temporal dimension that separates the past understood as feudal*ism* from the future understood as capital*ism*. However, by focusing on a definition of capital as social relation rather than as capital as stock, as in Smith,[13] Marx's definition of primitive accumulation leads to another possible interpretation. For primitive accumulation to be a precondition of accumulation, it must be a precondition of *the exercise of capital's power*. The latter is nothing else than human production carried on through the relation of separation that characterises capital's production. With his discourse on 'primitive accumulation', Marx is thus able to point out the presupposition of this capital-*relation*: 'the capital-relation presupposes a complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realisation of their labour'.[14] From this, it follows that:

> the process . . . which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations,

[11] This section is a development and refinement of the argument proposed in De Angelis 2001.

[12] In this paper, I use the terms 'primitive accumulation' and 'enclosure' as interchangeable theoretical terms.

[13] See Perelman 2000.

[14] Marx 1976a, p. 874.

> whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers.[15]

Thus, so-called 'primitive accumulation . . . is nothing other than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production'.[16]

A careful examination of Marx's definition of primitive accumulation allows us to argue that although enclosures, or primitive accumulation, define a question of genealogy, for capital the problem of genealogy presents itself *continuously*. There are two reasons why this is the case.

(i) Because of what 'primitive accumulation' means within the context of capital accumulation, that is, *ex-novo separation* between producers and means of production.

(ii) Because of the fact that this *ex-novo separation*, this qualitative jump, constitutes itself necessarily as a social *force* in opposition to *other* social forces. The line of confrontation is the limit that capital must transcend, or, seen from the other side, the space liberated from capital's priorities, within which alternatives to capital can emerge and develop.

Let us examine these in more detail.

II.ii. *'Enclosures' as ex-novo separation between producers and means of production*

There are three central points that I believe are key to an understanding of primitive accumulation which is coherent with Marx's theory of capitalist accumulation. The first is that the *separation* of producers and means of production is a common characteristic of *both* accumulation and primitive accumulation. The second is that this *separation* is a central category (if not *the* central category) of Marx's critique of political economy. The third is that the difference between accumulation and primitive accumulation is not a substantive one; rather, it is a difference in the conditions and forms in which this *separation* is implemented. Marx refers to this as 'ex-novo' separation, requiring extra-economic force to be carried out. These three points lead to

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Marx 1976a, pp. 874–5. We can also find indications of Marx's emphasis on class relations in the structure of this section of *Capital*. Marx dedicates two chapters of this section to the formation of the working class (Chapters 27 and 28) and three chapters to the formation of the bourgeoisie (Chapters 29, 30 and 31).

a different understanding of the timing of primitive accumulation. Let us briefly review them in turn.

Separation applies to both accumulation and primitive accumulation

Marx is extremely precise on this. In Volume III of *Capital*, he stresses that accumulation proper is nothing else than primitive accumulation – which Marx defined in Volume I in terms of the *separation* – 'raised to a higher power'.[17] In the *Theories of Surplus Value* he is even more precise, writing that accumulation, 'reproduces the *separation* and the independent existence of material wealth as against labour on an ever increasing scale',[18] and therefore 'merely presents as a *continuous process* what in *primitive accumulation* appears as a distinct historical process'.[19] Again, in the *Grundrisse*, he states: 'Once this *separation* is given, the production process can only produce it anew, reproduce it, and reproduce it on an expanded scale'.[20]

The meaning and centrality of 'separation' in Marx's theory

What does 'separation' mean? In the context of accumulation, the separation of producers and means of production means essentially that the 'objective conditions of living labour appear as *separated, independent* values opposite living labour capacity as subjective being, which therefore appears to them only as a value of *another kind*'.[21] Through enclosures, in other words, objects rule subjects, deeds command the doing,[22] and the doing of human activity is channelled into forms that are compatible with the priority of capital's accumulation. This separation is clear in the fetishised categories of mainstream economics. To call 'labour' a factor of production is to call human activity, *life process*, a means, and the objects produced, the end.

At the social level, this separation means the positing of living labour and conditions of production as *independent values* standing in opposition to each other.[23] This *separation*, therefore, is a fundamental condition for Marx's theory

[17] Marx 1981, p. 354.
[18] Marx 1971, p. 315. My emphasis.
[19] Marx 1971, p. 271 and pp. 311–2.
[20] Marx 1974, p. 462. My emphasis.
[21] Marx 1974, p. 461.
[22] See Holloway 2002.
[23] 'The objective conditions of living labour capacity are presupposed as having an existence independent of it, as the objectivity of a subject distinct from living labour capacity and standing independently over against it; the reproduction and *realisation*,

of reification, of the transformation of subject into object. It is through this *separation* that 'the objective conditions of labour attain a subjective existence *vis-à-vis* living labour capacity'[24] and living labour, the 'subjective being' *par excellence*, is turned into a thing among other things, 'it is merely a *value* of a particular use value *alongside* the conditions of its own realisation as *values* of another use value'.[25]

The idea of *separation* therefore strictly echoes Marx's analysis of alienated labour, as labour alienated from the object of production, the means of production, the product, and other producers.[26] The opposition implicit in this definition is, of course, a clash of opposites, expressing a 'specific relationship of production, a specific social relationship in which the owners of the conditions of production treat living labour-power as a *thing*'.[27] These same owners are regarded only as 'capital personified', in which capital is understood as having 'one sole driving force, the drive to valorise itself, to create surplus-value, to make its constant part, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus labour'.[28]

The concept of *separation* enables us to clarify Marx's reference to capital not as thing (as in Adam Smith), but as a social relation and consequently, of capital accumulation as accumulation of social relations: 'The capitalist process of production . . . seen as a total, connected process, i.e. a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself; on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer'.[29]

Ex-novo separation as extra-economic force

Having defined the common character of both accumulation *and* primitive accumulation, we must turn to what constitutes their distinctiveness. This is

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i.e. the expansion of these *objective conditions*, is therefore, at the same time, their own reproduction and new production as the wealth of an alien subject indifferently and independently standing over against labour capacity. What is reproduced and produced anew is not only the *presence* of these objective conditions of living labour, *but also their presence as independent values, i.e. values belonging to an alien subject, confronting this living labour capacity*', Marx 1974, p. 462. Marx's emphasis.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] See Marx 1975.

