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A Planet of Surplus Life: Building Worlds Beyond Capitalism

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Abstract: Capitalism is an immense machine for churning out surplus life. Its long war of enclosure has captured, controlled, and pauperised human life, and laid waste to nonhuman life. This paper argues that surplus populations—people rendered as economically redundant—are central to the future politics of our planet. Yet the ruling classes still fight to preserve capitalism in all its horror: "*you must work, even if there are no jobs!*" How we diagnose this dilemma is a vital task of our age. We respond with a beyond-capitalist politics that challenges centuries of capitalist world-alienation, pauperism, and indignity. We present a radical alternative, centred on the interlocking ideas of *alter-worlds*, *alter-work*, and *alter-politics*. Each is based on building, sustaining, and connecting new spaces of geographic justice and autonomy for all. We must make the end of capitalism easier to imagine than the end of the world.

Keywords: surplus populations, capitalism, wageless life, politics, Marx, justice

Worlding Surplus Life

Capitalism is a mode of existence that continually captures, consumes, and expels life. Writing at the apex of industrialising Britain in the 19th century, Marx viewed surplus populations as central to the motor engines of capital. Not an accident, not an aberration: surplus lives were produced by capital "in the direct ratio of its own energy and extent" (Marx 1990:782). In this paper, we argue that surplus populations—or people rendered as economically redundant to capitalism—are central to a beyond-capitalist politics. Today, in an era of globalised neoliberal repression, automation, and financial extraction, the waged labourer is struggling to survive (Denning 2010). A new form of political hegemony, de-socialised, and entropic capitalism (Streeck 2017)—based on separating surplus life from secured life—has taken stranglehold (Smith 2011). The result is the dangerous conjuncture many now face, where the outcast poor are treated with utter disdain: as *disposable* to capital (Bauman 2004; Harvey 2014). This moment is, however, an opportunity for radical praxes, and the focus of our paper. Wageless life is a tragedy *and* a release—a mode of existence beyond the torments, logics, and habits of wage labour. Everything pivots on translating

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the latent potential of surplus populations into projects of world-building *beyond* capitalism (Hardt and Negri 2017).

A decade after *Antipode*'s special issue on surplus populations (McIntyre and Nast 2011) we find capitalism's accelerated surplusification of humanity. While the richest saw their wealth increase during the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time in 25 years, extreme global poverty rose, with around 45% of global humanity surviving on less than $5.50 a day (World Bank 2020:39). Even in the limited sites where they persist, middle-class job losses during the pandemic have fuelled unprecedented levels of unemployment and debt (public and private). According to the International Labour Organization (2020), around half a billion people have insufficient work. As their report notes, "having a paid job was not a guarantee of decent working conditions or of an adequate income for many of the 3.3 billion employed worldwide in 2019" (ILO 2020:12). By contrast, the world's richest 1% hold more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people (Oxfam 2020). Finally, consider the number of jobs becoming automated or converted into "gig" employment. Digital platforms have stripped workers of multiple rights, miraculously transmuting them into independent contractors. The goal for capitalism, of course, is for everybody to rent everything—even their own job.

A world shaped by money but populated by the moneyless has existed since the outset of capitalism. And not just in the industrial heartlands. Colonial looting, slavery, and imperial wars are central to world capital, and have been since at least 1492. But the relationship between money and the moneyless has changed, particularly in dominant countries. Surplus populations typically provided a set of residual functions for capitalism: such as wage depression, an army of unemployed workers, and a disciplining effect on those who remain in the work force. But this "recyclability" of workers is today limited both in both its scale and effectiveness. Neoliberal growth depends, increasingly, on complex financial extractions and the enclosure of biogenetic commons. The production of surplus value—so central to Victorian-era growth—is a shrinking form of wealth extraction. Consequently, human exploitation, under the Marxist concept of proletarianisation, is transitioning (always unevenly) to outright and violent *expulsion* and disposability (Fuentes 2020; Sassen 2014). As Bauman (2004:42) warns, "we can hardly visualise in advance the social settings that may define 'redundancy' and shape the human-waste disposal mechanisms of the future". Bare economic life now befalls billions across the planet.

The balance between waged life and wageless life, between human exploitation and human expulsion, has tipped, we argue, to an unprecedented scale. We are hardly alone in observing how capitalism has entered a dangerous phase-shift of its existence (Streeck 2017; Venn 2018; Wallerstein et al. 2013). This represents the permanent expulsion—and punishment—of surplus populations from the socio-economic order. The logics of economic inequality, predicated on *inclusion* with capitalism, can scarcely account for *expelled* surplus life, which hinges on a logic of disposability. As Harvey (2014:292) writes, "We are daily witnessing the systematic dehumanisation of disposable people". The geographies of surplus and disposable life are growing everywhere. Unemployed workers in America's rust belt, or young migrants in Paris, join the planetary slums for "warehousing this

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century's surplus humanity" (Davis 2006:201). What, then, are the limits of categories such as class (Kalb 2015), work, and the worker in the face of pervasive wagelessness, automation, and expulsion? What should a beyond-capitalist politics look like? Liberal prescriptions for social justice that do not consider *geographic* justice are always limited. We instead ask: who owns the earth? Who has the right to the world (Nevins 2017)?

