
The National and the Regional: Their Autonomy Vis-à-vis the Capitalist World Crisis

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Some fifteen years after the onset of what numerous authors have identified as the “general crisis of the Fordist development model,” an orthodox response seems to have taken shape in the media, among certain mainstream economists, and even among left-wing intellectuals in the industrialized countries. We can summarize the proposed orthodox solution to the crisis in two broad points:

1. The crisis could potentially be resolved through worldwide technical cooperation and interlinked markets with an appropriate social support system.
2. The operationalization of such a solution would require a suppleness and flexibility that could only be ensured at the local level.

The difficulty with this orthodox strategy is that it presupposes that there is one, and only one, possible form of post-Fordist social organization, determined, as it were, by the technological revolution that itself was informed by the crisis of Fordism. This technological revolution implies a worldwide and flexible social organization. The orthodox proposal also entails an important political consequence, for it implies that the national state, as an institution and as a geographical construct, must fade away to the benefit of alternative worldwide and local authorities.

From its very beginning this orthodox solution ran into lively criticism from certain groups on the left who identified weaknesses in the argument. They highlighted two general criticisms:

1. Its technological and economic determinism, which arose no doubt from an uncritical acceptance of the Marxian orthodoxy of the Second and Third International: a view of human destiny somehow dictated by the blind and impersonal forces of “progress”—a progress that is nevertheless dictated by specific social forces.

2. The loss of relevance of the national as an appropriate level for social change, which undercut labor and other progressive forces that, in spite of the unhappy claims of "proletarian internationalism," have never found anything better than the nation-state as an unavoidable instrument for change.

Valuable as these criticisms from the left may be, they should not mask the fact that similar criticisms have often been associated with nationalistic and conservative forms of attachment to social gains; such criticisms have frequently and perhaps unwittingly led to a rejection of authentically progressive aspirations to rid societies of a state perceived as alienating, in favor of communities more closely bound to the individual and better rooted within the conscience of a collective destiny—aspirations that in the past have often been suppressed by the nation-state. Ironically, therefore, this left-wing Fordist reaction to the decline of national Fordism reinforces precisely the position that it purported to combat in the first place, thus instituting an absurd polarization (e.g., between "the national" and "the local," between the closing and opening of the national economy, between the state and the individual). The end result is that a fraction of the left thus became identified with the Fordist era, an era not only transcended by the dominant capitalist evolution, but also rejected by the very same popular forces not so long ago mobilized against the centralist tutelary state that regulates the Fordist model.

The purpose of the present text is to develop a general theoretical argument, based upon the French "Regulation" approach,¹ which might surmount this absurd polarization between the over- and underestimation of locally rooted social compromises. First, I reflect on the concept of "space" or "spatiality"² and use it to suggest a number of basic notions that clarify the specificity of "the regional" in relation to "the national." Next, I revisit the Fordist model in its international and interregional dimensions, and with respect to its crisis issues. In this fashion I evaluate the autonomy of the national and the regional in view of actual tendencies, looking for different ways out of the crisis. In conclusion, I evoke the relevance of these two levels of political decisionmaking to the search for a progressive solution to the crisis in Fordism.

SOCIAL RELATIONS AND SPACE: SOME DEFINITIONS³

From the Modes of Production to Space-in-Itself

Each social formation is a complex structure of social relations intertwined at the economic, politico-judicial, and ideological instances. It presents itself as an articulation of modes of production: typical mixtures

of social relations such as capitalism, petty commodity production, and domestic production. This articulation, however, represents something more than a mere combination of these relations.

On the one hand, the form of existence of each of the forms of production depends largely upon the role attributed to it by the reproduction of the dominant mode in the social formation (i.e., capitalism). On the other hand, the conditions of existence of the dominant mode of production itself presupposes the presence of other modes of production, serving, for example, as reserves of labor power and outlets.

If, a priori, each mode of production has its own developmental dynamics and logic, which is generally in contradiction to that of the other modes, the dominance of the capitalist mode of production imposes on the whole structure its unity (i.e., its mode of functioning), which thereby manifests itself as a coherent whole. Thus, every practice and social relation figures within a concrete totality that is always already given and that determines that relation as its condition of existence. This totality, to the extent that it has materiality, carries a spatial dimension, for example, the separation of the producer from his/her means of production and the division of labor. As soon as this separation is realized—becomes physically established—it allows for the reproduction of the relation and, consequently, of the separation itself. Though all relations contribute to the constitution of social reality, every singular practice takes social reality—and hence spatiality—for granted. This is what may be called the "ecological paradox": for although the socioeconomic space is a product of practices, it appears, however, as somehow externally given for each individual practice or interaction (Lipietz 1989).

In other words, to the extent that it is not a historical transformation of the conditions of existence (i.e., of a revolutionary or long-term nature), the material existence of social reproduction also plays the part of a "social mold" determining the "habitus" (Bourdieu 1978), anticipations, behavior, and opportunities of the social formation as a whole. The social space, therefore, is one of the dimensions (the spatial dimension) of this social mold that one could call "the habits of history" (Lipietz 1987). In this light, social space should not be comprehended as the reflection (or support of the reflections) of social relations that would exist "elsewhere"; nor should it be perceived as a milieu, a field of deployment of regular practices constituting these relations. But in social reproduction the material space appears either as a result or as a determinant of these relations and practices. One can state that the social space is a "moment" of social reproduction. In this respect—and in this Hegelian terminology—the social "space-in-itself" is a "reflection" of social relations. This space-in-itself is the objective foundation of the empirical space in which social practices seem to take place, are embedded, and deployed.⁴

From Hegemony to Space-for-Itself

It is to the merit of Antonio Gramsci to have made, within the Marxist approach, significant progress in reflecting on the passage from "society as a field of relations" to "society as an agreement or struggle for the conservation or the establishment of a field of relations."⁵ He did so precisely on the issue of the regional and national question, suggesting the notions of "social bloc" and "hegemonic bloc." A social bloc is a convergence of social groups or fractions belonging to certain groups.⁶ A hegemonic bloc is the social bloc capable of representing or dictating (i.e., imposing) its project as that of society as a whole.⁷ A space-for-itself is the spatial dimension of a social bloc, of its hegemony, or of the open struggle between such blocs.