[27] Marx 1976b, p. 989. For a more detailed analysis of the connection between reification and commodity fetishism in Marx's analysis, see De Angelis 1996.

[28] Marx 1976a, p. 342.

[29] Marx 1976a, p. 724.

located in the genealogical character of 'primitive' accumulation. As opposed to accumulation proper, what 'may be called primitive accumulation . . . is the historical basis, instead of the historical result, of specifically capitalist production'.[30] While sharing the same principle – *separation* – the two concepts point at two different *conditions* of existence. The latter implies the *ex-novo production* of the *separation*, while the latter implies the *reproduction* – on a greater scale – of the same *separation*:

> It is in fact this divorce between the conditions of labour on the one hand and the producers on the other that forms the concept of capital, as this arises with primitive accumulation . . . subsequently appearing as a constant process in the accumulation and concentration of capital, before it is finally expressed here as the centralisation of capitals already existing in few hands, and the decapitalisation of many.[31]

The key difference thus resides, for Marx, not so much in the timing of the occurrence of this separation – although a sequential element is naturally always present – but rather in the *conditions, circumstances and context* in which this separation is enforced. In the *Grundrisse*, for example, Marx stresses the distinction between the conditions of capital's arising (becoming), and the conditions of capital's existence (being). The former, 'disappear as real capital arises', while the latter do not appear as 'conditions of its arising, but as results of its presence'.[32] Marx is emphasising here a simple but crucial point: 'Once developed historically, capital itself creates the conditions of its existence (not as conditions for its arising, but as results of its being)',[33] and therefore it drives to reproduce (at increasing scale) the separation between means of production and producers. However, the *ex-novo* production of the separation implies social forces that are posited outside the realm of impersonal 'pure' economic laws. The *ex-novo* separation of means of production and producers corresponds to the *ex-novo* creation of the *opposition* between the two, to the *ex-novo* foundation of the specific alien character acquired by labour in capitalism.

This is the element of novelty, of 'originality' that Marx seems to indicate when he stresses that while accumulation relies *primarily* on 'the silent

[30] Marx 1976a, p. 775.
[31] Marx 1981, pp. 354–5.
[32] Marx 1974, pp. 460–1.
[33] Marx 1974, p. 459.

compulsion of economic relations [which] sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker', in the case of primitive accumulation the separation is imposed *primarily* through '[d]irect extra-economic force',[34] such as the state[35] or particular sections of social classes.[36] In other words, primitive accumulation, for Marx, is a social process in which separation appears as a crystal-clear relation of expropriation, a relation that has not yet taken the fetishistic character assumed by capital's normalisation, or the 'ordinary run of things'. In other words, borrowing from Foucault, it is a separation that has not been normalised . . . yet, or a normalisation of separation that has not been challenged . . . yet.

Timing of the ex-novo separation and the strategic character of enclosures

When does *ex-novo separation* occur? If you believe in capital*ism* the answer is very simple: it occurs *before* capital*ism*. However, the fact is that people do not live in capital*ism*. People live in life-worlds, often overlapping. For example: the factory, the school, the neighbourhood, the family, cyberspace – the realm of significant relations to objects and to other people. What capital (not capital*ism*) does is that it attempts to create life-worlds in its own image (such as the factory) or to colonise existing ones, to put them to work for its priorities and drives. And it has done this since the beginning of its history to different degrees, and, at any given historical moment, different life-worlds are subject to different degrees of colonisation. Capital will not stop in its attempt to colonise until either some *other* social force will make it stop – such as, for example, socialised humanity – or until it has colonised all of life. So, paradoxically, the true realisation of capital*ism* coincides with the end of life (and, therefore, of any alternative to capitalism!)

Enclosures bring about the *ex-novo* character of separation as capital's entry point for the commodification of new spheres of life. *Ex-novo* separation occurs in two instances. (i) Either when capital identifies new spheres of life that it may colonise with its priorities. The list here is endless, from land enclosures, to the enclosures of water resources through privatisation, to enclosures of knowledge through enforcement of intellectual property rights. (ii) Or, when there are other social forces that are able to identify social spaces that have

[34] Marx 1976a, pp. 899–900.
[35] Marx 1976a, p. 900.
[36] Marx 1976a, p. 879.

been previously normalised by capital's commodity production as a possible space of an alternative to commodities, such as commons. For example, the definition of global eco-system as a *global common* arises out of a contested process of identification of nature as a commons and not simply as an exploitable resource. In other words, it is through the process (albeit contradictory) of the political constitution of humanity as global community that it is possible to identify the eco-system as global commons. This, of course, opens the political space that allows us to *problematise* the forms of interaction within the global social body.

In both cases, capital has to devise *strategies* of enclosure, either by promoting new areas of commodification in the face of resistance, or by preserving old areas of commodification against *ex-novo* attacks launched by 'commoners'. In both cases, capital needs a discourse of enclosures and consequent discursive practices that extend and/or preserve commodity production.[37] Therefore, around the issue of enclosures and their opposite – commons – we have a foundational entry point to a radical discourse on alternatives.

