

Monopoly capital, the perversion of need and the banishment of nature

Suhas Paranjape

Emergence of capitalism degraded the use value by reducing it to carriers of value and surplus value. The difference that monopoly capital brings in compared to its competitive phases is the re-constitution of use value and the processes of capitalisation of nature. It analyses use value in relation to the need it satisfies and attempts to reconstitute it in a way that it can serve that need in a manner that is more suited to its methods and processes. Hence, in this process, nature as bountiful giver is already potentially expelled from the lives of people specially of developed capitalist countries. Even women, mainly producing subsistence at home, are increasingly separated from nature through introduction of highly mechanized processes, which are profitable to capital. But there is a threshold, crossing which may have consequences over which we must start to think seriously.

USE value, once it has provided the ground for the analysis of value, and once it has been used to distance the analysis from the vulgar identification of use value and exchange value that is implicit in marginal utility theory, is routinely ignored in Marxist analysis. The analysis moves away from use value, nature and concrete labour to the other associated with value, the capitalist economy and abstract labour. While the requirement of transhistorical conditions specifies that commodities must have use value, it does not specify what they might be. However, under capitalism, use values change – indeed, change radically – and also become a medium for modifying need, a continual process of interpenetration and mutual determination between value and use value that we see speeding up after the emergence of monopoly capital and fully flowering in late capitalism. I briefly attempt to trace this story – mainly because it has an importance of its own in connection with nature – that I intend to show is the story of another process of dis-possession of nature that takes place at the heart of capitalised nature and joins up with the processes of dis-possession taking place at its margins that I have described in another note¹. I do not trace it in order to develop a theory of monopoly capitalism or a history of need and use value – that is in any case a task of a very different magnitude – I trace it only to bring out the aspect of dis-possession that

I feel needs highlighting.

Use value is mostly given a presumptive treatment; it is treated as a necessary concomitant of value, its vehicle, presumed as such and left behind as analysis moves on through value and surplus value to accumulations and so on. Rarely does it enter analysis again. Nevertheless, under late capitalism, the surfeit of visible wealth in the advanced capitalist countries presents itself as an unprecedented explosion in the variety, quality and quantity of use values. It also provides the ground for the strong attraction towards the affluent way of life ushered in by late capitalism and an ideological justification of it in terms of the choice and freedom it creates. In other words, it is not a phenomenon that can be simply relegated to the sidelines and presumptively excluded.

THE TRIAD OF USEFULNESS: NATURE'S FREE GIFTS, USE VALUES AND COMMODITIES

Use value, as Kovel, one of the few theorists to have given it more attention, says, 'reflects nature's presence within economic activity'². Kovel goes on to say,

It needs to be underscored (as the point is so commonly overlooked) that use-value is not the same as utility, or the appropriation of the world into human activity, but represents the passage of this utility into the economy.³

While this 'passage into the economy' is an important insight, Kovel's formulation contains an ambiguity that also needs to be resolved. Later context shows, that, largely, the economy that Kovel refers to is the *capitalist* economy, the system of generalised commodity production, its use without the emphasised appellation would imply that use value is an attribute that is specific to capitalism; and that what is relevant on a trans historical scale is not use value but utility. This is a point that needs some discussion. At issue here is how, and whether or not, we situate use value and the economy as transhistorical categories.⁴ Capitalism presents its economy as an independent self sufficient and controlling sphere and postulates all economic decisions as being taken by a virtual Homo economicus armed with the calculus of utilities measured as value, and Kovel is situating his analysis of use value within a critique of this supposed independence, quantification and dominance, so that his struggle for use value is also a struggle against the forms that capitalism imposes on use value and its context. Thus he views the struggle for use value also as a struggle 'against the hegemony of the economic *as such*'. [(Kovel 2000) *emphasis added*.] However, his treatment leaves room for an ambiguous elision of the economic and use value in a transhistorical sense, and the problematic character of this elision appears in the qualifiers he has to append to the term as emphasised above, that indicate the ambiguity of the elision.

While Kovel's distinction between utility and use value as representing its passage into the economy is an important insight, its contrast with appropriation into the world of human activity is problematic.