Spaces-for-themselves might include such cases as the following: a nation, recognized or seeking to be recognized (e.g., Palestine or Sahara); or a more restrained space, still affirming its specificity (a region defined by a regional movement); or a wider space materializing in a community seeking a certain mode of life ("the Umma," the "Free World"). Notice first that a space-for-itself can as easily express positions of either a conservative, modernist, reactionary, or progressive nature. And second, a space-for-itself may be defined in any instance (e.g., economic, ideological, religious, political, and linguistic options). Hence conflicts of legitimacy and the possibility of shifts: One can experience oneself as a Yugoslavian (against Stalin) and then as a Croatian (as a Catholic); one can experience oneself as an Arab nationalist, but also as Lebanese, and, then again, as a Sunni; and so forth. Notice finally that, as a result, the borders of a space-for-itself do not necessarily coincide with the space-in-itself proper to a particular social relation, nor with the language community or the citizenship.⁸ In contrast, few social movements exist without a spatial dimension: elegy for a re(li)gion, writes Francisco de Oliveira (1977) speaking of the northeast of Brazil.

Economic Regions, Regional Armatures, Nation-States

An homogeneous area consisting of articulation of modes and forms of production will be defined henceforth as an "economic region."⁹

"Homogeneous" here should not imply that we disregard subregional differences, the most evident of which are urban-rural divisions, or that we neglect economic and social divisions in the urban spaces or urban hierarchies within the region. Considering the totality of these relations (urban and rural; workers and bourgeois neighborhoods), it may be said that the form of articulation of these relations "individualizes" the region. In an

economic region, a definite subregime of accumulation evidently exists that maintains relations with its exterior. The choice of scale (i.e., of the social relations under consideration) can be somewhat artificial; the "Industrial North," for instance, is a global economic region, whereas the Great West of France and the northeast of Brazil form economic regions within national spaces.

Yet such illustrations of space-in-itself do not necessarily provide a sufficient basis for the articulation of a space-for-itself. For example, while the North-Western part of the world and the Brazilian *nordeste* provide illustrative cases, for the time being at least, the Great West of France does not. Evidently, there is some question as to the existence of the hegemonic social bloc and the institutional forms that grant a space for its personality. And it is precisely at this point that the question of the state can no longer be avoided: the state as "the apparatus by which society equips itself in order that the different groups of which it is constituted do not exhaust themselves in a struggle without end," as Marx and Engels defined it in *The German Ideology*. The topology of state relations—i.e., the topology of relations of sovereignty (or national borderlines)—relentlessly divides the scale of spaces among the national, the local, and the global.

We will call "regional armature" a space-for-itself where the dominant classes of the hegemonic bloc mobilize ideological and political apparatuses enabling the appropriate regulation at this level of some aspect or another of the socioeconomic conflict. Several regional armatures can divide an economic region, and certain parts of an economic region can appear as deprived of a significant regional armature. (Think of the specificity of Wales in relation to Sussex, for example.) Yet, the regional armature must be sharply distinguished from the nation-state, the territory of which is characterized by the universality of law (social law in particular), the uniqueness of its currency, and the monopoly of legitimate violence (sovereignty).

Let us limit ourselves to the economic aspects. It is only at the national scale that a policy of social compromise can become durably stable. For it is only within the totality of a state that social reproduction—and, in particular, the regime of accumulation—can make use of all the forms of compensatory mechanisms and of monetary, nonexchange transfers (e.g., taxes and social revenues). It is the privilege of the state to issue the general equivalent: the national currency that each holder of an income can exchange for an output realized at every location in the national territory, in an expedient fashion for both the individual and society. But this is also its limit. The exterior or balance of trade constraint requires that a distributed income exchanged for a foreign output should almost simultaneously have its counterpart in an equivalent exportation. A region (subnational), in contrast, does not face an exterior constraint.¹⁰ This fundamental difference between the national and the local inevitably leads to political consequences; struggles and compromises can only be settled at the national

level or, more precisely still, can only be settled at the level of regional armatures at the mercy of conditions warranted at the national level. A regional armature can extract the conditions for local compromises from the rest of the nation (in France, for example, le Midi Viticole, the industrial regions in decline). But it is certainly a national compromise (the maintenance of a "culture of the vine," of industries unprofitable from a capitalist point of view), at the charge of the nation, to make this compromise respected within the context of its exterior constraints.

But what about supranational spaces-for-themselves? Are there supranational forms of regulation, embedded in an international consensus among classes? Of course such forms exist, but until recently they have been rather weak forms of implicit hegemony, such as the dollar standard and "virtuous configurations" of complementarity between the national regimes of accumulation (Lipietz 1987). I will return to this issue later, when dealing with the European question.