Capitalism and its discontents are always spatial and embedded in the infrastructures of the world (Shaw 2019). There is an important geography to capitalism's violent surplusification of life. The *demographic* injustice of surplus populations is always-already a *geographic* injustice. Consider the spatial enclosure of land and dispossession, as Marx (1990) first explored in his writings on so-called "primitive" accumulation. Such enclosure remains an ongoing system of privatisation and commodification of the planet's commonwealth (Christophers 2018; De Angelis 2017; Jeffrey et al. 2012). In turn, this violence continues to underpin the epidemic of surplus and dispossessed life (Sassen 2014). But crucially, this privatisation of the soil, seas, and skies—indeed the entire web of life (Moore 2017)—sets in motion a profound and ongoing world-alienation (Arendt 2013). Framing the problem as a series of *surplus geographies* thus brings into conversation studies on wasted lives and wasted environments. We view both as symptomatic of capitalist enclosure (Sevilla-Buitrago 2015). Surplus populations are not an *aspatial* mass of humanity, but rooted in the flesh of the planet—a planet that is itself the target of capitalist violence and species-wide exploitation and annihilation (McBrien 2016).

If capitalism has alienated our human relationships and connections from a fraying web of life, its rectification demands a political imaginary that seeks to reintegrate us. This pathway beyond capitalism's violent endgame cannot come from *within* its logics. Accordingly, our paper is centred on "worlding" capital's innermost discontents (Shaw 2019), and providing a political praxis *beyond* capitalist realism (Fisher 2009). Worlding our understandings of capitalism—seeing it as a mode of existence that produces bodies, minds, and ecologies—rather than just an (abstract) economic system, helps us chart more dignified spaces of life for humans and nonhumans. This worlding separates our contributions from overly economic and liberal prescriptions, such as a Universal Basic Income (UBI), as well as the techno-optimistic futures embodied in notions such as a "fully automated luxury communism" (Bastani 2019). A planet of surplus life pivots on a deep geographic injustice, which requires that we radically rethink, and reimagine, the spaces we inhabit and work for. Creating a space for the imagination to flourish is a crucial battleground for geographic justice (Gibson-Graham 2006). We dramatically under-estimate the challenge we face if we only understand surplus life as an economic question of employment and unemployment. The challenge, writes Roelvink (2016:150), is "to expand the focus on dignified workers to also consider a dignified world".

Our paper responds to calls for more work on Marxist and post-capitalist geographies (Chatterton and Pusey 2020; Harvey 2018). We contribute towards research on surplus populations (Fuentes 2020; Pratt et al. 2017), community economies and social transformation (Schmid and Smith 2021; Turker and

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Murphy 2021), autonomous geographies and politics (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010; Hardt and Negri 2017; Healy 2015; Woodward et al. 2012), the commons and commoning (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015; De Angelis 2017; Noterman 2016), and enclosure (Christophers 2018; Sevilla-Buitrago 2015). We start by exploring surplus populations and surplus geographies. This is followed by situating Marx's ontology of economic bare life: the "virtual pauper". We then provide our account of geographic justice and review work on post-capitalist geographies. Three interrelated sections follow: *alter-worlds*, *alter-work*, and *alter-politics*, each providing a conceptual cosmology for a beyond-capital praxis. We define alter-worlds as common spaces of more-than-human co-existence. Alter-work is a type of care for the world that nourishes these autonomous sites. Finally, alter-politics is the ongoing challenge to create, sustain, and connect alter-worlds. For us, everything rests on directing our energies into rethinking and remaking the spaces of the expelled—so that capitalism, rather than life, is made surplus.

Surplus Life

The concept of surplus populations remains vital for addressing "how certain groups are considered expendable ... disposable, wasted, or precarious" (Tyner 2013:703). Both Engels (2009) and Marx (1990) placed surplus life at the centre of their political economy. For Marx (1990:872), the expansion of capital produces a redundant humanity to a "greater extent than suffices for the average needs of the self-expansion of capital, and therefore a surplus population". The more surplus workers capital produces, the more that commodity—labour power—is devalued. The residual functions of surplus populations in the industrialising period, including wage depression and a flexible reserve army, are still active today. But the position of surplus populations in relation to capital has changed. Flexibility has morphed into disposability (Bauman 2004). "The past two decades", argues Sassen (2014:1), "have seen a sharp growth in the number of people, enterprises, and places expelled from the core social and economic orders of our time". Capitalism has entered a *new* phase where surplus populations no longer represent value to capital, either as workers, consumers, or a reserve army (Smith 2011).

A global *multitude* of the poor now exists in staggering numbers (Hardt and Negri 2009, 2017). For Davis (2006:11), this "outcast proletariat—perhaps ... 2.5 billion by 2030—is the fastest-growing and most novel social class on the planet". Neoliberalism continues to render employment and everyday existence as precarious—paralleled by a rise in meaningless and "bullshit jobs" (Graeber 2018). The term precarity links together contemporary waged life, the gig economy, the unemployed, as well as the exploitation of migrant workers. Precarity is both an economic condition and a broader category of life for surplus populations (Lewis et al. 2015). For Hardt and Negri (2017:59), "Precarity has become something like a generalised existential condition". Accordingly, it is crucial to consider surplus populations not as a fixed demographic or as a homogeneous bloc. Instead, it is a multitude that cuts across national borders (Hardt and Negri 2017; McIntyre and Nast 2011), is constantly in flux, and exists on a spectrum of freedom

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and unfreedom, life and death. Capitalism, in turn, is not a static structure, but an ongoing process of enclosure and *surplusification* that affects people unevenly.

