

Rerouting Capillaries

Networked Territories of Condensation

For the Standing Rock Sioux, David Archambault II says, water is not a resource but a relative.¹ It is kin to the species producers of lifetimes for capital, including the nonhuman beings and producers of nature whose extraction as resources for capital creates toxic tailings as well as other waste. Waste in turn serves as content flows for other capitalist industries of management and securitization. Waste must be processed, moved, channeled. Flows are made to be managed and therefore must be instigated to be processed. Discontents of people, families, villages must be administered, policed. Such value-productive processing requires the connective means of the global network.

While the network is often envisioned as continuous (think of visualization systems like Buckminster Fuller's World Game),² it is not productive of a homogeneous zone of communication and trade. Instead, it must produce (or colonize) heterogeneous territories. These zones of extraction and condensation are increasingly designed to optimize financial gain.

We will introduce two figures to represent zones of extraction and zones of condensation. These are, respectively, the mine and the port. We will look at the characteristics of these zones and the means by which they are simultaneously kept separate and linked.

The Mine

- “Natural” resources: the open pit mine, the oil field/fracking site, the timber forest, the oceans, the rare earth metals mine
- Technological resources: the data center as mine
- Human resources: migrant labor, the prison system, displaced agricultural workers, the “absolutely expendable”
- Financial resources: loans, mortgages, credit (predatory lending as debt harvesting, the production of indentured servants, future lifetimes of captive territorialized populations)

The natural and technological resource mines are situated in territories of low land values and ready accessibility of low-cost energy, human labor, and other necessary resources (e.g., water in the case of data center cooling). These zones must remain geographically distinct to ensure efficient harvesting but require infrastructures that link these spaces to zones of condensation (the railroad, the oil pipeline, the data cable).

The human and financial resource mines are linked to vulnerable populations. These populations must remain vulnerable to exploitation to ensure efficient mining of labor or debt. Vulnerability may be total (in the case of the prisoner) or partial (in the case of the student seeking educational loans).

A single body is available for exploitation as both human and financial resource. Tens of thousands of migrant workers in the Gulf Cooperation Council, for instance, are indebted to recruiting agencies that transport them from their countries of origin (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, the Philippines) to the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, or Oman, where they work under conditions of indebted servitude (in construction, waste management, etc.). They enter into a system of total vulnerability and absolute servitude while simultaneously producing debt (as capital investment) and labor.

In this case, the discontinuity of the network is necessary to produce a condition of total exploitation. These migrant workers have unequal access to communication networks and therefore to information that would contradict the false promises of the recruiting agency (typically, false wage estimates are offered to encourage loan taking) or connect them to legal representation (when the illegal confiscation of passports by employers is common and effectively suspends any rights the worker might possess). Unequal access to communication networks is not purely technological. Dominant languages (whether management-speak, English, or Arabic—language dominance varies by context and specific power relation) maintain a relation of inclusion and exclusion even within the boundaries of technological platforms for communication. Whether technological, material, or social, discontinuity allows for the asymmetries necessary under systems of extraction.

The Port: Capital Condensation at the Fringes of the Network

- Tax havens
- Free ports
- Special economic zones
- Loopholes

Financial networks seek the path of least taxation. The consequence of this has been a shift of techniques and transactions ostensibly situated at

the margins of the network toward the network's center. The port is no longer merely a point of entry but a node in a system of transactions that prolong entry into a zone of taxation or tariffs. State actors have exploited this tendency by setting up special economic zones that literally bring these liminal spaces to the interior.

The result is the displacement of the network outside the boundaries of the nation-state, or at least outside of its systems of taxation, customs, and immigration (in the case of special economic zones for noncitizens). These zones are spaces of condensation: the financial centers of Hong Kong or Singapore, the global corporate headquarters in Jebel Ali in Dubai, the tax-free territory of the Cayman Islands, the art storage facilities of the Geneva Free Port.

These sites are extensions of the port. They are (selectively) outside of state sovereignty. They are the sites where global capital accumulates, as well as the white-collar workforce that manages this accumulation in the industries of financial law, operations management, and investment management.

But these sites of condensation are not islands (though some, literally, are). The port remains a site of infrastructural development—linkages to other ports as well as to territories of extraction: the mines. These are the sites where undersea cables land. They are also, traditionally, places where shipping containers accumulate (though the infrastructure for physical logistics has shifted—prosthethically controlled by data, they seek cheaper real estate, larger swaths of land, lower pay for longshore workers).

Ports are nodes; mines are pits.

We can observe three kinds of connections: port-to-port, port-to-mine, and mine-to-mine. The former is the financial network that operates at the periphery of the nation-state and yet that increasingly defines the economy in the import nations (centers of condensation). This network thrives on smoothness, unencumbered by borders, tariffs, and other regulations.

The mine-to-port connection is a one-way street. Extracted materials, data, and financial value are shuttled to the centers of condensation. Little returns to the mines. This one-way street maintains the zonal distinction between port and mine.

The mine-to-mine connection often falls outside what can be seen as continuous global networks. The transfer of resources between mines is generally not a part of a globally accessible marketplace. Instead, these transfers are locally determined and unique. They must fall outside the network and outside, often, the eye of the law. This is the path of human trafficking, slavery, or the suspension of rights within the prison system. It is also the appropriation of local communities (often displaced by climate change or the declining value of agricultural work) as labor resource.