Interregionality

First of all, a fundamental point needs to be clarified: the statute of interregionality in the definition of regions. In other words, one must ask: Is a region defined by itself, by the type of articulation of social relations that characterize it (see the definition above), or in relation to the others by the relation that opposes it to the other regions? Or yet more problematically: Is this "homogeneity" ascribed to the economic regions solely the product of the history of socioeconomic relations in these regions, or is it the impact of the position that regions take in an interregional division of labor? In brief: Is the interregionality derived from the regions, or vice versa? This is a decisive theoretical question for the problem at hand, irrespective of the degree of autonomy of the space-for-itself that grounds the economic region under investigation. If one adopts a global or an international theoretical perspective, then the potential for recognition of local, regional, or national socioeconomic transformations is very small. If, however, one adopts a regional standpoint, then everything evidently changes.

Despite the decisive nature of this issue, the answer will be voluntarily ambiguous.¹¹ First of all, it is evident that there exists a spatial division of labor internal to the economic region and that this very division in turn defines the subspaces (e.g., urban-rural). On the other hand, it is evident that there exists at the supraregional level a de facto spatial division of labor between the economic regions as soon as they become articulated among themselves: different-type regions neither produce nor exchange the same things. The only question lies in knowing whether the difference between regions (i.e., between the types of internal articulation that characterize them) is the product of different internal (genealogical) causalities, or whether it is the outcome of interregional relations. To this specific question, I answer: Both at the same time, according to a varying importance,

and depending upon the topology proper to the division of labor corresponding to the most developed forms of contemporary capitalism, but leaving to internal causation an irreducible importance that always conserves its primacy in the case of a space identified with a given nation-state. To put things differently, the interregional division of space develops in correspondence with the current tendencies of the capitalist division of labor and on the basis of a checkerboard of regions having their internal "Okinawa"-social features inherited from the past (this is the "coarseness" or rather the "viscosity" of space, as evoked by Milton Santos, 1978). Thus, the development of the interregional division of space also takes into account the possibilities and willingness of the hegemonic social bloc in the concrete regions to adapt or resist. More simply still: The interspatial relations of the center-periphery type are the results, not the causes, of the socioeconomic characters of the peripheral spaces. The ultimate causes should be traced back to the internal dynamics of peripheral spaces, in the understanding that the forms of colonization should be considered as a part of these internal dynamics, and that the relations between the internal hegemonic bloc and the exterior weigh heavily on its proper dynamics.¹²

THE CRISIS OF FORDISM

Let us briefly review the notion of Fordism—the regime of intensive accumulation with mass consumption under monopolist regulation—that dominated in the North-West of the world from 1945 to 1970.

As a regime of accumulation, Fordism is based upon an organization of labor that combines Taylorism (separation of conception and execution, parceling and standardization of tasks) and mechanization (by incorporating the social know-how systematized in the machine system). The consequence of this process is a rapid growth of the apparent productivity of labor and of fixed-capital per capita. The outlets for this increased productivity are established through this same growth of per capita capital, on the one hand, and an increase in the real wage level corresponding to gains in productivity, on the other. Regulation of this regime of accumulation is in the first instance based on regulation of the wage-labor relation: coercive institutional forms (generalized collective agreements, growing minimum-wage levels, the welfare state) controlling parallel growth of demand stemming from the wage-laborers and capitalist production. To these one must add the consolidation of a pure credit currency with legal tender, issued in function of the involvements of private capital.

The Spatial Arrangement of Triumphant Fordism

There is an immediately striking and intimate relationship between Fordism and national space. Never before has the space of capital been so

closely identified with the national framework, characterized by the validity of the legal-tender credit-currency and the redistribution of revenues in the welfare state. It was in the mid-1960s that the relation between exports and the domestic markets for manufactured goods reached its historical depth in most capitalist countries. Still, the exchange flows took place most essentially inside supranational continental blocs (e.g., the EC, U.S.A.–Canada). After that date, these exchanges tended to intensify and, as such, badly affect the efficiency of national regulation.

During the “Golden Age” of Fordism, the interregional division of labor forming the regional spaces tended to modify itself. In the preceding stages of capitalism these relations corresponded essentially to the spatial dimension of exchange relations between modes of production (external articulation) or between sectors of economic activity. It was the classical spatial division of labor between primary goods and manufactured products that also held sway in the international domain.

But Fordism allowed for a spatial disjunction, a new topology of its own productive process, according to the tripartition of:

1. Tasks of conception
2. Skilled tasks of production
3. De-skilled tasks of assembly

This disjunction did not necessarily adopt an interregional dimension, but could only do so once the firms found, within the old division of labor, the pools of labor power differentiated according to skills, costs, traditions of struggle, and—in the corresponding regional armatures—the social forces available to support such an industrialization strategy. Of course, during the two decades after World War II, this “new interregional division of labor” modified the regional armatures themselves.

The Crisis of Fordism

Nevertheless, after the mid-1960s, Fordism began to run out of breath. The Fordist operational modes engendered declining productivity gains while the technical composition of capital increased. This resulted in a fall of profitability that simultaneously diminished the capacity to accumulate; at the same time, accumulation led to less and less employment. As a consequence, the financing of the welfare state went into crisis. This, in turn, also decelerated the rhythm of accumulation.