II.ii. *Continuity, social conflict and alternatives*

The interpretation of Marx's analysis of primitive accumulation presented thus far has revealed two basic and interconnected points. First, primitive accumulation is the *ex-novo* production of the separation between producers and means of production. Second, this implies that enclosures define a strategic terrain among social forces. The actual playing out of these strategies in given forms depends, of course, on the historical, geographical, cultural and social context.

The reduction of the category of primitive accumulation to a historical (rather than political-theoretical) category is a confusion certainly due to the fact that primitive accumulation also occurs *before* the capitalist mode of production is established as dominant mode of organising social reproduction. But the political-theoretical understanding of the concept emphasises that, if a temporal dimension exists, it lies in the fact that enclosures are the *basis*, the presupposition, and the necessary precondition for accumulation of capital to occur. It must be noted that this last definition is Marx's own and it is

[37] In the case of environmental commons for example, the discourse of carbon credits and the creation and consequent development of markets in 'pollution rights' stands in opposition to the discourse of the environment as global commons.

more general than the one adopted by the classical 'historical interpretation', and therefore includes it.

This is because, if primitive accumulation is defined in terms of the preconditions it satisfies for the accumulation of capital, its temporal dimension refers to two things. First, it indicates the period of the establishment of a capitalist mode of production as a dominant mode of production. Second, *at the same time*, it refers to the problematic of the preservation and expansion of the capitalist mode of production *any time the producers set themselves up as an obstacle to the reproduction of their separation from the means of production,* a separation understood in the terms described above.

In other words, capital's overcoming of barriers must not be seen as *the* necessary result of its dynamic, but both as conditioned result and necessary *aspiration* embedded in its drives and motivation as well as in its survival instinct vis-à-vis emerging alternatives to capital. History is open, both for capital and for the rest of us who are struggling for a different life on the planet.

Another way to put it would be in terms of Karl Polanyi's concept of 'double movement'.[38] On one side, there is the historical movement of the market, a movement that has no inherent limits and that therefore threatens society's very existence. On the other, there is society's propensity to defend itself, and therefore to create institutions for its own protection. In Polanyi's terms, the continuous element of Marx's primitive accumulation could be identified as those social processes or sets of strategies aimed at dismantling those institutions that protect society from the market. The crucial element of continuity in the reformulation of Marx's theory of primitive accumulation arises, therefore, once we acknowledge the *other* movement of society. Of course, unlike Polanyi, we believe the agents of this 'double movement' are the grassroots, not simply 'states'.

Thus, within Marx's theoretical and critical framework, the divorce embedded in the definition of primitive accumulation can be understood not only as the origin of capital vis-à-vis precapitalist social relations, but also as a reassertion of capital's priorities vis-à-vis those social forces that contest this *separation*. Thus, precapitalist spaces of autonomy (such as the common land of the English yeomen or the economies of African societies targeted by slave merchants) are not the only targets of primitive accumulation strategies.

[38] See Polanyi 1944.

Enclosure strategies also target any given balance of power among classes that constitutes 'rigidity' – that is, a resistance against the further process of capitalist accumulation, or a reversal of that process. If we conceive social contestation as a continuous element of capitalist relations of production, capital must continuously engage in strategies of primitive accumulation to recreate the 'basis' of accumulation itself.

This element of the continuity of primitive accumulation is not only consistent with Marx's empirical analysis of processes of primitive accumulation, but seems also to be contained in his theoretical framework. This is because accumulation involves primitive accumulation 'to a higher degree', and 'once capital exists, the capitalist mode of production itself evolves in such a way that it maintains and reproduces this *separation* on a constantly increasing scale *until the historical reversal takes place*'.[39] Thus, just as the 'historical reversal' poses itself as a *limit* to accumulation, so strategies of enclosures pose themselves as a challenge – from capital's perspective – to that 'historical reversal'. To the extent that social conflict creates bottlenecks in the accumulation process by reducing the distance between producers and means of production, any strategy used to reverse this movement of association can rightly be categorised as 'primitive accumulation' – and this is consistent with both Marx's definitions and with his theory.

Marx's text is quite enlightening on this. The key difference between what he calls 'the ordinary run of things'[40] – that is, the normalised silent compulsion of economic relations – and 'primitive accumulation', seems to be the existence of 'a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws'.[41] Therefore, insofar as the working class accepts capital's requirement as natural laws, accumulation does not need primitive accumulation. However, working-

[39] Marx 1971, p. 271. My emphasis.

[40] Accumulation relies on 'the silent compulsion of economic relations [which] sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker'. In this case, '[d]irect extra-economic force is still of course used, but only in exceptional cases. In the ordinary run of things, the worker can be left to the "natural laws of production", i.e. it is possible to rely on his dependence on capital, which springs from the conditions of production themselves, and is guaranteed in perpetuity by them'. Things are different 'during the historical genesis of capitalist production'. In this case, '[t]he rising bourgeoisie needs the power of the state, and uses it to "regulate" wages, i.e. to force them into the limits suitable for making a profit, to lengthen the working day, and to keep the worker himself at his historical level of dependence. This is an essential aspect of so-called primitive accumulation', Marx 1976a, pp. 899–900.