Let us approach the issue from a somewhat different direction. Consider Kovel's example of air; air has utility but has no use value. Air has utility for us because we are natural beings. We use air 'as found', just as we use sunshine 'as found' to provide us with illumination or the rain to provide moisture to our fields. Humans utilise nature 'as found' in myriads of ways. These are all nature's 'free gifts' to humans. Nature is a free gift for us because we are nature's creatures and we enjoy nature's bounty as much as any other creature and

nature provides us its bounty as much as to all its creatures.

It is beyond this myriad of utilities as free gifts that use values emerge. To the extent that we act on nature – through direct appropriation, nurturing or transformative labour and production processes – to satisfy our needs – at this stage I take need in its wider sense of necessities, wants and desires, without trying to discriminate or distinguish between them – the utilities that we thus create pass into social production, and that surely is the economy, in its transhistorical sense?

In the passage quoted above, Kovel contrasts 'appropriation of the world into human activity' as different from the passage of the utility into the economy. I would suggest that we need, not a twofold but a threefold, distinction here. First we have the appropriation of nature 'as found'. This is unmediated, immediate utility of nature. We utilise air by breathing it as a natural being, as an animal if you prefer – I avoid the term generally for the hierarchical notion it carries around with it – but it is an unmediated use. Second is the economy in its transhistorical sense, this is the sphere of *mediated* interaction with nature that comprises social production. And we have the third sense in the historical form that the economy in its transhistorical sense takes, or is imposed on it – passage into the feudal economy or the capitalist economy.

We then have a triad: utility, not all of which is use value, and use value, not all of which is use value embodied in commodities; and similarly, we have utility, then use value as the utility that passes into the economy in its transhistorical sense, and what use values of these then pass into the economy as *capitalism* defines it, that is as those that have value. And it is in this imposition of form by capitalism that there are exclusions as much as inclusions. In capitalism, since use values are measured by value, or at best, *imputed* value, but value nonetheless, there are many use values and the associated labour processes that are denied any role in the economy or, where allowed, there is often a process of their de-valuation. Thus we have housework banished from production into a sphere of consumption, at most grudgingly accepted as a

sphere of reproduction, consequently women's labour is rendered invisible; subsistence production is not even considered and non-capitalist petty commodity production is treated as a 'backward' sector of the economy. To reclaim them as production, we also need to reclaim what they produce as use values.

We may now see why Kovel's formulation as quoted above is problematic. It reduces the triad to a dyad. And since the two ends of the spectrum are clear – the utility of air and its use for breathing are clearly outside the economy (both in its transhistorical sense and its capitalist sense) and are therefore utilities but not use values; and at the other end, those utilities which effect a passage into the capitalist economy are clearly use values (both in their transhistorical and capitalist sense) – it leaves the status of the middle term of the triad, those utilities that are part of the economy in a transhistorical sense but are denied passage into the capitalist economy, ambiguous. The triad reclaims them as use values and also explains why they are not allowed passage into the capitalist economy. The triad also implies that the capitalist economy as constituted through the value form is necessarily incomplete, in that substantial portions of *both* use values and utilities remain outside it and are also actively externalised by exclusion and de-valuation.

USE VALUES IN PRECAPITALIST SOCIETIES: THE STAMP OF NATURE

So, when capitalism is emergent, it faces the dyad, of utilities – free gifts of nature – and use values, utilities that have passed into the precapitalist economies – the third term of the triad is still to be created. The use values that it faces are mediated – produced and consumed – through the precapitalist social relations of production. It may be safe to say for the most part that commodity production – still assumedly non-capitalist commodity production – mediates a small part of the total use values that a society produces. The bulk of the use values are produced locally, producers and users are close, often the same, and the circulation of social product and material is essentially local. Moreover, the process of production of use values and their use is

closely integrated within the rhythms of nature and together they form the matrix within which daily life takes place. Most use values are derived from local materials, especially biomass and local minerals and only the small part – a part that may be small but may be crucial in many ways – comes from farther off through commodities. The particular mode of production and use of social product is the result of co-evolution and mutual adaptation of humans and their natural habitat over a fairly long period. In a much more direct sense, use values in these precapitalist modes reflect 'nature's presence within economic activity' and that too of nature as bountiful giver.