The first reaction of firms was to counter the fall in profitability and the increase in the cost of the welfare state by seeking to implant “type III” activities in the economic regions external to the national Fordist social-formations in southern and eastern Europe and in the Latin American or East Asiatic Third World. This strategy, which extended the Fordist

interregional division, succeeded all the better as it matched the division of local hegemonic blocs. Therefore, this strategy is called “primitive Taylorization” (cf. Lipietz 1985). But this strategy, in effect, served also to accelerate the internationalization of production and markets, and in this way it paralyzed the national monopolistic regulation to an increasingly greater degree. The external constraints entered into contradiction with the principles of the monopolist regulation of the wage-labor relation: In order to be competitive, the domestic wage-labor costs needed to be compressed. But what was consequently a cost to the domestic market could not automatically be regained through growing exportations.

In a first configuration of the crisis (1974–1979), the internal stimulation of the central markets continued to prevail by means of the credit system and gave certain newly industrialized countries access to a form of “peripheral Fordism” (Lipietz 1987). But more fundamental, within the industrialized countries themselves the wage-labor relation had to face two important inflections, the first one being regressive, the second one potentially progressive.

First of all, conditions for the reproduction of labor power were challenged. During economic growth, the coupling of productivity and wage level to one another had played the principal part and the welfare state a supportive part. As the welfare state continued to develop, securing for the wage-laborers and their families a kind of permanent income, enterprises tried to get rid of the heavy contractual bonds that were linking them directly to their wage-laborers. The “hard core” of labor (the permanent workers) began to break down, while a world of statuteless, low-paid, short-term, and part-time workers began to develop. These workers live primarily on the welfare state and only occasionally on a salary. This peculiar form of wage-labor relation, being an attractive solution to each individual enterprise, became a burden upon population and enterprise as a whole, for, in fact, social security and payroll taxes increased substantially. Moreover, this evolution even further disarticulated the consensus on Fordism. The last remainders of “statute” or “craftsmanship” disappeared among the young, condemned as they were, upon entry into the job market, to “bit (odd or small) jobs” and welfare.

The second tendency, evidently more interesting, was the search for new deposits of productivity. These sources were looked for within the work process itself, in the promising potential of the electronic “technological revolution” and the challenge to Taylorist principles: redefining tasks, and individual or collective involvement (through the “quality circles”) of producers in search of efficiency.

But these germs of the future, just like Taylorism before them, could only develop in a favorable macroeconomic and social framework. This was clearly rejected by the monetarist shock. At the end of the 1970s, the social hegemonic bloc in the North-West of the world openly resigned

itself of policies aimed at stimulating domestic demand. The restriction on credit and the challenge to social legislation drove this economic region into a succession of sharp business cycles resulting by 1979 in industrial stagnation. This contraction of credit and outlets by the "Center" has had disastrous effects on the whole of the old periphery, but it hit certain countries of peripheral Fordism particularly hard.

It is as if, having correctly identified the origin of the crisis in the fall of profitability, the world hegemonic bloc confined the search for its solution to a technological revolution liberated from the obstacles of national monopolistic regulation, and social legislation in particular. Yet, one should think more carefully about the real contribution of the technological revolution. Between technology and the model of development are a series of linkages established throughout social relations: from technology to technical operationalization and direct production relations (i.e., who decides how the collective work process will be organized?); and the overall socioeconomic relations from production to the economy (i.e., will there be enough consumers or, conversely, investors? what will they produce? which form of full employment?). In other words, a new regime of accumulation and a new mode of regulation, especially with respect to the wage-labor relation (or other relations of production) remain to be invented. In addition, the development should also be compatible within some new international configuration. I will briefly examine these three series of problems.

The Great Liberation of the 1980s?¹³

What does informatics offer? It offers not so much a gain in productivity per second of utilized machine-time, but rather the possibility of making full-time use of the machines on the workforce and also of making that workforce more flexible (Coriat 1984). A Fordist plant, based on the double-specialization of machines and people, makes uneconomic use of their time, for example, waiting-times between two operations, intermediary buffer stocks that pile up, and the impossibility of balancing work positions. The automatic control of a workforce allows for a leap forward in the flexibility of the production process and hence for the economic use of constant capital. This is the large source of profitability that informatics offers. Information systems are quite expensive in initial investments, yet these investments can be used at full capacity.

There is more to consider. Electronics, especially, allow for increased flexibility in the system of machines. It was indeed a long while ago that the principle of automation entered the workshop: people created machines that, by themselves, would repeat their movements, such as in production lines in automobile processing or in print shops. But in order to produce the same uniform product, these enormous machineries could only perform

a well-defined series of movements. In contrast, the robot can adapt itself and shift from one task to another by means of rapid reprogramming. As such, the robotized workshop can adapt itself to a fluctuating demand, jumping from one small series of tasks to another.

First bifurcation. Two evolutionary axes open up for the post-Fordist reorganization of the labor process. Automating the administration of the production process opens the temptation to separate still further the theoretical concept of the process from the executing acts of the collective worker. The operating workers would then become mere flesh and blood in the automated process of production. A majority of U.S. as well as some European plants, especially in Spain, France, and the U.K., follow this path. In contrast, however, automation can give rise to a partial reskilling of the collective worker, the practical knowledge of the operators having not only a real-time involvement in the process itself, but also in the permanent tuning of the equipment. This route seems to be being pursued by the majority of Japanese and European plants, especially in Germany and Scandinavia (Aoki 1985). This bifurcation is the scene of an immense social struggle over a new social compromise dealing with worker involvement and distribution of increased gains in productivity.