[41] Ibid.

class struggles represent precisely a rupture in that acceptance, a non-conformity to the laws of supply and demand, a refusal of subordination to the 'ordinary run of things', the positing of 'an outside' to capital's norm, an 'otherness' to the already codified. This also implies a rupture in the economic discourse, understood as discursive practice that constructs capitalist economic action and acts as a factor in the (re-)establishment and maintenance of the normalised rationality embedded in the 'ordinary run of things', or the 'natural laws of capitalist production'.[42] It is against this concrete and discursive challenge of the normality of capital that 'extra-economic means' are deployed:

> Every combination between employed and unemployed disturbs the 'pure' action of this law. But on the other hand, as soon as . . . adverse circumstances prevent the creation of an industrial reserve army, and with it the absolute dependence of the working class upon the capitalist class, capital, along with its platitudinous Sancho Panza, rebels against the 'sacred' law of supply and demand, and tries to make up for its inadequacies by forcible means.[43]

It follows, therefore, that not only is 'primitive accumulation, . . . the historical basis, instead of the historical result, of specifically capitalist production',[44] but it also acquires a continuous character – dependent on the inherent continuity of social conflict – within capitalist production.

III. Enclosures: an analytical framework

If enclosures are a continuous element of capital accumulation, what tools do we use to analyse them? In this section, I suggest an analytical framework with which to study and understand the relevance of new enclosures based on three components: *processes of identification, types* and *modes* of enclosure. By 'processes of identification', I mean to raise the question of *how* and what social forces are behind the need to enclose new areas of social life. By 'types

[42] '[a]s soon as the workers learn the secret of why it happens that the more they work, the more alien wealth they produce . . . as soon as, by setting up trade unions, etc., they try to organize planned co-operation between the employed and the unemployed in order to obviate or to weaken the ruinous effects of this natural law of capitalist production on their class, so soon does capital and its sycophant, political economy, cry out at the infringement of the "eternal" and so to speak "sacred" law of supply and demand', Marx 1976a, p. 793.

[43] Marx 1976a, p. 794.

[44] Marx 1976a, p. 775.

of enclosure', I mean to raise the question of their taxonomy. Finally, by 'modes of enclosure', I intend to draw attention to the plurality of methods used by capital to carry on enclosures and the plurality of social agents involved in these processes.

III.i. *Processes of identification of the space of enclosure*

As we have seen, the emphasis on the 'divorcing' of people from the means of production opens the way for understanding 'primitive accumulation' as part of the continuous process of capitalist accumulation, rather than simply at one point in time in the past. It is a continuous process that is rooted in capital's drive to continuous expansion – accumulation proper. Both accumulation and 'primitive' accumulation pose capital as a social force that must transcend a limit. But while, for accumulation, the limit is merely quantitative, for primitive accumulation or enclosure, the limit that capital must transcend is qualitative. With enclosure, a new social *space* for accumulation is created, and this creation begins with the *identification of a concrete limit* and the deployment of strategies for its transcendence. The force identifying this limit may either be capital – in its attempt to colonise new spheres of life – or other social forces set in opposition to it. In either case, enclosures emerge as strategic problem *for* capital every time capital sets itself to transcend a limit, whether this limit is identified by capital itself or by those life-reclaiming forces that attempt to decommodify spheres of life. If capital must identify a limit in order to transcend it, our critique must identify capital's processes of identification in order to expose them and devise strategies to limit capital's transcendence of these limits, and also in order to root political practices and projected alternatives in the space thus opened.

There are two main types of *limits* that capital identifies in its drive to transcend them. One that we may call, *the limit as frontier*. The other we may call *the limit as political recomposition*.

(i) *Limit as frontier*. The frontier presents itself as the border dividing the colonised from the colonisable. Capital's identification of a frontier implies the identification of a space of social life that is still relatively uncolonised by capitalist relations of production and modes of activity. From this perspective, it is indifferent whether this space is clearly posed 'outside' existing capital's domains – as in the definition of a potential colony in the discursive practice of imperial*ism*, or within its interstices, inside

'Empire' – as Hardt and Negri believe.[45] In either case, it is capital that identifies a frontier, and the identification of this frontier implies the creation of a space of enclosures, a horizon within which policies and practices promoting further separation between people and means of production in new spheres of life. In this case, the initiative of the identification of the limit and of the setting out of concrete strategies of enclosure comes from capital. The *strategic* character of this identification is clearly due to the fact that the identification of a space of enclosure implies the attempt to overcome necessary resistance by what capital regards as 'enclosable' subjects. All classical examples of enclosures, such as land enclosures, as well as those enclosing entitlements won through past battles fall in this category. Other more insidious practices also fall in this category: for example, enclosures of cultural commons or a hegemonic redefinition of discourse. The successful deployment of strategies of enclosure results here in a process of *deepening* of capital's relations of production across the social body.

(ii) *Limit as political recomposition*. Here, the limit is identified *for* capital by a social force that poses its activity in opposition to it. Any time movements constrain the capitalist process of production by raising a social barrier to the endless drive to commodify and accumulate, by opening up a space of entitlements and commons disconnected from market logic, capital is faced with the need and strategic problem of dismantling this barrier (or co-opting it). In this case, the limit emerges as a political problem for capital. It is, in a sense, what Polanyi referred to as 'dual movement' of modern liberal society, although Polanyi saw this movement mainly through its institutionalisation.

In the first case thus, the limit that capital must transcend is defined by capital itself. In the second case, it is defined *for* capital by a force that opposes it. In either case, the fact that enclosures represent a limit that capital must overcome for its survival, opens an important chapter for the thinking of alternatives beyond capital. The space of alternatives to capital has to go through the opening up of counter-enclosures, of spaces of commons. The *alternatives* to capital pose a *limit* to accumulation by setting up rigidities and liberating spaces. In a word, alternatives, whatever they are, act as 'counter-

[45] See Hardt and Negri 2000.

enclosures'. This, of course, opens up the question of capital's co-optation of alternatives, something it is not possible to discuss here.

