Fulcrum

spatial divisions of society.

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The encounter of architecture and urbanism with parcelisation is marked with the sign of a historical debt.

Parcelisation is a tremendously powerful design tool. Architecture and urban planning attest to its capacity to shape sociospatial relations across a range of scales and contexts. From Renaissance *palazzi* to modernist slabs, from nation-wide agrarian reforms and Haussmann's Paris to Christopher Alexander's new theory of urban design and Michael Webb's Suitaloon — most of the historical revolutions and experimental projects that have shaken these fields have relied, consciously or not, on a critique and restructuration of inherited divisions of land and space. The layout of parcel patterns has a series of implications including forms of property, the divide between private and public realms, the distribution of spatial contents and uses through zoning, typological decisions and so forth. The behaviour of any urban structure depends on the tissue of plots that configures the urban fabric and many of the challenges urban design faces today (complexity, urban vitality, social equality, etc) hinge upon the forms of land division and distribution we adopt.

That said, we should bear in mind that historical productions of space under capitalism have a 'dark' relation with parcelisation. It could be said, indeed, that modern spatial planning begins with a massive act of re-parcelisation with lasting repercussions in the social landscape: the forms of enclosure of open fields and common lands which pervaded European countries — especially England — at the onset of the agrarian and industrial revolutions.

By reworking the face of the land, the elites used space as a fulcrum to dismantle the commons, reshape social relations and devise a new regional division of labour, unleashing a process of dispossession that would turn the free rural commoner into a wage slave and urban proletarian.

Enclosure's articulation of spatial and social divisions was an early illustration of what Jacques Rancière calls the 'partition of the perceptible', i.e. a physical and symbolic distribution of bodies, modes of doing and modes of being which is achieved, amongst others, through the allocation of particular population groups, practices and representations to certain sites and according to specific spatialities. Infusing places with precise enclosed meanings, this 'enrolment in the city' relies, first and foremost, upon acts of parcelisation that become essential governmental instruments.

Perhaps one of the most extreme examples of this strategy is to be found in Gottfried Feder's model for new settlements in Nazi Germany. His book *Die neue Stadt* starts with an analysis of land apportionment as a basis for a thorough organization of society (including the distribution of inhabitants, tasks, jobs, building areas and styles, and so forth). Feder's archetype was of course the product of a wider parcelisation of society under a dictatorial regime. But despite its totalitarian contours, this approach was free of one major flaw of subsequent urbanisms: the uncritical assumption of inherited land allotments that pervades both conventional and supposedly progressive productions of space today.

How is this trend to be countered? How can we imagine alternatives to current parcelisations of society that redeem the historical debt of design techniques and undo unjust apportionments of space? Only a collective effort, including radically different architectural positions, can answer these interrogations. A few caveats should be borne in mind when facing that challenge. Crucially, we should avoid the mistakes of certain past experimental architectures and urbanisms that based their imagination of a new society on a ghostly abolition of parcels. In our apportioned world any change will start in the form of an autonomous, variable and constantly evolving counter-parcelisation, a new mode of spatial co-distribution nurturing novel forms of commoning and sociomaterial complexity. The question, therefore, has to be reformulated. How to collectively design these counter-parcelisations, and what kind of architectures would result?

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within, against and beyond.

r.soundy

The struggle *for* autonomy and *against* structural neglect is at the heart of two invisible and vitally evolving rural and urban social movements in Mesoamerica. Despite their limitations and inherent contradictions, both the Zapatistas in Southern Mexico and the Self-managed Cooperative Housing movement in Central America have demonstrated that the struggle for land and housing rights has fundamentally demanded a constitutive spatiality grounded on communal modes of ownership to counter neoliberal parcelisation. By claiming that 'land is for those who work it' and 'housing is a right and not a commodity,' the movements have transformed use-value into unprecedented and sustained territorial strategies against speculative capital.

Twenty years after the Zapatista uprising of 1994, the movement's struggle for autonomy may most clearly be traced with its ongoing resistance to neoliberal land restructuring, namely the parcelisation of communal lands or *ejidos*. Organized around the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN), the movement first brought to the foreground the historical neglect of indigenous peasants by a 71-year single party government in Mexico. Likewise, as Chiapas never benefitted from the 1910 Mexican Agrarian Reform, the colonial and republican land tenure structure known as *latifundio* (large land owning farming system) has systematically dispossessed indigenous peasants from their communally owned lands into the subsistence *minifundio*, or small-plot farming. In 1992, the Mexican government undermined the legal foundation of *ejidos*, forcefully exposing non-commercial and communal ownership to market speculation. This led to an uprising in 1994, when 38 municipalities claimed autonomy. In 2003, striving for indigenous self-determination, government councils organised *Caracoles* (territorial entities for direct democracy). Rooted on communally owned lands, but individually and increasingly cooperatively self-managed, the movement has worked to ensure self-sufficient production to sustain, amongst other social programs, the crucial communal health and education systems. The *Caracoles'* autonomous government

councils, or *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*, have gained legitimacy in allowing cross-financed modes of income distribution in all productive activities throughout the *ejidos*, effectively warding off the possibility of parcelisation draining the communally managed investment fund (and any subsequent undermining of the communities' decision-making process).

In a tormented region with a stubborn history of rebellions and failures, the Self-managed Cooperative Housing movement has fundamentally transformed (in just ten years) the struggle for adequate housing in post-conflict Central America. Following the Uruguayan self-managed and mutual aid cooperative housing experience originating in the 1960s, FUCVAM and the Swedish Cooperative Center (today We Effect) signed an agreement in 1998 to promote the movement in Bolivia, Paraguay and Central America.

The outcome has been an unprecedented struggle for 'housing as a right and not as a commodity,' based on collective property ownership.

Reaganism and Thatcherism's market fundamentalism has profoundly impacted Central America's land and housing supply for social groups living in poverty. Beyond the national states, the Self-Managed Cooperative Housing movement has intensified its activity regionally (with more than 80 federated self-managed housing cooperatives) providing collective property ownership to around 3,000 families in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Significantly, members may withdraw from the cooperative at any time, but do so without gaining any form of land value, since collective property has no commercial purpose. Despite operating within territorial market forces, self-managed cooperative housing works as a guarantor to protect vulnerable households (and especially children) from abandonment to the risk of a desperate sell-off.

Both Zapatistas and Self-managed Cooperative Housing movements have transformed use-value into a strategic project against structural neglect and speculative capital, from within autonomy and beyond neoliberal parcelisation.

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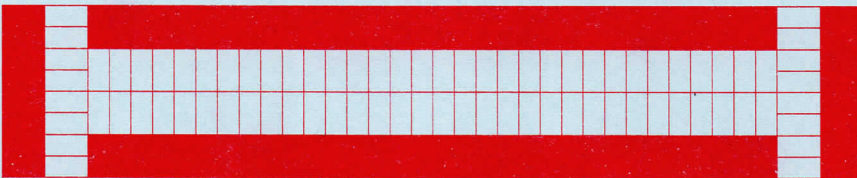
I acre

I square chain (66ft / 20.12m)

4 rods per chain (16.5ft / 5.03m)

I house and its garden

40 plots per acre

80 homes per 2 acre terrace

The invention of terraced housing: the parcelisation and measurement system introduced to London in 1666 by Robert Hooke. The model integrated large and small urban scales (23.5 bricks per chain, 88 chains to the mile) and standardised capitalist property ownership in the city.