Second bifurcation. One should also know how these gains in productivity are to be utilized. The first variant in the post-Fordist alternative will mobilize even more capital than the aging Fordism itself. Productivity gains will be reserved as profit, and final demand will not grow. The flexibility, in itself, of computerized processes allows for the profitability of large-scale investments—by a succession of limited series of products—meant for segmented and capricious consumption by well-to-do clients. But these gains in productivity, in the absence of an extension of mass consumption, will also entail the growth of unemployment and the risk of a three-tiered division of society: a dominant class benefiting from the new gadgets of the electronic revolution; a stable but limited core of permanent employees; and a growing mass of increasingly more precarious wage-laborers marginalized by significantly weakened social protection, and finding only provisional access to service jobs during cyclical upswings. This seems to be the route being followed at present in the United States.

The other trajectory is the negotiated redistribution of gains in productivity, with mass access to the new consumption commodities that themselves require consumption time (e.g., cultural, optical, and acoustic hardware, home computers). These low-cost commodities (in comparison to automobiles) call for a division of gains in productivity in the sense of a substantial decrease of working time. Of course, a development model based on mass extension of nonpecuniary activities (e.g., leisure, creative activities, or intellectual enrichment) risks becoming translated into greater

uncompetitiveness (in terms of the hourly wage-labor cost) compared to a model based on the intensification of labor without redistribution of gains in productivity. Yet, this way is being followed by Germany, Scandinavia, and, lately, even Japan. Consequently, there is a new bifurcation: Does the configuration of the world economy, the choices of the most powerful states, and the forms of interregional and international regulation leave certain spaces-for-themselves (regional armatures or nation-states) sufficient degrees of autonomy to explore new social relations? This question leads to the core of the subject, and the experience of previous years already gives some indication as to future possibilities.

THE AUTONOMY OF SPACES IN CRISIS

A Little More Theory

In order to face a crisis of the regime of accumulation and/or the mode of regulation at the local, national, or world level, it is important to understand that the social formation breaks down into not two but at least three basic postures that, in turn, can give birth to social blocs:

1. Defenders of the prevailing order up until the crisis itself (i.e., the conservative bloc);
2. Advocates of change in the capitalist hegemonic system (i.e., the modernist bloc);
3. Protagonists of a profound revolutionizing of existing social relations (i.e., the radical bloc); and also, in most cases, a fourth posture:
4. Those favoring a return to the mythical "golden age" preceding the regime in crisis (i.e., the reactionary bloc).

This very general typology is concretely materialized by ideological currents and social movements that combine these four postures in an often inextricable manner. Moreover, social classes are themselves divided between these different postures, hesitating as they are between the different routes and between the different blocs being formed and aspiring to hegemony.

It would be easy to illustrate this phenomenon of typological breakdown in its political reality.¹⁴ But what about its spatial dimension in terms of spaces-for-themselves? At the regional as at the national level it can happen that the brutality of the transformations turns the whole of participating parties in the old bloc (of the exploiters as well as the exploited) against the project of monopolistic capital and of the centralized state (as in the case of declining regimes). The projected modernist space seems to

enter openly into conflict with the old concrete regional space; the modifications of the juridical space, implied by the new project, appear despoiled, while the new classes fostering the changes appear as invaders. In these circumstances, the struggle between classes assumes a very distinct form: It opposes, at least initially, the defenders of the "old space" to the "new space" (or to the new mode of development), which is perceived as imposed by the "foreign state" and rejected as a whole. This is a phantasmagoric figure, where the whole population of a real, concrete space fights a virtual and abstract space.

In correspondence with the facilities they apparently offer, these struggles raise very difficult problems of hegemony in the social movement. At first they appear as indeed legitimate and unanimous—legitimate because humans must fight to save a land they have modeled with their own hands and also for the right to live and work in this country; unanimous because the enemy is elsewhere, at a distance, foreign and abstract. And additionally, as the enemy is monopoly capital and the state that regulates it (in the case of regional struggle) or, more precisely still, multinational capital, one could think that these struggles automatically embody the possibility of forming a radical, anticapitalist social bloc. But it is not so simple. For the old space is itself the very space that articulates social relations, which are themselves relations of exploitation. The regional social armature (or the national state) is *de facto* under the hegemony of the social conservative bloc. The legitimacy of the struggle may therefore only be the legitimation of the old way of exploitation, and the unanimity of the struggle may mask the direction of the struggle by the old exploiters belonging to the regime in crisis, or even to the preceding regime of accumulation. These are typical cases of nationalist or regionalist reactions, where radical and conservative or even radical and reactionary aspirations become mixed up with one another.¹⁵

There also exists an inverted image of this mix of reactions. A project of local, regional, or national compromise is difficult to accomplish within the existing interregional and/or international relations. It unites the radical refusal of the old order and the modernist aspirations of the new elites. The opposition between projected and real space then adopts the form of a progressive nationalism or regionalism that perceives exterior dependence as an obstacle to progress. This latter form generally covers situations in which the new seeks to be born, while the former mix of radical and conservative reactions refers back to situations in which the old dies out. In this way, the developmentalist nationalism of Europe and Latin America in the 1950s combined the search for social conquests guaranteed by the state and the more or less successful establishment of the Fordist regime of accumulation. Today's regionalist struggles against industrial restructuring or for protectionist maintenance of social gains in a national support system combine the workers' refusal to be treated as chess pieces

and the conservative reaction of state functionaries, the employers' associations, and labor unions belonging to the Fordist compromise. The liberal-modernist current presently affecting the North-West of the world combines the libertarian refusal of the heavy forms of state administration in the Fordist compromise and the projects of multinationalization of a capital disembodied from social legislation.