Indeed, capital's trajectory in dominant countries—from a post-war Keynesianism to a contemporary expulsion—obscures "the armies of the poor who lived outside of the normal world of employment and unemployment" (Watts 2011:73). Consider, for example, the slave and slave-liked conditions many people are subjected to under neoliberalism (Lebaron and Ayers 2013). Wageless life has been the norm for most dominated countries, where "super-exploitation" and "permanent primitive accumulation" are normal (Munck 2013:752). The longer geohistories of surplus populations begin with the expulsionary and racist geographies of European imperialism and slavery (Robinson 1983). These still structure the experience of black communities in America (Mitchell 2010), as well as myriad other inheritors of the legacies of settler colonialism. The colonial foundations of surplus life intersect brutally with systems of racism and patriarchy to produce a gendered necropolitical order that continues to render third world women as violently disposable (Fuentes 2020; Pratt 2005; Wright 2011). Accordingly, while surplusification is a universalising process, it disproportionately impacts already racialised and gendered populations.

There is an important geography to surplus populations. Prisons, detention facilities, refugee camps, and violent borderlands (Davies et al. 2017), function to *concentrate* surplus life. Sassen (2014:222) argues that these "spaces of the expelled" need to be conceptualised. A crucial geography for managing surplus populations is the prison-industrial complex. Authoritarianism has grown across the globe and is increasingly directed towards surplus populations as a "fix" to crises of state legitimacy. What Hallsworth and Lea (2011:142) call a security state aims to police "a growing global surplus population rendered 'structurally irrelevant' to capital accumulation". Giroux (2002) similarly describes the rise of the "garrison state", which proffers its legitimacy by targeting a (racialised) surplus population. The prison is thus the most explicit and archetypal site for managing surplus populations. The sole purpose of prisons, for Bauman (2004:86), is a "final, definite disposal". Prisons, in other words, "forcibly disappear" the most disruptive of society's (racially coded) castaways (see Gilmore 2007). For Wacquant (2009:xvi), "incarceration serves to physically neutralise and warehouse the supernumerary fractions of the working class". Similarly, public housing continues to be a site of disinvestment and decay, leading to "spatial trauma" (Pain 2019) among (former) working classes.

The slum remains an important global geography for warehousing, sequestering, and policing a global residuum (Davis 2006; see also Gidwani and Reddy 2011). Here, violence is materialised as letting die: as a mode of "active inaction" (Tyner 2016:206). We can thus understand capital's production of space (Lefebvre 2009) in its *negative power*, as the power to abandon. Slums are frequently sites of "necropolitical" violence (McIntyre and Nast 2011). Targeted assassinations and disappearances comprise a suite of violent policing practices in São Paulo's favelas (Alves 2014). Such disposability has, in turn, led to unprecedented forms of forced migration. A staggering 79.5 million people were forcibly displaced in 2019 (UNHCR 2020). Consequently, a "part of this enduring

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temporality of disposability has been the respatialisation of family life through the massive expansion of labour migration" (Pratt et al. 2017:170). The global borderlands are spaces where surplus life gathers, waits, stops, and is the target of violent forms of militarised state power. Borders and (informal) refugee camps act as interfaces where global capital faces down its outcasts. For Davies et al. (2017:1268), these spaces "have become a concentrated visible symbol of the 'apartheid' of migrant Others from the Global South".

Finally, capitalism continues to exploit and expel *nonhuman* life directly. As Hardt and Negri (2017:167) put it bluntly, "*Capital against the earth*—one or the other may survive, but not both". There is an important ecology to capitalism's surplusification of life. The planet's global commons—from the simplest of seeds to the most ancient of forests—are remade as exchangeable and disposable commodities. Capitalism is a world-ecology (Moore 2017) that captures the web of life with a mixture of gluttony and disdain. The planet is not simply a backdrop for surplus populations, then, it is simultaneously a *target* and *space* of violence (see Laurie and Shaw 2018). For Tsing (2015:4), "only an appreciation of current precarity as an earthwide condition allows us to notice this—the situation of our world". Life, rather than being treated (and protected) as an *end*, is converted into a *means*. In the eyes of capital, everyone—and everything—is replaceable, surplus, disposable. From deforestation in Brazil, to factory farming in China, capitalism tears through the web of life. Understanding what Moore (2017) calls the Capitalocene is to view capital as a great coloniser and disposer of life in its *entirety*. People, plants, animals and the biosphere are rendered surplus. Little wonder that McBrien (2016) terms the epoch of capital as a *Necrocene*: a biogeological era of ecological death and extinction. For McBrien (2016:116), "Capital does not just rob the soil and worker, as Marx observes, it necrotises the entire planet".

The Virtual Pauper: A Negative Ontology

How can we begin to understand an *ontology* of surplus populations? In this section, we argue that *pauperism* is the anterior and necessary condition of surplus life (Denning 2010). To be surplus is to be stripped of one's ability—and means—to live an autonomous existence. Encountering this "zero point" is important—since the politics we sketch below depend on it. The term pauper emerged as far back as the 16th century in English law, referring to a person destitute of property, livelihood, or means of support. The figure of the pauper in English capitalism was regarded as "a social disease" (Polanyi 2001:91). The dramatic rise of pauperism is inseparable from capitalist enclosure. For Marx (1973:604), "Only in the mode of production based in capital does pauperism appear as the result of labour itself". Pauperism has always shadowed capital and is the beginning and endpoint for unemployed labourers. As Marx and Engels (2015:19–20) write, "The modern labourer … sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth".