III.ii. *Types of enclosures*

In the context of contemporary dynamics, the many types of 'new enclosures'[46] are defined through both of these two processes of identification. Enclosures are identified both by processes of commodification and by processes of decommodification; by strategies that go under the name, for example, of 'privatisation'; or by class strategies that roll enclosures back through practices that produce commons and reinvent communities. In the first case, they include attacks on conditions of life by a World Bank-funded dam in India threatening hundred of thousands of farming communities; cuts in social spending to pay for servicing international debt in a country of the global South; cuts in social expenditures in the UK threatening hundreds of thousands of families. In the second case, as in St George's Hill during the English Civil War,[47] or currently in Brazil in the waves of land occupations,[48] or in the *de facto* mass illegal bypassing of intellectual property rights in music and software production and the establishment of 'creative commons', it is possible to identify enclosures as an external limit, posed by capital, to the *production of*

[46] See for example Federici 1992, and the other contributions in the 1992 issue of *Midnight Notes* on the 'New Enclosures'. See also Caffentzis 1995.

[47] On Sunday 1 April 1649 a small group of poor men collected on St. George's Hill just outside London, at the edge of the Windsor Great Forest, hunting ground of the king and the royalty. They started digging the land as a 'symbolic assumption of ownership of the common lands' (Hill 1972, p. 110). Within ten days, their number grew to four or five thousand. One year later, 'the colony had been forcibly dispersed, huts and furniture burnt, the Diggers chased away from the area' (Hill 1972, p. 113). This episode of English history could be consistently added to Marx's Chapter 28 of *Capital*, Volume I, entitled 'Bloody Legislation against the Expropriated'. Yet, while most of that chapter deals with Tudor legislation aimed at criminalising and repressing popular behaviour induced by the expropriation of land (vagrancy, begging, theft), the Digger episode goes a step further, by making clear that primitive accumulation acquires meaning vis-à-vis patterns of resistance and struggle. This episode entails the active and organised activity of a mass of urban and landless poor aimed at the direct re-appropriation of land for its transformation into common land. Paraphrasing Marx, it was an activity aimed at '*associating* the producer with the means of production'. It is clear therefore that the force used by the authorities to disperse the Diggers can be understood, consistently with Marx's theory, as an act of 'primitive accumulation', because it reintroduces the separation between producers and means of production. Although Marx did not include this episode in his treatment of primitive accumulation, in Chapter 28, he does refer to a handful of cases in which struggles are counterposed to state legislation which either represent a 'retreat' of capital with regard to these struggles or an attempt to contain them.

[48] See Branford and Rocha 2002.

commons. It is this barrier that political and social movements need to overcome through the production of commons, and often this production is the result of practices of civil disobedience and direct action, rather than of traditional party politics. Also, it is clear that these productions of commons, in the context in which capital aims at pervading the entire social field, are *at the same time* struggles against enclosures. The awareness and *de facto* identification of enclosures thus arises either because the production of commons problematises existing established property rights (as past enclosures), or because the struggles to defend commons established in the past problematise the threat of new enclosures attempted by states. In other words, the extent to which we are aware of enclosures is the extent to which we are confronted by them. In all other social interactions still rooted in commons of different types (take, for example, language), in commons that are not immediately threatened by enclosures, we live our lives undisturbed. Here, we are only preoccupied by the question of *how* we relate to each other within these commons (say, how do we speak to each other), and not whether the 'what' that constitutes the material basis of this 'how' is a common or not. We take that for granted.

As we have seen, there is a vast critical literature on processes of privatisation, marketisation, cuts in entitlements both North and South, effects of structural adjustment policies, biopiracy, intellectual property rights, resource privatisation, and so on. However, not much effort has been devoted to pulling together these and other types of enclosures into a coherent whole, rooted in a critique of capital. The broad picture which I present derives from an understanding of the role of enclosure from a capitalist-systemic point of view, that is from the role which enclosures play in the accumulation of surplus-value by capital (the M-C-M' process). From this perspective, all these different types of enclosures, and the consequent enclosure strategies, share a common character: *the forcible separation of people from whatever access to social wealth they have which is not mediated by competitive markets and money as capital*. Where such access exists, it empowers people in that it gives them a degree of autonomy and independence from the corporate sharks of the world economy and from competitive market relations. New enclosures thus are directed towards the fragmentation and destruction of 'commons', that is, social spheres of life whose main characteristic is to provide various degrees of protection from the market.

On the other hand, a typology of new commons is starting to be debated. Various advocates are proposing different kinds of commons as solutions to

a variety of problems and issues arising in the world economy. These, for example, include, civic commons,[49] environmental commons, natural resources commons (such as water), common heritage resources, and so on.[50] Often, the identification of these types of commons is made possible by the acknowledgment of struggles against their enclosure, so that these struggles have begun to be seen in their positive and constituent content, as struggles for *new commons*.[51] For example, natural commons are set in opposition to the privatisation of water. Life and knowledge commons are set in opposition to patenting and targeting the genetic structure, indigenous knowledge of plant variety, and bioprospecting. Finally, public services as commons are posed in opposition to privatisation and GATS.[52]

Although the counterposing of enclosures and commons emerges from the current literature, I do not think the radicalism of its implications is sufficiently theorised. This for two reasons. First, because the enclosing force is generally discursively identified merely in terms of *policies* (such as neoliberal policies), rather than these being seen as a particular historical form of capital's inherent drive. In saying this, I am not dismissing the importance of recognising this distinctive dimension of neoliberalism – on the contrary. Those Marxists who, in the many public fora of social movements and civil society (such as the World Social Forum or the European Social Forum), remind us that the problem is not neoliberalism but 'capitalism', often make a doctrinaire connection, not a political-strategic one. Because the term 'neoliberalism' does identify a capitalist strategy in a particular historical moment, an effective and intelligent discourse on alternatives to capital must be able to *articulate* the historically contingent with the immanent drive of capital, which is common to various historical periods. While the 'doctrinaire' Marxists fail to make this articulation by dismissing the historical forms of strategies in preference to 'contents', many other approaches within the movement emphasise instead historical forms with no articulation to 'content'. Thus, secondly, in this latter approach, commons are often seen as alternative 'policies', and not as social practices that are *alternatives* to capital (in the first place by posing a limit to it, *that at the same time* open a space for alternatives and their problematisation).