This observation helps in understanding the absurd polarization that is tearing apart the left in Western industrialized countries, divided as it is between attachment to social-democrat compromises that have become conservative, on the one hand, and a subordinate affiliation to a new modernist bloc, on the other. The conservative avenue is by definition without outlet, even if it remains a feasible practice in the medium term.¹⁶ It is economically condemned by the crisis of Fordism and its forms of national regulation, and, since the mid-1960s, politically rejected by the potentially progressive forces, even before the opening of the economic crisis. But is the modernist solution, as presented by the liberal orthodoxy, really a solution? This will now be briefly examined in order to stress the spatial aspects of the problem.

The Shortcomings of Modernist Liberalism and the Question of the Spaces of Regulation

The thrust of the liberal-modernist current lies in the first instance in the more or less theorized weakness of the Fordist modes of regulation, and especially of the national welfare state. Although too expensive for the productive system, the state organizes for its beneficiaries an economy of distribution in the absence of production. Moreover, the bureaucratic regulations, satisfactory to pilot the capital-widening growth of mass production and free of major innovations, are incapable of detecting and putting into operation the strategic lines of a new productive model still to be discovered. This exploration needs total flexibility and is stimulated by the largest possible competition, at the same time without really knowing if flexibility is required only in the exploratory stage or if it actually constitutes a durable feature of the future model.

The weakness of this current of thought is its total silence with respect to regulation, or rather that global competition would play the part of regulation. For neoliberalism, the future regime of accumulation would be already inscribed in the germs of the "third industrial revolution," and the individual agents (the firms) would adapt, on their own, through a process of struggling for their own existence and natural selection. The spatial consequence would be a reshuffling of the hierarchy of spaces (worldwide/national/local) that Fordism would have concentrated, now more than ever, at the national level. Schematically, the economic would be played out more directly at the world level, and the administration of the social

(i.e., of the reproduction of labor power, whether in capitalist employment or otherwise) would be played out at the local level. Less schematically, the local would also have a role as the breeding ground for new productive forces. In a poorly defined continuum, the region would simultaneously be the site of the self-organization of survival through the mechanisms of civil society (e.g., the family, the informal economy) and of the emergence of innovative enterprises (corresponding to the myth of the replicability of Silicon Valley). The role of the state would not disappear; it would assist national firms in facing the world scene. From an organizer of society, it would become a cooperative or a syndicate in the service of local coalitions of private capital in the midst of worldwide competition. But this new role granted to the national state definitely discards the old distinction between nationalist and internationalist fractions of dominant classes. In the countries that became "central Fordisms" during the 1950s and 1960s—thanks to their developmental nationalism—the cooperative state reconciles matters between those advocates of a retreat of the welfare state and those defending state support of industry.¹⁷ In newly industrialized countries led to peripheral Fordism by dictatorships, the democratic pressures stemming from the workers as well as from the interior bourgeois sometimes dissolve into the ascension to power of very moderate social democrats pursuing modernization without necessarily jumping ahead to the welfare state. In fact, these social democrats refuse to sacrifice the internal conditions for external competitiveness.¹⁸

Obviously, this model shows weaknesses on both sides. At the world level, at least without reservations too numerous to ignore, the argument is full of sophisms: In order to move away from the crisis, each national economy would merely have to become more competitive. This is the illusion of a world market that would function as a thermostat, capable of absorbing all the outputs, as if the competitiveness of some would not subtract from that of the others. The 1982 and 1991 economic slumps and the latent debt crisis of the worldwide economy have, however, demonstrated the instability resulting from an uncontrolled coupling of national economies. At the local level, new responsibilities assigned to civil society bypass by far what is possible within a regional armature devoid of a political apparatus; these include the disaggregation of the family and the local communities as well as the incapacity of the informal economy to provide the professional training corresponding to the proclaimed needs of the technological revolution. If the capacities of local regulation are not reinforced (i.e., if a local political society is not constituted), all of these allow one to foresee a disappearance of the social rather than its regeneration at the local level. As a result, the mode of regulation implicit to this model (within the bifurcation tree originating from the technological revolution outlined earlier) privileges the most regressive sides: aggravation of the separation, internationally as well as interregionally, between designers

and executing manual workers; and aggravation of the social dichotomy between the beneficiaries of gains in productivity and the rejected economic agents now oscillating between the regular domestic economy and the bit (small) jobs. In this way, the spatial displacement of the instances of regulation can turn out to determine the evolution of the work process and the regime of accumulation.

Still, it is undeniable that—at the regional as well as at the national level—social blocs and political projects exist that proclaim themselves as “free trade” while still promoting progressive compromises between workers and management and, with respect to the command of technical change, pretend to search for a means for the local administration of the social, the forms of which would be mutually beneficial to society and the individual (e.g., think of the behavior of the Communist Party at Emilia-Romagna). But the success obtained by these modernist blocs often translates into the opposite of what liberal ideology would like to demonstrate. Spaces-in-themselves that are particularly well organized, equipped with intense internal forms of regulation without market character and practicing a protectionism more efficient than it is tacit (“cultural,” as one says of Japan), often reveal themselves as the best adapted to world competition. In any case, these spaces (regions or nations) remain reliant on the global economic conjuncture upon which they themselves have no impact, whence the appeal to the national as the only space of explicit regulation possible at present, or the appeal to a supranational, worldwide, or continental (European) regulation.

In this fashion, the shortcomings of modernist liberalism and its economic defeat in the 1980s tend to revive two spatial instances that have had their time of glory but at the moment are doubtless facing a new youth: the federal state and the multinational bloc. These instances oblige us to refine the spatial scale suggested in the first part of this chapter.