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Most of humanity under capitalism, then, is not born as a "worker" but as a pauper. Economic bare life—life stripped down to an abstract exchange value—is capitalism's foundational social contract. As Marx clarifies, pauperism is a *necessary* category of the surplus population. "Pauperism is the hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army. Its production is included in that of the relative surplus population, its necessity is implied by their necessity; along with the surplus population, pauperism forms a condition of capitalist production" (Marx 1990:797). Pauperism is not ontologically distinct from surplus life—it is simply its most naked expression. Life is rendered contingent to what Harvey (2018) calls the madness of economic reason. To become surplus, one must always-already be surplus. Here, Bauman (2004:12) inflects this exact point, writing, "To be declared redundant means to have been disposed of *because of being disposable*". The pauper and worker are not distinct since the former *includes* the latter:

> It is already contained in the concept of the free labourer, that he is a pauper: virtual pauper … He can live as a worker only in so far as he exchanges his labour capacity for that part of capital which forms the labour fund. This exchange is tied to conditions which are accidental for him, and indifferent to his organic presence. He is thus a virtual pauper. Since it is further the condition of production based on capital that he produces ever more surplus labour, it follows that ever more necessary labour is set free. Thus the chances of his pauperism increase. (Marx 1973:604)

Under capitalism, most workers exist as *virtual* paupers: personalities, histories, and dignities, are *surplus*, and often irrelevant, to the abstract labour power we are compelled to sell. So, while some of us are virtual paupers, and others are actual paupers—pauperism is a shared mode of existence under capitalism (see Breman 2016). If the *homo sacer* is the figure of biological life stripped of political life, then the pauper is surely a figure of biological life stripped of economic life. The labourer exists *because* it is a pauper, always becoming-surplus. Accordingly, wageless life, rather than wage labour, is Denning's (2010) starting point for understanding capitalism—and one we find invaluable for diagnosing a planet of surplus populations. Denning, like Marx, argues that an analysis of capitalism must not begin from the accumulation of capital, but from its violent obverse: the accumulation of (landless) labour. Pauperism complicates many of the categories of capitalism. While Marx discussed the proletariat in relation to European industrialism—it must be understood as a primary figure of ontological dispossession (see also De Angelis 2017:184). The "free" proletarian is a virtual pauper (Denning 2010:81).

Capitalism *negates* our basic human autonomy and singularity (what Marx termed our organic presence), and sells us back some kind of existence under waged life. This means that waged life is a negative power, or, a *negation* of a *negation*. The pauper is a negative figure of economic bare life, stripped of land, liberty, and livelihood. The worker expresses this negative ontology only as compounded negation. Pauperdom is the starting point for diagnosing and moving beyond a planet of wageless life. And, as we explore later in the paper, this negative ontology of surplus populations contains a revolutionary—and

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positive—potential for challenging the foundations of pauper capitalism. To be cash-poor, to be wageless, is not the same as to be resource-poor or worthless (Araujo 2017). Put differently, "poverty as not deprivation but a state of wealth and plenitude that threatens every sovereign and transcendent power" (Hardt and Negri 2017:61). Everything depends on reclaiming worlds from the zero point of capital.

Geographic Justice and Beyond-Capitalism

Capital's great war of enclosure set humans "free" for a life of wage labour and pauperdom. Enclosure names this historical act of privatisation and deprivation (Linebaugh 2014). But enclosure also reaches into the present, and is responsible for ongoing extractions of commonwealth (De Angelis 2017; Hardt and Negri 2017) or what Harvey (2003) calls accumulation by dispossession. Enclosure is therefore the pervasive spatial—or biopolitical—condition of humanity (Jeffrey et al. 2012; Sevilla-Buitrago 2015). Yet enclosure hardly stops at humanity. It is a worldly violence that damages the web of life (McBrien 2016). Enclosure "sets free" plants, animals, and nature's commons into a set of extractable resources. The singularity of both humans and nonhumans is surplus to capital accumulation. In other words, humans and nonhumans are devalued by the same system of expulsion that captures and *truncates* life (Tyner 2013). Capitalism, as a world ecology (Moore 2017), strips humans and nonhumans of their inherent dignity, deterritorialises their spatial existence, and casts them adrift in a global system of exchange.

We need, therefore, to chart a pathway to geographic justice for all (Soja 2010). Enclosed space materialises a struggle between those who own it, and those made surplus (De Angelis 2017). Capitalist property relations—predicated on economic exchange rather than social use value—are an obstacle to geographic justice. Private property—backed by the law—is what Hardt and Negri (2009:8) term the "republic of property", which encloses "the conditions of possibility of social life in all its facets and phases". Yet the term justice, in liberal thought, so often refers to equitable distribution (of rights). But it fails to consider the equitable *production* of space. So, while the right to access space is an important axis of justice (though one heavily policed), this is secondary to a right to *produce* space, which is far more circumscribed. Lefebvre's notion of autogestion, for example, is a spatial struggle to occupy the "conditions of existence"—restoring the primacy of use values over exchange (Lefebvre 2009:192). Lefebvre's focus was embedding autogestion within a right to the city, a struggle to "de-alienate" urban space (Purcell 2013:150). But what about a process of de-alienation beyond the city? Here, then, we ask with Nevins (2017:1360), "What are the spatial conditions under which it is possible to be?" What of a right to the world: a right to use and *produce* space—a spatial right emblazoned across the banners of the pauperised, the disposable, the surplus?