Let me be clear here. I do not intend to paint any idyllic picture of perfect harmony between nature and humans in precapitalist society. The mention of co-evolution and adaptation over long periods immediately calls up associations of perfection and harmony with which they are often associated in common usage and it is perhaps important to prevent what is being said from acquiring those overtones. Evolution and adaptation are never, by nature, perfect. As Stephen Jay Gould has said on many occasions, it is the *imperfections* that are the give away sign of a process of natural evolution and adaptation.⁵ So it is with this co-evolution and adaptation. Life was not without hardship (and certainly not without exploitation), and in view of that my insistence of the presence of nature as bountiful giver may also need to be similarly placed in context. It is not meant to imply a life of comfort and ease, but to emphasise that nature was considered as bountiful giver, and hardship was associated by nature's withholding of its bounties, by natural or divine caprice. Even within hardship, nature's essential nature as bountiful giver was not questioned, only its contingent capricious withholding was lamented. This is necessary to emphasise because within many environmental movements – red as well as green – the common view of precapitalist communities as evolved and adapted to their natural habitats does not correspond to the more historically grounded conception of evolution – with all its implied imperfections and warts – but to an idyllic view based on the overtones of perfection and harmony that they evoke.⁶

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It is tempting to draw out further implications of this mutual co-evolution and adaptation, but I shall restrict myself only to one aspect of it. Kovel's ambiguous missing term of the triad that I identify here as the precapitalist economy, is not a separate sphere of life; its separation from other aspects of life is conceptual, not social. All the demarcations and separations that acquire so much significance in capitalism – those between the economic and the political, between civil society and the state, between the public and the private, between the personal and the social – are but interpenetrating continuums, both in form and content and are yet to become formally separate through the social embedment of these separations. The village is as much a workplace as a dwelling place, and the overlord holds economic power as much as political power. In India, caste adds its own cross linkages, but so far as the contrast with the separation of spheres in capitalism is concerned, I think the point still holds.

Use value always signifies more than its immediate utility, but all the stronger when all the separations and divisions that capitalism brings in have not taken effect. Raw mango is associated with the advent of spring in many areas, with the swings tied to the mango tree, when agricultural operations of the previous year have ceased and those of the new year are yet to begin, the harvest is in and there is some leisure, the hard months of the ferocious summer are yet to set in. Raw mango in that society smells and tastes of all these. And if in that season mango is used to flavour the chutney and the curry rather than the usual tamarind, it is not just a fancy for another sour taste but a tribute to all that the mango represents. If in capitalism use values are the vehicle of value, its material carriers, in precapitalist societies use values are as much material carriers of lived ways of material life, of lived interactions with nature. And the recent discovery of use values as signifiers of culture and life styles must truly be seen as a re-discovery of this dimension based on a previous process of de-signification that capital carries out on them. It is to this that we now turn.

EMERGENT CAPITALISM, THE RULE OF ABSOLUTE SURPLUS VALUE AND THE DEGRADATION OF USE VALUE

The emergence of capitalism as a historical event is primitive accumulation, that violent process so graphically described by Marx in *Capital*⁷. In one historical sweep it dispossesses the producers of their means of production, concentrates them in the hands of the capitalists and delivers the now propertyless workers into their factories. Deprived of their means of production, they are also separated from their means of subsistence and must acquire them as commodities. Even as it creates newly acquired property, newly acquired resources and newly acquired means of production for capital, it also creates a new market for its commodities. The favourable relation between these is *always* the advantage that accumulation by dispossession has over the accumulation processes that happen through the medium of relative surplus value later on. There is no mistaking the age that primitive accumulation ushers in; it is the rule of absolute surplus value vividly described in the long chapter on the working day in *Capital*⁸ and even more fully in the *Conditions of the Working Class in England*.⁹ I shall not further elaborate the point I have already made earlier that it is still present throughout capitalism, especially in the developing countries and at the margins of capitalisation of non-capitalist formations and nature.

Of more interest here is the relationship of this state of affairs with use values. The inhuman conditions that the rule of absolute surplus value imposes on the working class degrade use value. They lose all signification of anything but pure physical need. Food is reduced to mere food, any kind of food; similarly clothing and shelter. The struggle is to acquire any kind of food, clothing and shelter that is affordable, anything that helps bridge the yawning gap between the working class and the necessities of life. And here too capital interposes itself in that chasm and makes it a source of profit.