By federative state we do not mean so much a juridical form of the state (although it is necessary) but a form of articulation of the national hegemonic system. Since the state cannot seek to assure everywhere the same form of macroeconomic regulation (and because this is not even desirable), the issue is to equip the regional armatures with more powerful instruments of economic and social regulation and to reserve for the nation-state the administration of the external relation (support to industries, administration of foreign exchange). In comparison to Fordism, which is above all and by definition “national,” this new division of capacities between the national and the regional means a contraction of the national legislation and collective agreements and a larger variability for the regional armatures in their choice of the social protection level, as, for example, in Ronald Reagan’s United States. With respect to peripheral Fordism, this development means that certain regions are abandoned to underdevelopment while others situate themselves for a globally oriented

form of modernization (e.g., Brazil and China could follow this route). At the other side of the national level, a multinational bloc confers certain attributes of overall macroeconomic administration on supranational authorities, translating transnational compromises between forces that can themselves be transnational, multiregional alliances. The creation of the European Economic Community has typically represented the constitution of such a bloc. It translated not only the hegemony of the Fordist national blocs of all its participants, but also foresaw forms of collective regulation of the articulation of the modes of production (e.g., the Common Agriculture Policy) and compromise measures for transnational forms of particular regional armatures (e.g., the Mediterranean Programs).

In any case, the crisis of Fordism makes the radical insufficiency of the European Economic Community overt. Being a free-trade zone without common social policy (e.g., there is only the implicit common engagement in the treaty of 1957 to assure interregional equilibrium through an accelerated growth in the standard of living), its institutions condemn the different nations in the community to administer against each other their external constraint by a competitive stagnation resulting in an extended general stagnation. No internal policy—and the social-communist French experience of 1981–1984 is the best example thereof—can escape this iron law.¹⁹ Orchestrated stimulation policy and the coordinated reduction in work time seem to be dictated by common sense, but they imply societal choices, among which are the formation of true hegemonic systems equipped with attributes of sovereignty: something approaching the constitution of a European nation that would eventually adopt the form of a federal state. But the experience of Italian or German unification shows that a nation is not formed coldly and objectively, without civil and foreign wars, even in the favorable case of the language community. In contrast, the experiences of Austria-Hungary or the U.S. Civil War show the great instability of a federal, yet regionally differentiated, state when it is not bound together by a common hegemonic system. Therefore, the purely technological European undertakings, such as the Eureka Project, incur the same risk as the “Parallel Action” in Musil’s novel.²⁰ And the “cold revolution” of European unification through the Maastricht Agreement could eventually lead to similar tensions and outcomes, as in the cases of past unifications such as Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia.

CONCLUSION

The articulation of the spaciality proper to the Fordist regime, centered on regulation of the nation-state with its virtuous international configuration and its internal differentiations in regional armatures, is at present as outmoded as the corresponding regime of accumulation. The

spatiality corresponding to the modernist-liberal ideological current, based upon the coupling of the worldwide or the local with a national state carrying reduced responsibilities, appears at the same time macroeconomically unstable as well as socially regressive. The amendments that the formation of federative states and multinational blocs could offer appear themselves as fragile and unstable. But are all these reasons sufficient to reject such improvements in a progressive strategy?

The problem, as we have seen, is the lack of specialized sovereign authorities to guarantee the compromises institutionalized in the core of a hegemonic system. Whether one likes it or not, struggles and fundamental social compromises are still settled at the national level. But it is not necessarily desirable that the nation-state should keep the quasi-monopoly of the stabilization process and control of historical and social innovations.

For precision's sake, it is important to form an idea of an up-to-date and progressive solution to the crisis. In the absence of credible revolutionary perspectives, it would consist of a form of compromise equivalent to the social-democratic compromise facing the crisis of the 1930s (but necessarily different), more or less opening the road to radicalization. The latter would entail the increased capacity of the administration by the producers and the citizens of their way of life and work, while still pushing back alienation as much as possible through market exchange and forms of state exploitation and oppression, be it capitalist or in a family setting. Such compromises would orient the technological revolution toward increased skills and mastery as well as more conscious cooperation by participants in the productive process, increased control of the social consequences of technical change, and, in particular, of the distribution of gains in productivity in the form of a substantial reduction of work time. In the same sense, while maintaining or improving the level of social protection, such a compromise would seek to increase productivity (in terms of use-value) of the welfare state's funds. The latter would serve to finance alternative (e.g., community-wide, cooperative) forms of collective goods and services, to the detriment of moonlighting and the exploitation of women.

It is clear that such a model, which implies a "reterritorialization" of the relation between skills and jobs and between production and social use, will need nonmarket, democratic forms of regulation, as close as possible to the grassroots and thus regional levels. These forms will imply (while the converse does not) the gradual federalization of the nation-state. The central state should keep its responsibility to lay the minimum thresholds for regional social legislation and guarantee a general realignment of social welfare in order to limit the perverse effects of competition among regions. At the international level, the formation of multinational blocs matching their nonrecessive, macroeconomic policies, bringing together scientific and technical means, and allowing for social innovation, can

only play a beneficial role in the continuation of national progressive experiences.