The idea of geographic justice encompasses various beyond-capitalist praxes (Chatterton and Pusey 2020), often inspired by the community economies approach of J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006; see also Roelvink 2016). Miller (2013)

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reads Gibson-Graham's community economy as the constitutive ontology of *being-with*, or what Jean-Luc Nancy called our being-in-common. Both the ethics and politics that follows are site-specific struggles for *commoning* across the social terrain. Consider, for example, Turker and Murphy's (2021) framing of community economies and post-capitalist futures as relational assemblages of humans, things, plants, and animals. For Turker and Murphy (2021:65), "increasing engagement with relational thinking in general, and assemblage theory and ANT in particular … have an immense potential in understandings of post-capitalist futures". Similarly, autonomous geographies cover a range of activities across the everyday practices and spaces of activism (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010). As Bresnihan and Byrne (2015) explore in Dublin, the politics of urban commoning is a practical exercise in escaping the enclosures of the city. Here, the "outside" of capitalism does not represent a distinct space, but rather, a messy process of *living beyond*, "producing an actually existing crack in the city" (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015:48).

We find much to support in post-capitalist initiatives, especially when geared towards prefiguring autonomy, supporting the commons, and organising communal practices across the spaces of everyday life (De Angelis 2017). Social centres, book shops, affordable cafes and bars, food cooperatives, free shops, meeting spaces, housing cooperatives, workers cooperatives, community gardens, self-build and self-help housing, squats, land trusts, communes, eco-villages, parallel institutions, low impact dwellings, and cohousing, are just some of the spaces that nurture a beyond-capitalist existence. As Schmid (2019:5–6) writes, "Autonomous perspectives emphasise self-managed projects that exist and thrive within capitalism's temporal, spatial, and institutional interstices". Chatterton and Pusey (2020) similarly offer useful guidelines for charting a post-capitalist geography: (1) creating commons against enclosure; (2) socially useful production to counter commodification; and (3) joyful doing to negate alienated work. All of these can help prefigure the *beyond* of capitalism in the here and now (Chatterton 2016).

In dominated countries, the idea of *post*-capitalism is much more complicated, for reasons already explored. Yet wageless life in the global South is not a story of passivity, but of the tactical and strategic means "to eke out an existence in conditions of chronic scarcity and exploitation" (Simone 2015:S15; see also Breman 2016). Many strategies employed by surplus populations attempt to patch together solidarity networks and economies. For Choplin and Ciavolella (2017:329), "urban margins become laboratories for new shared identities and social solidarities and thus, perhaps, for the formation of a new political subject". The range of survival and livelihood repertoires of the wageless across the global South is impressive in scale and organisation, and resonate with recent work by Hardt and Negri (2017) on entrepreneurship from the bottom (see also Pratt et al. 2017). These cases (and myriad others; see Shaw and Waterstone 2019) demonstrate the *political antinomy* of surplus geographies: they are spaces of despair *and* opportunity.

Geographic justice, in short, demands existential autonomy: the ability to produce and share the spatial conditions of our coexistence (Nevins 2017). This is a right to the planet's commons in an age of brutal land acquisitions, ecological

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expulsions, financial extraction, dispossession, and the mass warehousing of a surplus humanity. Geographic justice is the ability to freely produce space wherever we find ourselves: a right to the world.

Alter-Worlds

In the section above, we argued geographic justice should guide a beyond-capitalist project. Now, we provide further conceptual details on why this project must be thought of in terms of *world*. As Venn (2018:139) puts it, "the problem is much larger than a purely economic or political one since it involves issues about foundations guiding the remaking of world". Our use of world—which has a rich philosophical genesis (Arendt 2013)—describes the *existential space*, or situatedness of people and their environment, rather than a synonym for the globe. We find the term *world* politically important for uniting human *and* more-than-human life, for pulling together the psychological and the embodied, and for capturing the socio-material background of capitalism (Shaw 2019). Capitalism is a worldly process—one that encloses humans no less than the biosphere. A planet of surplus populations is a planet of endemic worldlessness. Singular spaces of togetherness, of unique stories-so-far (Massey 2005), and plural commons, were bulldozed by the violent equivalences of money, and the blood-stained concept of *terra nullius*. Capitalism installs a singular, homogeneous, and global space of exchange—and subjugates other worlds and imaginations (Fisher 2009). For the Invisible Committee (2009:8), "Two centuries of capitalist and market nihilism have brought us the most extreme alienations—from our selves, from others, from worlds".

By worlding our understanding of capitalism, then, we see surplus life as symptomatic of spatial violences rooted in centuries of colonial dispossession, alienation, and enclosure. Pauperisation—the process of becoming-surplus—is a process of becoming surplus to the world. Terms like poverty, under this understanding, imply a *world-poverty*. Capitalism prevents billions of people from producing, using, and inhabiting common spaces to flourish, and erases alternative cosmologies and imaginaries. Arendt (2013:256) characterised modern life in terms of this world-alienation—one that threw people off the land, enclosed the commons, destroyed existential autonomy, and created a "labouring poor". World alienation is a profound loss of territorial autonomy, or loss of "a tangible, worldly place of one's own" (Arendt 2013:70). Accordingly, we want to present our view of alternative worlds—or alter-worlds—to those subsumed by capital. At the beating heart of this project to de-alienate surplus life is the reappropriation of the commons. "Since capital requires the separation of the worker from the means of production and subsistence", writes Linebaugh (2014:110), "commoning must logically ground the answer to the ills of a class-riven society". Crucially, the commons are not just a "resource", but, following De Angelis (2017), must be thought of in terms of a social system, or, as we prefer, a *world*.