[49] See McMurtry 2002.
[50] See IFG 2002.
[51] See Klein 2001, and 2003.
[52] See IFG 2000.

Third, as modes of accessing social resources that are not mediated by the market, currently emerging discourses on commons can be the entry point for broader discourses that help redefine the priorities of social reproduction. But, in order to do so, these political discourses must be open to the possibility of opposing *all* types of enclosures, both old and new, both those stratified and normalised to different degrees by economic discourse as well as those recently emerging. This requires a process of identification of capital's enclosure through political recomposition, as discussed above.

In any case, as a way of illustration, let us confine our attention to types of new enclosures. In the first column of Table 1, I offer a non-exhaustive list of types of enclosures that I will discuss in the next section.

Table 1. A Taxonomy of Types and Modes of New Enclosures

Types	Modes
Land and resources	• land policies: through direct expropriation (e.g. Mexico's *ejido*) or indirect means (e.g. use of cash-tax); • externality: land pollution (e.g. Ogoni land in Nigeria; intense shrimp production in India); • against re-appropriation (e.g. against MST in Brazil); • water privatisation (e.g. Bolivia); • neoliberal war.
Urban spaces	• urban design; • road building.
Social commons	• cuts in social spending; • cuts in entitlements.
Knowledge & life	• intellectual property rights; • marketisation of education.

III.iii. *Modes of enclosing*

How does this ex-novo separation occur? I think that there are two general *modes* of implementation of enclosures. (i) Enclosures as a conscious imposition of 'power over'. (ii) Enclosures as a by-product of the accumulation process. In the first case, we are talking about conscious strategies that go under many names (privatisation, export promotion, budget austerity, and so on). The enclosure by Act of Parliament that become common in eighteenth-century England is the archetypal example of this type of enclosure. In the second case, enclosures are the unintended by-product of accumulation. In the language of mainstream economists, this kind of enclosure may go under the name of

'negative externalities', that is costs that are not included in the market price of a good, because the costs are incurred by social agents who are external to the producing firm. Pollution is an example of an externality cost, to the extent that producers are not the ones who suffer from the damage caused by pollution. Others have referred to these as 'the power of splitting' that accompany processes of accumulation due to the fact that

> industrialization is not an independent force . . . but the hammer with which nature is smashed for the sake of capital. Industrial logging destroys forests; industrial fishing destroys fisheries; industrial chemistry makes Frankenfood; industrial use of fossil fuels creates the greenhouse effect, and so forth – all for the sake of value-expansion.[53]

In terms of this analysis, it is not only the question of resource depletion and pollution, but of the role that resource depletion and pollution and all other so called 'externalities' have in promoting the bankruptcy of communities of independent producers, from indigenous people to farmers: resource depletion seen here as means of enclosure. Also, 'negative externalities' have an archetypal model in the English enclosure of land in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the landed aristocracy took their horses and dogs across fields while hunting foxes and ruined the crops of small farmers.[54] These agents of 'negative externalities' and destroyers of small farmers' livelihoods were the ancestors of those that in Britain today claim to defend the 'traditional way of life of the countryside' in the face of a parliamentary bill against foxhunting.

There are, of course, many concrete instances and ways in which these two modes are implemented. The second column in Table 1 provides a synoptic list of examples.

Land can be (and has been) expropriated in different ways; by direct means, as in the classic case of English and colonial enclosures, or by indirect means. In the latter case, for example, in many countries in the South, where the population is largely dependent on farming, the imposition of a tax payable in cash may act as an instrument of expropriation, by forcing mostly self-sufficient farmers into allocating part of their land to the production of so-called 'cash crops' – a good produced for the sole aim of acquiring cash –

[53] See Kovel 2002.
[54] See Perelman 2000.

instead of products that would serve for people's subsistence. The same result is attained in many of the large development projects such as the construction of dams (as in Malaysia, India, China), or other means to promote cash crops. Another form of new land enclosure, is that which results from environmental damage caused by multinationals.[55] Another example is the intense shrimp production occurring in some Indian and other East Asian regions. Shrimps are produced for the world market using the intensive industrial methods of aquaculture. These consist of large pools of salt waters in the vicinity of coastal regions. In time, the salt water penetrates the soil, thus polluting the water supplies and making the land of local farmers unusable for subsistence crops. Again, in this case of modern enclosures, the result is pressure to abandon the land.

Just as the old enclosures were accompanied by struggles, so also in the face of these new types of enclosure, people organise themselves and build forms of resistance. Two important examples are the Zapatistas' struggle in Mexico, catalysed by the attempt by the government to sell the common land traditionally held by the indigenous population [*ejido*],[56] and the movement for re-appropriation of land in Brazil by the 'Sem Tierra' movement.[57] War and, in particular, recent forms of 'neoliberal' war have also been discussed in terms of their effect not just as enclosure of land, but of many other types of resources as well.[58]

In order to show the pervasiveness of the new enclosures, I will also mention here some cases of urban enclosure. Urban design, in fact, is a site of important attempts to enclose human and social behaviour in forms and patterns compatible with the accumulation process and the profit motive. For example, the lack of public benches in public sites such as the large main hall of Waterloo

[55] For example, petroleum extraction by Shell in Nigeria has been condemned as the source of land pollution and consequent endangering of the livelihood of villagers and farmers, given the effect of spillages in damaging crops and sources of drinking water (streams), reducing soil fertility, polluting ponds thus threatening animal livelihood, destroying biodiversity, and so on. For a general background discussion of this case, see the resources in Web 7. For a general discussion of the link between oil production and environmental damage (and consequent threat of enclosure for those who depend on the ruined resources and their struggles), see the resources in Web 8.