Gone now is the presence of nature as bountiful giver, in spite of hardships, in daily life and in use values. Use values now are more the markers of an absence that they fill and the experience of nature at the workplace and in their habitats is that of

something oppressive that has to be overcome and defended against. The experience of nature here turns into the experience of oppression at the workplace and squalour in the habitat. I do not treat this as an absolute condition, but as a *tendency* that is everywhere imposed by emergent capitalism and that the working classes have to struggle against. And struggle they do, leading, on the one hand to the emergence of relative surplus value and the reconstitution of the working class family and also on the other to a reconstitution of need and use value.

RELATIVE SURPLUS VALUE, COMPETITIVE CAPITALISM AND THE RECONSTITUTION AND MULTIPLICATION OF USE VALUE

The explosive growth in use values that relative surplus value has ushered in over the last two hundred odd years is a well accepted fact that does not need description. Of interest here is again the difference that it has made in its competitive and monopoly phases to the re-constitution of use value and its relation to the processes of capitalisation of nature at the heart of capitalism as well as at its frontier with non-capitalist production. I am aware of the somewhat speculative character of the analysis that follows and I offer it more as a possible direction of exploration, to be further corroborated/modified or thrown overboard than as a definitive analysis.

In a sense, it may be said that competitive capitalism takes use value and underlying need as given, it treats them, as it were, 'as found'. It does not yet have the capacity to decisively influence the use value or the need it is inscribed in. However, what it does do is to radically reconstitute it. It decontextualises and de-signifies it and treats in a scientific manner and in its scientific and technological context. Firstly, it attempts to provide the same use values but produced profitably with its methods. Secondly, it identifies those use values that may not as yet have been commodified but are capable of being profitably provided in a commodity form. Thirdly, it analyses use value in relation to the need it satisfies and attempts to reconstitute it in a way that it can serve that need in a manner that

is more suited to its methods and processes.

The first leads to a transformation of the production processes of use values – the classic sequence of co-operation, division of labour and manu- or rather machino-facture that Marx traces in *Capital*. The second leads to the conquest by capital of an expanding sphere of daily life. The third leads to an extensive reconstitution of use values. Synthetic materials and synthetic processes everywhere take precedence over natural materials for the simple reason that synthetic processes are amenable to control in ways which natural materials are not, and for capital, control over the production process is of paramount importance both in terms of materials as well as personnel. It initiates a process of receding of nature that finds its culmination in late capitalism as we shall see below.

The counterpart of this is the reconstitution of the working class family in the heartland of capitalism on the basis of some version of a living wage based on a single earner family, an ideal that is never completely realised, but defines the terms of the discourse. The rights of labour also have to be asserted within capitalism in the form of commodities, and are won in that form, in the form of a wage sufficient to command a basket of necessities bought as commodities. Housework is presumed. Presumed also is the division of labour within the reconstituted patriarchal family. Women take charge of subsistence production and the continuation of production within the family in the form of housework. This has its own implication in respect of nature. While within the factory working class men lose all control over their productive interaction with nature since it is capital which takes over that control, outside the factory too they virtually lose all productive contact with nature as part of daily life, it is the women who retain it. Nature retains its productive presence in the daily life of working class not through working class men but as a rule through women, who despite capital find newer ways to satisfy needs based on whatever meagre means and uncaptialised portions of nature are left at their disposal. In short, it also means that we need to recognise that first because of their incorporation into capital as wage labourers (as

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variable capital) at the workplace, the degradation and fragmentation of work, and their excluding themselves from all productive work within the habitat because of patriarchy, the workers lose productive contact with nature. Nature as bountiful giver is already potentially expelled from their lives. And it is through women that the bond is maintained. Of course, the situation on the ground is bound to be more complex, but this is the *direction* that capital imposes. This relationship is stronger in the developing countries, where a vast majority of the labouring classes still occupy the frontier of capitalist nature and production and obtain their livelihoods through a mix of wage labour and non-capitalist production forms¹⁰, but the direction here is the same, if anything the women have a much stronger relationship with productive nature.

MATERIAL FACTORS BEHIND THE RISE IN CONSUMPTION

If the process of the receding of nature as bountiful giver from daily life is initiated by competitive capitalism, it is brought to a striking conclusion by monopoly capital. It is customary, especially among green theorists to see consumerism¹¹, a culture of compulsive consumption on part of the consumer, as the driving force behind the exponential expansion of use values and its consequent effects. Lodziak offers a strong corrective to this view, which he calls an ideology of consumerism.