The commons have become a central socio-spatial framework—or organising principle—for how to conceptualise a beyond-capitalist horizon (Hardt and Negri 2009, 2017). For Gibson-Graham (2006:193), this means "creating, enlarging, reclaiming, replenishing, and sharing a *commons*, acknowledging the

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interdependence of individuals, groups, nature, things, traditions, and knowledges, and tending the commons as a way of tending the community". The commons are a vital resource of shared power, collective property ownership, and the co-production of beyond-capitalist spaces, goods, and subjectivities (De Angelis 2017). As Chatterton and Pusey (2020:30) write, these spaces are "a means to struggle against capitalism". The commons, in other words, are productive spaces that generate new and emergent vocabularies, solidarities, and "social and spatial practices and repertoires of resistance that can be used against capitalism" (Chatterton 2016:407). Reclaiming the commons is vital for regaining non-capitalist forms of wealth and social coexistence. Of course, the commons are not homogeneous systems that are straightforwardly opposed to capital—nor are they automatically a threat. Instead, they are *complex* terrains of contradictory socio-spatial relations and prefigurative possibilities (see Noterman 2016).

Centuries of pauperisation have destroyed the spatial strategies for territorial autonomy. The battle is thus for the very contours of the world, not just for wages or the workplace. Accordingly, lodging the commons at the heart of geographic justice demonstrates the vital political relay between territorial autonomy *and* existential autonomy. This alternative geography is vividly illustrated by land-based movements such as the MST in Brazil, the Landless People's Movement in South Africa, the Black farmers movement in the US, the Via Campesina Movement, or the Zapatistas in the Lacandon jungle. All express wealth in terms of the commons, rather than capital (De Angelis 2017). The indigenous struggle for emancipation "orients the forces of resistance more clearly toward an autonomous terrain" (Hardt and Negri 2009:102). Alter-worlds are animated by this spirit of autonomous commoning. For Subcomandante Galeano of the Zapatistas, "Zapatismo believes that, 'When the land hurts, everything hurts'" (in EZLN 2016:254). There is much to be gleaned from indigenous cosmologies for beyond-capitalist praxes: dignified associations between humans and nonhumans, as well as innovative forms of value and exchange (Araujo 2017).

The zero point of capitalism was its elimination of incompatible worlds—setting in motion a profound world alienation. Alter-worlds are autonomous, singular, and common spaces of coexistence between humans and the planet. Crucially, these spaces—of use value rather than exchange value—are not distinctly *human* spaces, but include nonhuman agents, held together by an emergent but fragile web of life (Tsing 2015; Turker and Murphy 2021). We think the term alter-world is key to understanding the ontology and future of the commons in the 21st century. All-too-often, the commons are seen as *resources*, rather than *worlds*. But this is to deny the commons their own agency, dignity, singularity, and *life*. Alter-worlds are common spaces that loop together human bodies, plants, imaginations, desires, animals, and the shape-shifting fabric of the planet. Commoning becomes the praxis of moving these worlds towards an autonomous and peaceful co-existence beyond capital.

Alter-Work

Alter-worlds demand ongoing *work* to make a material difference to livelihoods. In this section, we consider alter-work as a *care* for alter-worlds. This requires

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confronting capitalist understandings of work. In the wake of the industrial revolution—and European colonialism—the meaning of work shifted from producing for ourselves, and for caring for the world, to labour for the owner of our labour power, if not outright slavery. So many of us woke up, as the Invisible Committee (2009:26) perfectly sum up, in "a world where 'becoming self-sufficient' is a euphemism for 'having found a boss'". Pauperisation is not simply the dispossession of land and liberty, but also of *livelihood*. Becoming-surplus is a violent removal of autonomous capacities. So long as we labour for a wage we will not be truly free. For Gorz (1989:22), it is capitalist impositions of waged labour that "sweep away the ancient idea of freedom and existential autonomy". Yet capitalism has successfully installed the oppressive ideology that waged life is all there is, all there can be, and that unemployment is to be feared. This impasse is why, as Denning (2010:79) articulates, a pervasive angst persists that "under capitalism, the only thing worse than being exploited is not being exploited".

Waged work is under pressure from multiple fronts, including automation and robotisation. What is novel about this current technological displacement of labour is the *permanent*, rather than cyclical, expulsion of human labour (Smith 2011). Streeck (2017:14) argues we have entered a new "Dark Age" of *de-socialised* capitalism with economic disparities that parallel those of the 19th century (see Piketty 2014). The fear is that capital (in the form of automated machines, robots, and algorithms) and human labour further decouple to create a *jobless future* (see Frase 2016:10). For Collins (2013:67), the "real threat of the future is not some Frankensteinian revolt of the robots, but the last stage of technological displacement of labour on behalf of a tiny capitalist class of robot-owners". Automation is not feared by all on the Left. Techno-optimism underpins a strand of post-work scholarship that welcomes the elimination of jobs as a pathway to communism (Bastani 2019). While these debates enrich a Left imagination, it is not obvious to us how they escape the orbit of capitalist realism. Automation, for example, is too often viewed as a "neutral" or "post-political" process, rather than a force generative of (technocratic, hierarchical, disciplinary) social relations. *If only we could get a socialist automation!*

Pauperisation, as well as stripping us to economic bare life, is a profound deskilling of our capacities to nurture and repair the world. So much of our daily activity is *not* directed at supporting the dignity of world. World alienation denies billions meaningful and worldly work. To create alternative worlds animated by the ancient spirit of autonomy demands a reconception of work as *worldliness*. We find much value in Arendt's distinction between the human activities of *work* and *labour*. Work, Arendt (2013) writes, is an ancient *world-building* craft, which creates durable artefacts to nourish, strengthen, and maintain public worlds. This human activity, of *worldliness*, defines us as *homo faber*, "human the maker". *Homo faber* is an existential engineer or a builder of worlds. This mode of contrasts with *animals laborans*, or "labouring beasts". While labouring has always existed, capitalism elevated it to the mythical status it now occupies. And our worlds suffered, as the commodity became the organising principle for life on earth.