While territorialization is often spatial, there are other methods for maintaining asymmetries that go beyond geographical separation, or the spatial model of spoke and hub. The legal loophole represents a regulatory space within which individuals and corporations can avoid taxation within the structure of the law. The expertise or financial status required to take advantage of tax loopholes creates two classes: those with access to the loophole and those without. As financial players take on a larger role in shaping the structure of taxation, these loopholes will continue to widen, speeding the linked processes of extraction and condensation.

And of those without access to the loophole, some are caught within the loop of the law and in its recursive functioning that forever bypasses their interests, their well-being, and with each cycle somehow generates another kind of hole. The loop as noose, the hole as black hole from which there are statically fewer opportunities of escape; the loop as an enclosure, an albatross, a police threat that generates landscapes of unbelonging and dispossession. This loop, this circuit, this rule set, this program, whether of rope, of barbed wire, of silicon, finance, or arms, for which some have the passkeys and for which others are relegated to the channels, bunkers, and modules that most often they themselves have been forced to dig, if only to survive. The loop creates with its bites a liquidity, an ever more desperate demand for the blood of the circuit, that is, for money that is exchanged with life at a discount. This is a liquidity that, as Neferti X. M. Tadiar says, “cannot solidify because it cannot aggregate”³ and is there to be mopped up, in the streets, in the camps, and in the gulags, by some other citizen/shareholders’ financial exploits and their salaried goons.

Territories of extraction—in an earlier time, the bankers came, set up a card table, handed out money, and within a decade or two owned half the land in the colony. Those dispossessed of their land needed to eat, and there, ready and waiting, was the newly built plantation and hacienda. Today, that culture still proudly thrives. It’s called various names, like Europe, Wall Street, America, the Internet—and these names more often than not disavow the histories of violence that underpin their institutions, brands, and platforms. The territories, cordoned off, ripped out of their original uses, violently expropriated without consideration or remorse, are not only geographic but also of the imagination, and of the flesh. Always were, of course, but the granularity is higher, the chain link ever more precise, the no-fly zones better surveilled, the processes more mysterious still. Rosa-Linda Fregoso called the border “a dispersed hemispheric and global terrain,” which in her account and many others is governed by a necropolitical order, the subjugation of life to the power of death.⁴ With special economic zones big capital got its loopholes, and its subcontracted states feasted on the spoils of maquiladoras, drug cartels, and femicide.

The new territories of extraction, those lodged in bodies and minds linked through networked mediations to bits and cash, sustain a necropolitical infrastructure, managed by algorithms of migration, net worth, nationality, racialization, gender—all things biometric. Every line of coke mediates concrete world history and affective terrains. Every hope of flight, of escape, is an attempt to flee the stochastics of the noose.

Life can be the pits in the mines. That's what my brother says all the time. A whole life adding up to nothing. He works in between the mine and the port, helping in the extraction, but all the while his own life added to the value extracted. So there hasn't been much left to accumulate. He's not exactly working in the mines, though undoubtedly he is mined like everyone else for his discounted life in the aid of those activities of condensation that make the port.

Here I am working in and for the port. My remittances to the mine or mine-to-port where my kin survive go a little way toward keeping them afloat. I extend their disposability, cushion and maybe lighten their extractability. I grew up in the mines, and escaped. Or so I tell myself. My remittances are investments in the mine out of which I came—discounted, the better to create value. And here I am trying to reinvest in that mine, deepening the hole, with my brother at its perilous edge. Like me, he is a service “helper” of the companies. But we are trying to get with it, become an entrepreneur or investor, using the cheaper life-times of others as assets, so we do not overextract ourselves. But we are working together, we are connected, we are also parts of a network that will never have an IPO or an ICO, though our network goes in and out of the financialized communication networks that we use, the channels through which we transport, transmit, extend, distribute, parts of our selves (a hand, a leg, a thought, a feeling, cash) to help each other live as well as we can.

Notes

This essay was written collaboratively as part of a book sprint. See “How This Text Was Written” (in this issue) for more information on the process.

1. “Everything that has a spirit or a soul is occupying something that needs water, so we all need water, so water is life, and so water is not a resource, a subject or a matter, water is more than that, it's like a relative, and when all things that have a connection, and are related—we're related to the four legged, or the winged, or the ones that crawl or the ones that swim, or the ones that flower or the ones that grow—if you are related to them, you can communicate. . . . But until that water is gone they will always be our relatives. So water is life for every thing.” *People's Tribune*, “Interview: Chairman Dave Archambault II.”

2. “In the 1960s Buckminster Fuller proposed a ‘great logistics game’ and ‘world peace game’ (later shortened to simply, the ‘World Game’) that was intended to be a tool that would facilitate a comprehensive, anticipatory, design science approach to the problems of the world. The use of ‘world’ in the title obviously refers to Fuller's global perspective and his contention that we now need a systems approach that deals with the world as a whole, and not a piecemeal approach that tackles our problems

in what he called a 'local focus hocus pocus' manner. The entire world is now the relevant unit of analysis, not the city, state or nation. For this reason, World Game programming generally used Fuller's Dymaxion Map for the plotting of resources, trends, and scenarios essential for playing. We are, in Fuller's words, onboard Space-ship Earth, and the illogic of 200 nation state admirals all trying to steer the space-ship in different directions is made clear through the metaphor—as well in Fuller's more caustic assessment of nation states as 'blood clots' in the world's global metabolism." Buckminster Fuller Institute, "World Game," www.bfi.org/about-fuller/big-ideas/world-game (accessed 14 June 2017).

3. Tadiar, "City Everywhere" (2015). See also the published version of this talk, Tadiar, "City Everywhere" (2016).

4. Fregoso, "'We Want Them Alive!,'" 110.

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