[The] ideology of consumerism is an ideology in the critical, negative sense, precisely because it is highly misleading in... a number of ways. First, the attractions of consumption (whatever these might be) for the consumer are exaggerated. Second, the value of consumption (whether it be that of pleasure, creativity, meaning or identity) is limited to certain groups of people. Third, the emphasis on consumption as a symbolic activity ignores the continuing relevance of need and the material use-value of goods in determining what we consume. Fourth, consumer choices cannot be equated with individual freedom. Fifth, the portrayal of consumption as an outcome of free choices ignores the fact that most personal and domestic consumption is an adaptive response to present day living conditions, and is best seen as obligatory.

Finally, as an explanation of increasing consumer demand the ideology of consumerism misconstrues individual consumption for the reasons already stated, fails to acknowledge that it may be relevant to only a minority, and totally ignores the most obvious way in which affluent societies continuously increase consumption, that is through... 'institutional' consumption.¹²

By institutional consumption, Lodziak here refers to the often feverish consumption spending that characterises consumption by corporate forms of capital, within and without productive consumption. Without necessarily rejecting the importance of the culture of compulsive consumption – for it could be a necessary accompaniment of the other phenomena and not necessarily counter posed to them – one would like to add to this what may appear like a truism, but is not, that the character of present-day capital as a form of dominance of monopoly and finance capital has also an important role to play. In what follows I shall briefly trace Lodziak's arguments and see how they connect up with monopoly capital.

Increasing levels of personal and domestic consumption on the other hand, Lodziak argues, are explained by three major factors. The first of these is the planned obsolescence of products. Planned obsolescence is now a well accepted phenomenon, incidentally, also well linked to monopoly capital.¹³ Gorz adds to this the concept of 'accelerated obsolescence'¹⁴. The second is the structural needs imposed by the changing social and physical environment of self reproduction, or the business of living. This is based on the fact that the new conditions require newer and 'richer means of satisfaction'¹⁵ of survival needs, and these 'structurally imposed or structurally induced needs'¹⁶ then become necessary conditions of the reproduction of daily life. The third is the typical Gorzian argument with respect to the length of the working day – the inflated working hours, the fact that the working day is kept much longer than what it could potentially be brought down to – an argument that I do not propose to engage with in what follows, since it will take us too far afield.

Planned, and later, accelerated obsolescence,

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presumes monopoly – albeit monopoly in a specific sense. Competitive capitalism takes use value as given, and implies that if one capitalist provides products incorporating obsolescence, the buyer can simply switch to another one which does not. Planned obsolescence presumes that capital has grown to a point where it can affect the market, where use value need not be taken as fully given, but can be moulded. The advertising, the sales effort follows and does not precede or create this obsolescence. Moreover, the specific sense of monopoly here is that arises out of concentration of capital as opposed to centralisation.

MONOPOLY CAPITAL AS GROUNDING THE RISE IN CONSUMPTION

In Marxist theory it is customary to distinguish between concentration of capital and centralisation of capital. The latter refers to aggregation in terms of ownership while the former refers to the aggregation that grows out of the size of an individual capitalist enterprise. It implies that conditions of production are such that because of the very scale of operation of individual capital its product inevitably forms a significant portion of the supply and is then capable of influencing it significantly. Without this power, neither planned nor accelerated obsolescence can be realised. Capital becomes truly dominant in the form of monopoly capital; it now comes to dominate the market more than being dominated by the market.

This dominance is important in both, the accelerated obsolescence as well as in imposing use values in its image on society and transforming need, the process that Offe identifies as structural needs now experienced as needs called forth by the requirement of the reproduction of daily life. And, it must be emphasised that this process is more than a change in ideas. The imposition of structural need is a material force, mediated by what Harvey calls being 'fixed'. The ever increasing separation of the workplace and the habitat that creates the need for transportation is fixed into the space and exists as a material condition that individuals have now to adapt to, to some extent, irrespective of what they think about it.