[56] See for example Holloway 1998. For an analysis of the impact of the Zapatista method of struggle outside Chiapas, see Midnight Notes Collective 2001, and De Angelis 2000.

[57] See Branford and Rocha 2002.

[58] Federici 2002, and Caffentzis 1983/2004.

station in London can be puzzling, unless we understand it in terms of the attempt to control vagrants (which takes us back to the rationale of Tudor 'bloody legislation' following the early enclosures), the marginalisation of vagrants to an 'invisible site' – or simply as an attempt to turn tired passengers into consumers by forcing them into nearby cafes. Even the satisfaction of human primary biological functions has become the object of enclosure in train stations and other public spaces in the West. To get access to a toilet we either have to become customers in local establishments, or pay up directly for the privilege. (The alternative here is of course to reclaim McDonald's and other fast-food outlets for conversion into public toilets). Also, public benches 'enclosed' by arm-rests as in London, or with a convex surface as in Los Angeles as noted by Mike Davis,[59] find a rationale as instruments of social engineering, preventing our modern 'vagrants' (especially the homeless) from stretching out their legs and reinforcing the 'correct' and 'acceptable' social behaviour, even when sitting and resting. Enclosing the space of benches keeps the city moving.

By 'social commons', I mean those commons that have been erected as a result of past social movements and later formalised by institutional practices. A classic example is the body of rights, provisions and entitlements universally guaranteed by the welfare state in spheres such as health, unemployment benefits, education, and pensions. Although these social commons served at the same time as a site for administrative regulation of social behaviour,[60] they also, to a certain extent, allowed access to public wealth without a corresponding expenditure of work (that is, access to it *directly*). This principle has been under increasing attack by the neoliberal policies of the last twenty years. In the North, enclosure of these social commons have taken the form of transformation from welfare to workfare (as in the US and in Britain); of the imposition of strict 'convergence criteria' which limit social spending in the European Union; and, in the countries of the South, by massive programmes of privatisation and structural adjustment linked to the neoliberal policies of the 'Washington Consensus' in which the leverage of international debt is used to impose social spending cuts and trade liberalisation in goods and, especially, in services. On all these issues, there is, of course, a massive literature.[61]

[59] Davis 1990, p. 235.
[60] See Piven and Cloward 1972.
[61] See Costello and Levidow 2001 for casualisation strategies. See Bonefeld 2002b for a class analysis of EMU. See also the anthology edited by Abramsky 2001 on

The enclosure of knowledge-commons includes the attempt to direct and shape the creation of knowledge, and control access, content and modes of delivery. Here, of course, there is a vast array of policies involving privatisation of education, the selling of public libraries and schools, the link between scarcity of public resources channelled into education and the costs of debt servicing in the South, and wide array of other strategies for the subordination of education and knowledge to the perpetuation of competitive markets.[62]

In most cultures in the history of humanity, knowledge has been accumulated and passed on to further generations as a matter of human social interaction. Just as language, agricultural and farming methods and skills of any kind, are the cultural basis of any society, without which any society would not survive, so genes are the building blocks of life itself. Yet there are increasing pressures by large multinational corporations to introduce legislation that 'enclose' the 'knowledge' built into life: genes. Intellectual property rights on life itself have contributed to opening a debate over the question of enclosure of knowledge and life in general. In addition a debate over the meaning of investment and research has been initiated. For example, despite the claim by drug companies that patenting is necessary in order to guarantee that investment in the sector is maintained, thus allowing further research, many researchers argue that, by promoting secrecy, and the channelling of funds into what is commercially profitable rather than the public good, patenting will threaten future research. Patenting of life legitimates biopiracy and the appropriation and subsequent privatisation of knowledge built up collectively by generations of anonymous experimenters, especially at the expense of the people of the South. It would provide industry with new means of establishing control over areas of nature previously held in common by communities in the South. What these enclosures of life are showing is the completely arbitrary character of *private* property claims over what are essentially *social and historical* processes of knowledge creation. What these debates reveal is that Marxist thinking urgently needs to reconceptualise enclosure and contribute to the emergent political discourse based on life and knowledge as commons.

struggles in Europe, many of which can be easily be identified in terms of anti-enclosures struggles. See also the references indicated in note 1.

[62] See, for example, Rikowski 2002, Levidow 2001, and Tabb 2001.

IV. Enclosure as discourse: preliminary notes and concluding remarks

If capital encloses, it cannot do it without a corresponding discourse. This discourse however, is not crystal-clear, but fuzzy and takes many names. While it has to reflect the *telos* and objectives of capital by promoting *separation*, at the same time, it has to discourage alternative projects and objectives, especially those that are based on a movement of *direct association* between waged and unwaged producers and social wealth. The discourse of enclosures, in other words, must present itself not as a negative force, one that separates, brutalises, and disempowers; but, on the contrary, it also has to wear the mantle of rationality, and project a vision of the future that *makes sense* to a multiplicity of concrete subjects. Thus, we may understand enclosure in terms of a rationale of capital accumulation and indifference to social needs (such as common access to entitlements or knowledge). But enclosure is endorsed in the meta-discourse of economics, through talk of 'trade liberalisation', 'anti-inflation' policies, 'fiscal responsibility', 'debt management', and so on. We can also cite 'growth prospects', 'democracy', 'transparency', 'accountability' and 'good governance'. This, I would argue, is not simply a smokescreen. Enclosures are not just about taking resources away from people, but the first step towards attempting to define new subjects normalised to the capitalist market. Capital does not enclose simply in order to rob, but also so as to integrate the social body in particular ways. The integration of the social body predicated on enclosures requires the constitution of social subjects who are *normalised* to the commodity-form, that is to stratified enclosures. The construction of 'economic man' normalised to markets and enclosures is the result of policies emerged from theoretical frameworks such as economics which work on the *assumption* of such a normalised subject.