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We want to recover Arendt's meaning of work—rather than labour—in our conception of alter-work, to signify the autonomous world-making activities that support common coexistence. Alter-work aims to inhibit the accumulation of surplus value, surplus goods, and surplus life, by *embedding* activity within the flesh of the world (see Polanyi 2001). Post-capitalist praxes (Gibson-Graham 2006) and autonomous geographies (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010) includes important decommodified examples of this kind of work. Chatterton and Pusey (2020) describe this non-alienated work as "socially useful doing". The work required to manage a commons, for example, involves a range of practical skills and theoretical knowledges: "it is a process of *collective* learning by *collective* doing" (Noterman 2016:441). Crossan et al.'s (2016) study of community gardens in Glasgow demonstrates how subjectivities are (re)made through working the land. This dealienating practice is rooted in caring for the world, building autonomy, and cooperating with earth-others. Alter-worlds, even if born amongst wasted lives and wasted talent, can provide the opportunity to "turn *detritus* into a social hummus in which new ideas can flourish into new practices and bloom with new wealth" (De Angelis 2017:236).

Alter-work enables people to materialise their existence into the flesh of the world. This immanent praxis, writes Gorz (1999:2), is a process of "exteriorisation by which subjects achieve self-realisation by inscribing themselves upon the objective materiality of what they create or produce". Unless we take ownership of our own work, our ability to *exteriorise* ourselves—to realise our existential autonomy in the world—is limited. The worlds so many of us labour within do not provide a space of exteriorisation and are utterly indifferent to our existence. Our lives are rendered surplus. Work must, therefore, be *reclaimed* and *reworlded* from under capitalism. Alter-work, in other words, is a practice *and* space of ecological care, a living circuit that celebrates the vulnerability and strength we share with the planet's biosphere. This, writes Venn (2018:15), provides "an ethics that could provide common ground for a postcapitalist world". We believe that waged labour—under intense pressure from capital's protracted and zombie-like death spiral—is not the route to geographic justice.

Of course, enormous swathes of the population who have long been surplus to capital are *already* in existence. The repertoires and improvisations that make everyday life possible for those outside of waged work might provide key insights for new forms of production, reproduction, and social relations. These could replace the present (but rapidly disappearing) waged arrangements, even if these alternate forms are now produced in brutal and exigent circumstances. Rather than viewing the present conjuncture as requiring increased inclusion in the wage labour-based society and its necessary forms of exploitation (though for too many around the globe wage labour remains the most ardently desired achievement and the outer limit of imagined possibility), a number of actual cases point to how it might be possible to recast salutary forms of (re)production that until now have been largely coerced impositions, into positively inflected, freely chosen opportunities (which because of space, we can only reference here: Chen et al. 2015; Fernandez 2018; Khasnabish 2017; Lindell 2010; Schindler 2014; Steel 2012; Subcomandante Galeano, in EZLN 2016; Whitson 2011). In short, we

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believe it is now imperative to listen to and learn from those who have never been proletarianised to reimagine what may be possible.

Alter-Politics

A successor system to capitalism is yet to crystallise, as are the identities, categories, and agents of a beyond-capitalist politics. For us, the future must lie with the collective power of surplus populations. Yet the extent to which this multitude can even form a class (Kalb 2015), or a "dangerous class", as Guy Standing (2011) called the precariat, is a crucial question. If, as Marx argued, the virtual pauper is the foundation of coexistence under capitalism, then it is here we must draw strength and political organisation. It is the multitude of the poor that now emerges "at the centre of the project for revolutionary transformation" (Hardt and Negri 2009:86). As a political analytic, (virtual) pauperism directs us towards the condition of ontological dispossession and bare life endured by surplus populations. Pauperism *directs us towards the world itself*. The violent geographies of becoming-surplus are a shared condition of oppression *and* revolution. Accordingly, the alter-politics we imagine is not based on a particular identity, but on an existential *world position*: to be outcast, to be denied a place of one's own, to be surplus. Pauperism, after all, is a radically open and democratic category. The political challenge is how to translate this potential of the poor into power.

The alter-politics we imagine is a positive power of *existential fabrication* animated by the skills of the poor, and the ontological fact of being-together. We see the challenge as threefold: (1) to *create* alter-worlds; (2) to *sustain* alter-worlds; (3) to *connect* alter-worlds. Each of these political challenges is met with a set of responses: (1) a subjective shift; (2) site-specific sensitivity and adaptability; (3) rhizomatic alliances between alter-worlds.

The autonomous tradition offers multiple pathways for how communities and individuals can create alter-worlds (Chatterton and Pusey 2020; Schmid 2019). For us, this is foremost a problem of imagination. The spell of capitalist realism has left so many atomised and reduced to abstract models of consumerism. Creating alter-worlds therefore requires recreating ourselves—as precarious beings, or as beings-with. The straitjacket of individuality can be loosened—and eventually broken—by immersing ourselves within the flesh of the world and transforming our daily habits and common senses. Subject formation is immanent to the (sensible) contours of the world itself. *Spatial* strategies and *subjective* strategies thus collapse in the act of doing, or building, alter-worlds. Furthermore, overturning capital's destruction of the planet requires not only challenging individualism, but the anthropocentrism that cocoons it. Capitalism renders the planet as a *vast plane of surplus life*, and so we must create the conditions for a dignified flourishing of human and nonhuman life. For Healy (2015:344–345), "To be a communist should be to insist on a common solution to an economic system that marginalises enormous numbers of people while laying waste to the commons—oceans, atmosphere, biosphere, and lithosphere". And this can only be realised if we see ourselves not as masters of the universe, but as

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co-inhabitants of a common earth, as a species among species. The commons do not belong to humans—we belong to the commons.