There is also a process here of individuation of need, that is as important as any other aspect. Individuation of need creates a greater market than otherwise; the market that is created by the individual motor car is much, much greater than the market that a rationalised public transport would create. Redundancy is as much built into newer and newer gadgets. Repair is a word that loses functionality as companies prefer to let repairs and replacements of spares die a silent death. All capital would prefer to thrive on waste but it is in its monopoly form that it can make business out of it because it can impose its will on the market.

Monopoly capital also acquires the size of the capital that gives it monopoly by virtue of its immense productivity, by the very high rate of surplus value. The turn that this involves towards spending on military and other stockpiling activity that can absorb this surplus value, the turn towards spatio-temporal fixes and the recently increasing accumulation by dispossession are one part of the story. The other part is related to the workforce. This affects, on the one hand, its workers, who may be granted 'richer means of satisfaction' of survival needs – and survival needs only – if they also create a sufficient market for those means.¹⁷ Secondly, it cannot visualise a shorter working day (the typical Gorzian argument) or a rise in the value of labour power beyond that required for the reproduction of daily life even with 'richer means of satisfaction' because it would reduce the rate of surplus value, it can however, look towards an increased consumption of goods and services that exchange against surplus value as a new sector of the economy that can provide an additional and expanding market without touching the source of that surplus value, and moreover can pay them differently and better. It can thus create a salariat class that is tied into its circuits and can be tied to a different kind of consumption need.

A POSSIBLE EQUATOR OF NEED

In describing what he calls the 'modernisation of poverty', Illich at one point says,

Beyond a certain threshold, the multiplication of commodities induces impotence, the incapacity to

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grow food, to sing or to build.¹⁸

Illich's resolute opposition to the disabling qualities brought about by the proliferation of commodities is entirely expected – and though it is often extreme, it has valuable insights to offer, some of which shall be discussed briefly below – what struck me is the rare admission contained in that qualifying phrase – *beyond a certain threshold*, which implies a judgment that a threshold has been crossed.

It brings to mind here a thought experiment described by Sawyer¹⁹ that brings out how thresholds matter. Imagine yourself at the South Pole. You paint a circle on the Earth of 1 km radius centred on the Pole. You are obviously standing outside the circle. Now you paint another 1 km strip outside the circle. You keep adding 1 km wide annular strips to increase the size of the circle. Everything runs all right for quite a while. The circle keeps getting bigger and bigger and you keep standing outside it. But things begin to happen very differently once you pass the equator. Instead of the circle becoming larger, with every addition of an extra strip, the circle now shrinks. You are no longer outside the circle increasing its size, you are now inside it and the circle now rapidly traps you into a smaller and smaller space! A threshold has been passed, and the same iteration now has very different effects.

It is possible to view the exponential multiplication of commodities in this light. It is possible that further expansion of commodities is becoming an entrapment because that threshold has been passed; we have passed the equator that determines the geometrical threshold of the expansion of our economic space.²⁰ These are all metaphors, and determining where the equator, the threshold, lies is of course the crucial question.

I remember myself reading Illich as most Marxists tend to read him, as a preposterous claim that everyone should grow their own food, fashion their own tools, make their own articles of use, should not go to school and abolish doctors. And even more so from the vantage point of a developing country. But there is another way to read him, to look at what he is saying, as something that happens after the threshold is crossed rather than as an absolute.²¹ Over the last thirty years, witnessing what

has been happening in the world, especially in the advanced capitalist countries and their replica vernacular enclaves everywhere in the developing world, re-reading Illich makes me much more alive to this sense of having crossed the threshold.

For it is without doubt, that the first phase of the multiplication of commodities does come as the opening up of new possibilities of reduction in drudgery and increase in well being – even as they are denied to the populace they nevertheless raise hope of a different kind. But as the fever to catch up begins to build up, I can sense this crossing of the threshold. It is impossible for me to pin down the location of the equator which changes my position from being 'outside' the expanding circle to being trapped 'inside' it. But I think I can make out clearly those ends of the spectrum where one or the other predominates. I can definitely make out a broad region where, at least to me, it is clear that we have crossed the threshold.