But a reasonable skepticism excludes the possibility that the different nations of a bloc adopt straightaway the same social compromises. Moreover, this is probably not desirable. In a progressive alliance between Europe and certain nations in the Third World, the first may allow the reduction of working time while the others opt to maximize production. One should rather aim at institutional forms within the bloc that would allow or even encourage the social advances, even if they are insulated from each of its members (a kind of Pareto optimality principle), without, however, excluding the coordination of progressive politics.²¹ But the political willingness can only be imposed through social movements that are themselves transnational and through social experiences that are themselves regionalized.

NOTES

1. The theory of regimes of accumulation and of modes of regulation (Aglietta 1979; Boyer and Mistral 1978; Lipietz 1979) was first developed in France by making provisional abstraction of the articulation of the modes of production, regional specificities, and international relations, although these preoccupations had been by and large present in the spirit of the authors before the development of this theory and were even at the basis of its development. In any case, the relation between articulation of the modes of production and regimes of accumulation, the regionalization and the internationalization of these concepts, have hardly been pushed later on (but see Lipietz 1987).

2. The term *space* should be understood here in the more general and concrete French meaning, and not only in the abstract (Kantian) English acceptance. For French economists and geographers, space is what is specifically spatial in the notion of territoriality.

3. This theoretical part, as in the next one on Fordism, repeats, summarizes, and develops considerations presented earlier within the context of my work on space and the crisis of the regime of accumulation (see Lipietz 1977, 1987). I repeat intentionally each time when possible my initial formulations relative to both conceptual fields, in order to explore their compatibility.

4. The concepts of "space-in-itself" and "space-for-itself" are developed along lines similar to those found, for example, in the master/slave dialectics of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* and in Marx's early writing. A space-in-itself would be purely objective (empirical) and prereflective conditions, as determined by the mode of production, whereas space-for-itself would imply a subjectively self-conscious region both in terms of territory and goal-oriented praxis (Editors' comment).

5. Society is not just the automatic reproduction of a structure of relations. These relations are relations of practices that, in addition to their routine character, can have an innovative ambit and, to the extent that the relations are contradictory (i.e., opposing individuals and the groups to one another at the same time as unifying them), can even carry a revolutionary or at least transformative vocation. The political is exactly the instance whereby this dialectical reproduction/transformation is condensed; and the ideological is the instance in which this tension is represented.

6. Or, more precisely, defined in themselves by the socioeconomic relations centered upon the project of maintaining or modifying the form of the existing relations.

7. Notice that a social class in itself can be divided among several competing blocs, and that inside a bloc the materiality of the convergence of interests inherent to one group with the interests of the bloc in general may be either more or less disputable. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between ruling groups and allied or related groups (Poulantzas 1973a).

8. See on this point the criticism by E. Terray (1973) against the empirist definitions of the nation (for example, Stalin's definition).

9. I intentionally use the vague term "form," first to leave room for the forms of production that the reader would refuse to acknowledge as a real mode of production, but also to take into account that every mode has adopted and adopts a number of forms, which can rival on the same territory.

10. This is a very important point. The "purchasing power" of a region against the overall product of an economic whole is certainly limited by the sum of the budgetary constraints (and the credit capacity) of its members, but this sum can be totally different from the "exportable" production of the region, if the interregional transfers are sufficient.

11. This is the criticism that D. Massey (1978) has addressed to me since the beginning: "The definition of the regions by Lipietz (1977) oscillates between that constructed through historical analysis and that relevant to the actual spatial division of labor."

12. This is the thesis that I defend (1987) in the case of international relations. The example of the relations U.S.A.-Mexico (two spaces created by colonization; then both become politically independent in the same period) is particularly illustrative. The analysis "starting from internal causes" sketched by Octavio Paz (1985) seems much clearer to me than the powerless invocation to "dependence."

13. I repeat here the conclusion in Lipietz (1984b). More recent developments are found in Leborgne and Lipietz (1987) and Lipietz (1989).

14. One can, for example, think of the breakup of the old Roosevelt alliance in the U.S. Democratic party in 1984 between Jackson, Hart, and Mondale, representing roughly the three basic attitudes. This breakup was not yet resolved by the election of 1992.

15. The rise of Muslim integrism can often be interpreted as a "radical-reactionary" reaction to the development of primitive Taylorization or peripheral Fordism. It has all the more success because the secular "radical-modernist" alliances of the preceding period (e.g., Nasserism) pretended that modernization and "progressism" are foreign aggressions.

16. One can interpret the decline of Great Britain and Argentina during the years 1950-1970 as the result of incapability to "modernize" their hegemonic system, facing the growing success of Fordism. Notice that now the conservative route can be embodied by labor or social-democratic parties (in the North) or by "developmentalist" parties (in the South).

17. I have analyzed, under the name "Saint Simonisme" (1984a) the strength of this current in France, well represented by A. Minc (1982) and his formula: "less state-protector (for the wage-labors), more state-shield (for industry facing worldwide competition)."

18. Rereading Poulantzas in the light of the theory of peripheral Fordism, I have called the leading class of this regime of accumulation "interior bourgeoisie." I have analyzed (1987) its hegemony over the democratic transition in Southern Europe in the seventies and in Brazil and Korea at present.

19. See Lipietz (1984b, 1989). One finds more and more analyses of this "perverse effect" in terms of game theory (cf. "prisoner's dilemma"); see, for example, Oudiz (1985). Note that these same perverse impacts can be found in interregional competition for foreign investments.

20. In *The Man Without Quality*, intellectuals from Austria-Hungary seek to riposte by a "parallel action" to the growing prestige of ally-rival Prussia. Their wild imaginings end in an order by the Austrian army to the merchants of Prussian guns.

21. More details on these dreams are in Lipietz 1989.