The second challenge is how to *sustain* alter-worlds, by translating nascent world-building tactics into durable refuges from capitalism. The Zapatistas, for example, have successfully defended their existential autonomy by crafting a parallel system of institutions such as schools, health clinics, and farms (Mora 2015). What is crucial for political success is materialising alter-work into the flesh of the world, over and over again. And this requires a site-specific approach and sensitivity. Here, we find Schmid and Smith's (2021) post-capitalist site ontology useful for understanding the immanent, practical, and emergent logic of alter-worlds. For Schmid and Smith (2021:265), "a site ontology opens alternative imaginaries of how a greater part of everyday needs and wants could be organised through such non-exploitative economic relations". Crucially, there is an element of surprise—and thus political potential—lodged within the care for alter-worlds, precisely because of their human and nonhuman composition. As Woodward et al. (2012:206) describe in their work on autonomous spaces:

> site-based politics are fundamentally expressed through the compositions and variations of a site's dense materialities: in the affective bodily arrangements of its human and non-human participants; in the charismatic chaos of its unexpected eruptions and routine redundancies; in the complex of arrivals and departures that both connect sites to one another and continually reshape their boundaries; and in the recruiting of human bodies into political moments unanticipatable from the perspective of their subjectivities alone.

Emergence, or "unexpected eruptions" require a high level of *sensitivity* and *adaptability* to the shape-shifting form of alter-worlds. For Schmid and Smith (2021:263), "sensitivity to the contextuality of practices encourages an openness towards the specificity of the *sites* of practice". Sustaining alter-worlds is not simply an activity of endless repetition, or a static praxis, but a continual glimpse into new forms of co-living. Caring for the world does not simply keep it as is, but generates a space of possibility and experimentation. As Crossan et al. (2016:945) describe community garden work, "it is not simply people who are generating such ideas and practices, but people in communion with space". Existential fabrication is a praxis of care and surprise.

The third challenge is how to *connect* alter-worlds. This is not a question of scaling up in an extensive, geometric or hierarchical way, but of proliferating alter-worlds. As Chatterton and Pusey (2020:37) write, "Autonomous postcapitalist politics have an emerging spatial sensibility around self-governing micro-commons, which are often non-contiguous but highly networked, especially through transnational activists". It is this highly networked—or rhizomatic—quality that needs to be resourced through work, imagination, and the energy of the wageless. For this reason, alter-worlds do not have a clear or singular scalar politics, but instead form archipelagos of commons, places, cooperatives, imaginaries, and above, all, united *experiences*. Scaling up is always secondary to *spreading*, to a micropolitics of "decentralised swarming, networking and infiltrating, countering and corroding the dominant as they connect" (Chatterton 2016:411). This

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rhizomatic geography is different from the post-work politics of luxury communism or a UBI, since both have little to say about the *site* and *practice* of politics (Schmid and Smith 2021), and both are attached to the money-form. Political alternatives that retain a transcendent economism skip over geographic justice. The political task is to build, craft, engineer, cook, and plumb, our way to alter-worlds.

Closing Thoughts

Capitalism is an immense machine for churning out surplus life. Its long war of enclosure has captured, controlled, and pauperised human life, and laid waste to nonhuman life. Many of us are *actual* paupers—but most of us are *virtual* paupers (Marx 1973), always becoming-surplus to capital. Capitalism, in turn, is unable to correct its violences. For Harvey (2018:208–209), "Surplus capital and an ever increasing mass of surplus and disposable labour sit side by side without there being any way to put them together to produce the use values so desperately needed … What can be madder than that?" We have argued that this madness must be imagined as a battle for geographic justice. Our contribution lodges the problematic of surplus life—together with a series of exit strategies—within the common flesh of the world. The political task we have set is to create, sustain, and connect alter-worlds, supplanting centuries of capitalist worldlessness and alienation. We have consistently made the case for *world* as an existential analytic for uniting the commons as a "resource" with the more-than-human relations that enliven and support it. Freedom, in turn, emerges from having a place in the world, thereby uniting territory and existential autonomy. As Gorz (1989:166) writes, "Freedom consists … in reconquering spaces of autonomy". Our political imagination is radically truncated if we see the anaemic welfare state or waged life as the sole shelters from the coming storm.

The importance placed on alter-worlds shifts our attention from hierarchical agents of power into the sinews of the world itself—into lived sites and practices of being-with. This being-with extends to planetary life, thereby "abandoning a homocentric conception of planetary well-being and learning to live in common with the biotic and abiotic forces that create conditions felicitous to life" (Healy 2015:345). Yet the conjuncture many of us are at—surplus populations confronting a fissiparous, decaying, and violent capitalism—remains dangerous. As Frase (2016:102) warns, "A world where the ruling class no longer depends on the exploitation of working class labour is a world where … Its ultimate endpoint is literally the extermination of the poor". There is nothing *inevitable* that an outcast humanity will organise against the machine responsible for its expulsion. This is where politics becomes the art of geographic justice. We must start dreaming, building, and connecting new worlds. "If no geographic locations exist for that tomorrow, we start gathering twigs, stones, strips of clothing, meat, bones, and clay. We begin constructing an island, or better yet, a rowboat, that we plant in the middle of tomorrow" (Subcomandante Galeano, in EZLN 2016:167). We must make the end of capitalism easier to imagine than the end of the world.

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