THE PERVERSION OF NEED

Let us begin with the need to reduce drudgery and hardship and the mechanisation of housework. So we have first the piped water supply instead of fetching water from the stream. In that too we have first the standposts and later on the individual tap in the individual kitchen. We have here a double process: the greater individualisation reduces social contact, that is separates us from other human nature and secondly it separates us from nature. It is still the stream that is the source of water but we have interposed between the stream and us a huge apparatus that makes it disappear from our vision. We begin the process of banishment of nature from daily life. We are now no longer directly involved or concerned with the state of the stream that feeds us with the water we drink. For women, this double separation is often drastic, this 'housewifisation' so to speak lops off a large part of their natural interaction with other women, an interaction that they must now actively seek and secondly, it disconnects them from nature as bountiful giver – disconnects them from the stream that gave them water and reconnects them to the gram panchayat or the municipal council as the provider of the tap

and the water.

Let us pass on to the need to reduce the drudgery of walking. The bicycle and then the tram and the bus and finally the individual motorcar spare us the effort of walking. Let us ignore for the time being the other end of this extension towards the fantastic, towards fast trains, racing cars, supersonic flight and finally, why not, space travel. Assume too that our workspace and home is ergonomically defined and spares us physical effort. Now simply because we have been saved all this effort, we must now devote special time to make effort! We must now carry ourselves in a motorcar to a stretch of open space and run simply because we have been saving ourselves the effort of walking! And we must go to a gym and bend and stretch because we have fashioned a way of life to save us from bending and stretching!

Capital thrives on this. It is happy to provide us with the mechanised workplace and the ergonomic home *and* the gym and the park, all at a profit. It is double business for capital. If in its earlier period, monopoly capital had concentrated on reconstituting of the workplace to suit its needs²², now it extends it to the home refashioning it by structuring the choice of commodities it provides, structuring need. It happens insidiously, by simple iteration, so that one does not notice the passing of the equator and the perversion of need that has taken place. The need for reduction of drudgery insidiously becomes the need to eliminate physical effort. There is an equator here too. Physical effort is a natural need of human beings, it is their connection with nature. Drudgery is imposition of effort beyond what would be natural effort. I do not want to deny the social nature of concepts like drudgery or natural effort, and we shall have occasion to go into some of those issues later, but at this point, I would also like to assert, that this social construct does not hand us the godlike power of infinite malleability of need. Nature asserts itself in the paradoxes it creates when social norms of the natural cross the natural equators that nature itself has set up. The paradox mentioned above, that we must go to a gym and bend and stretch because we have fashioned a way of life to save us from bending and stretching, indicates that

we have at some point crossed that equator, that need has been perverted.

The view is also likely to be very different from the two sides of the equator, the metaphor so conveniently maps on to the difference between the North and the South. The South, excluding its affluent enclaves and including the poorest of the poor and the subsistence sectors in the North, is still, probably, on the expanding side of the equator. One of the greatest problems is in unifying these two views, to find a common language, to assert the need for expansion of the painted circle even while retaining an awareness of the equator where expansion will turn into a contraction. But I over-anticipate. We are entering new territory here. We are entering the territory of need, of what is natural and not, from how we regard capitalism to how we regard nature, though of course the two have always been linked. Let me return to what this insidious perversion of need under monopoly capital has done to the status of nature, through another and, in my opinion, a decisive crossing of the equator.

THE BANISHMENT OF NATURE

Humans have always felt the need for protecting themselves against the extremes of natural climates. Hearth fires have helped us cope with winter, while wetted khus and other fibrous curtains and fans have helped cope with summer heat. Electric fans and electric heaters are an enhanced version of this coping mechanism. But with central heating and air conditioning I think we insidiously cross the equator of needs. I offer this specific location of the equator as a proposition even while fully acknowledging the malleability of need and the interpenetration of need, want and desire, because I think that in respect of nature, it does seem to mark a threshold. Central heating/air conditioning and the individual motor car are now counted among the necessities in the affluent North. They are presumed, and no one need give thought to them. What they do to energy consumption is well documented, what I am more interested here is in what they do to nature.

The hearth fire and the khus curtain and fan, or even the electric heater and the electric fan, even

while coping with nature keep alive our contact with nature. Nature is ever present in the draft that passes through the built space, the seasons and the elements are allowed entry; it is only their felt extremes that are attempted to be modified. With central heating/air conditioning and the heated/air conditioned car, we seal ourselves off from nature. An enclosure takes place. We emerge from centrally heated/airconditioned homes, get into heated/airconditioned cars and travel to centrally heated/airconditioned workplaces. We already live in cocoons, and were it not for total recycling and air locks, we could be on Mars or a space station. Daily life has almost become science fiction.