To illustrate this, let us briefly consider another kind of enclosure, the enclosure of medieval women in monasteries. In her study on the representation of women in the discourse of monastery enclosure in Old English literature, Shari Horner[63] shows how 'the discourse of enclosure prescribes, regulates, and thereby normalises the female subject of early English literature, differentiating her from her male counterparts, and providing a historically and culturally specific matrix through which to view this subject'. Just as the

[63] See Horner 2001.

discursive practices of medieval enclosures attempted to construct femininity, so the meta-discourse of economics is based on continuously re-*constructing rational economic man*, that is fragmented individuals (excluded from common access to resources) normalised to market and competitive interaction. This normalisation, this construction of rational economic man, in the same way as the construction of medieval femininity, is based on the definition of boundaries. Just as for the early medieval church, 'the boundaries of the cloister were as important for containing those within (active enclosure) as for keeping the rest of the world out (passive enclosure)',[64] so too the boundaries of resource enclosure, creating commodities and property rights, are as important for shaping capitalist social relations (active enclosure) as for keeping out social interactions that are alternatives to capital (passive enclosure). This double principle embodied in enclosures should be kept in mind, because it is here, in the concrete identification and strategic possibility of shifting the boundaries, that resides the starting point for the thinking and construction of alternatives to capital.

Finally, just as in the middle ages 'women's "enclosure" is a broad organising system of thought' and 'this discursive system defines, limits, regulates, and authorises the feminine within Old English literature' so in the meta-discourse of trade liberalisation, market and competitiveness, the commodity (that is the enclosed commons!) is the broad organising system of thought. In this sense, enclosures represent what Michel Foucault calls a 'discourse formation'[65] – that is, a theme that circulates in many texts, not only specialised texts of economics, but in policy discussions, in literature, films, media, even in the language of trade unions and NGOs concerned to maintain their legitimacy and a reputation as realistic organisations. It is also for this reason that the beginning of alternative political discourses based on commons is very much to be welcomed,[66] and will, one hopes, represent the beginning of a direct challenge to the pervasiveness of enclosures and the world of commodities and competitive social interaction.

However, we must be fully aware of the implications of this discourse on commons. As we have seen, since commons emerge out of a relational social field, they are defined *in opposition to* enclosures. In other words, just as

[64] Horner 2001, p. 7.
[65] Foucault 1972.
[66] For example, it is possible to find elements of this discourse in Esteva and Suri Prakash 1998, Klein 2001, and MacMurtry 1998, 1999, and 2002.

capital's drive for accumulation must identify a common as limit for its expansion and thus outline strategies of new enclosures,[67] so the building of alternatives to capital must identify a strategic space in which current enclosures are limiting the development of new commons. To be able to identify, so to speak, '*them*' as the limit of '*our*' project would be a great strength, a strength that is based on processes of political recomposition and constitution of projects that pose the concrete question of alternatives *here and now*, and not in a distant future. In other words, life *despite* capitalism and not life after capitalism. *How* can we politically invert capital's strategies and identify enclosures as limits for non-market social interactions and as a strategic space for new commons? This is the true strategic challenge faced by the many articulations of today's global justice and solidarity movement. As I have argued elsewhere, to be viable and desirable, a process for the definition and constitution of alternatives requires nothing less than participatory, inclusive and democratic forms of organisation that found their political practice on formulating and addressing questions such as 'What do we want?', 'How do we go about getting it?' and 'Who is "we"?'.[68] Raising and addressing these naïve questions as part of our political practice implies that we participate in the production of a discursive inversion of the 'ordinary run of things', and the opening up of the many spaces for alternatives and the problematisation of their articulation.

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[67] See Midnight Notes 1992.

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Other Web resources

Web 1, India's Greatest Planned Environmental Disaster: The Narmada Valley Dam Projects: <http://www.umich.edu/~snre492/Jones/narmada.html>.

Web 2, One World Campaign: Narmada Valley: <http://www.oneworld.org/campaigns/narmada/front.html>.

Web 3, GATS Campaign, Stop the GATSastrophe!, WDM's campaign on the General Agreement on Trade in Services: < http://www.wdm.org.uk/campaign/GATS.htm>.

Web 4, GATSwatch.org – Critical Info on GATS: <http://www.gatswatch.org>.

Web 5, 'Globalisation and War for Water in Bolivia', published by Jim Shultz and Tom Kruse, in Cochabamba, Bolivia: <http://www.americas.org/News/Features/200004_Bolivia_Water/Shultz_and_Kruse.htm>.

Web 6, 'Jubilee Plus' material at: <http://www.jubileeplus.org/>. Jubilee South, a radical network from the south, at: <http://www.jubileesouth.org/>.

Web 7, Human rights and the environment. International Campaigns: Nigeria ERA Monitor Report No. 8: Six Year Old Spillage in Botem-Tai: <http://www.sierraclub.org/human-rights/nigeria/background/spill.asp>.

Web 8, Trade Environment Database (TED) Projects. 'Oil Production and Environmental Damage': <http://www.american.edu/ted/projects/tedcross/xoilpr15.htm>. On international grassroots campaign, see 'Oilwatch, A Southern-Based Activist Network Takes on Petroleum Dependency': <http://www.newint.org/issue335/action.htm>.