We lose the sense of living within nature because in the airconditioned affluent society we truly no longer live within nature. The mediated sense in which we still anyway continue to live within nature is no longer part of lived experience in daily life. Nature now appears as 'view', as what we see through thick glass panes outside. And within daily life, nature appears as obstruction, as the weed that over runs the garden or the snow that must be shovelled off to facilitate the movement of the motor car, as the rising or falling temperature which must necessitate an adjustment up or down of the thermostat. Nature as bountiful giver, as condition of all that humans do and create is banished from daily life. It now only can exist far from us – in the wilderness.

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NOTES

¹ See the note 'Capitalisation of Nature and Accumulation by Dispossession: At the Heart and the Frontier of Capitalism' that I had presented to the Indian Social Science Congress 2007.

² (Kovel 2000). Kovel's analysis is not altogether free of ambiguities some of which are discussed below. Kovel's treatment of the struggle for a prefigurative re-appropriation of use value deserves treatment in its own right and the remarks that follow are not intended to serve that purpose; they are limited to situating use value in a transhistorical context.

^{3,4} (Kovel 2000)

⁵ To quote one of the many instances where he makes this point: '[The] argument—that the imperfection of nature reveals evolution—strikes many people as ironic, for they feel that evolution should be most elegantly displayed in the nearly perfect adaptation expressed by some organisms... Why should all the large native mammals of Australia be marsupials, unless they descended from a common ancestor isolated on this island continent? Marsupials are not "better," or ideally suited for Australia; many have been wiped out by placental mammals imported by man from other continents. This principle of imperfection extends to all historical sciences.' (Gould)

⁶ I would like to describe here my recent experience of watching a well meaning documentary on water issues which depicted some of the practices in severely drought prone areas. I do not refer to that particular documentary by name here because I do not wish to single out that particular documentary for a phenomenon that is so very common. In the film, the women speaking in their own dialect continually talk about their hardship just as much as they talk about how their practices have been adapted to cope with scarcity. In the English voiceover, the hardship disappears from the text! For similar elisions also see (Baviskar 1995) and (Baviskar 2005)

⁷ (Marx 1959) p. 667-724

⁸ (Marx 1959) p. 222-86

⁹ (Engels 1969)

¹⁰ This refers to non-capitalist commodity production, subsistence production and housework.

¹¹ In its non-American sense as specified here. It is used without qualification in that sense in what follows.

¹² (Lodziak 2000) p. 6

¹³ See for example the classic (Baran and Sweezy 1966)

¹⁴ 'Competitiveness demanded maximum mobility, fluidity and rapidity in designing new products and putting them into production. Firms had to be capable of continual improvisation; they had to know how to whip up passing fads, unpredictable and transient fashions) and exploit them to the full. In virtually saturated markets, the only type of growth possible was growth in the variety of taste and fashion, growth in the speed at which these things changed.' (Gorz 1999) p. 27-8 as cited in (Lodziak 2000). It is here that the importance of finance capital also becomes important. Finance capital, the most mobile form of modern corporate capital, has the mobility required to impose this constant frenetic movement on productive capital.

¹⁵ (Gorz 1967) p. 89 as cited in (Lodziak 2000)

¹⁶ (Offe 1984) p. 224-7 as cited in (Lodziak 2000)

¹⁷ The individual motorcar is one such need that monopoly capital has happily granted its workers in the advanced capitalist countries. For a typical Gorzian view, see (Gorz 1980b)

¹⁸ (Illich 1978) p. 10 emphasis added.

¹⁹ (Sawyer 1959). I do not have the book in front of me, but it has left a sufficiently deep impact on me to be able to vouch for the citation!

- 20 Metaphorically, we still tend to think in terms of infinities, when the fact is that of finitude, of most space as a an infinite Euclidean expanse when the fact is more likely that of non-Euclidean closed spaces.
- 21 Gorz reads him differently and consequently incorporates many of his concepts into his own distinctive analysis.
- 22 The classic study in this respect is (Braverman 1974). And the degradation of work may be seen to be paralleled by the anticipated perversion of need.

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Monopoly capital, the perversion of need and the banishment of nature