

Thrown Out of the World: Private Property and Utopian Lives

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The history of freedoms guaranteed for human beings has been, up to now, repeatedly confused with the history of the freedoms guaranteed by human beings for the economy.

R. VANEIGEM

All the things of this world live on in a perceptible state of exile.

TIQQUN

Abstract

This chapter concludes the collective work with a profound philosophical-political and conceptual analysis that centers on the construct of property from its origins to its recreations and its positive and negative impacts. The author provides an overview of different philosophical schools and confronts us with challenging ideas regarding property and its different aspects.

Keywords: private property, utopia, exclusion, metaphysics, becoming-property

It is very likely that people with no interest in philosophical and political thinking find it almost irrelevant to consider what philosophers from centuries ago had to say about property, or even what contemporary philosophers are saying today—as long as they can keep their property or aspire to owning one, while those who make critical statements about property keep a tight grip on their own—.¹ We are seldom aware of the roots of the thoughts

1. This is a difficulty pointed out by Sereni (2007): “It is truly paradoxical to question once again the established right to property while continuing to exercise that right, as if there were no contradiction. The critical voices seem to think in one world and live in another, while the object of their critique belongs to the latter” (p. 9) (author’s translation).

and ideas that in one way or another organize and steer our day-to-day life, and we do not realize how ancient and wide-ranging they can be. Nevertheless, the task of thinking about the time we live in, the realities that shape it and unsettle it, and the concerns that drive it, demands that we look up for a moment and direct our gaze beyond our immediate selves, especially in this age when self-reference and rootlessness are recurring temptations. For this reason, we set out here to recover some ideas from different times and contexts that might give rise to voices that provoke in us different possible reactions: the sensation of a link to a history that might seem remote; the restlessness of feeling oneself “discovered” by another’s words, or even terror at seeing the irruption of a real possibility of an alternative to the reality in which we have been, in which we are, and in which we fashion what we will be.

In this sense, we are dealing with expressions that, while they may be “philosophical,” somehow resonate or prove to be attuned with what happens in everyday life today. The work of thinking requires that we immerse ourselves in what has already been thought, with all the risks that this entails, such as not finding a breathing space of clarity and words, or not finding an outlet into praxis that would turn thoughts into a habitable space. Thinking is also inhabiting, and doing it in an ever more inhospitable world entails unexpected risks—especially when this inhospitable character might also be the result of our having refused to think or having dared to think—. This is the case of property, more specifically, of private property. It does not take any great effort to perceive how tied up this concept is with contemporary human experience and its most pressing concerns, such as suffering, happiness, meaning, and security. It thus forms part of the dynamisms that drive passions, reflections and actions: What happens to those who do not, or cannot, own property? Who owns what? Who can be a property-owner and who cannot? Why are some people property-owners and others not? What determines or authorizes ownership? What power should regulate property and ownership? What should be done with the idleness of the property-owner as opposed to the non-property-owner? What should be done with the resentment or rage felt by people who are deprived of their property? What happens between property and property-owners when there are people capable to taking lives in order to defend this relationship? How has property insinuated itself into human life, to the degree that it seems to have become

something sacred and unassailable? We will not try to address or answer all of these questions in this text. We will focus only on two problematic features of contemporary private property: its metaphysical character and its complex relationship with utopia. These features play a prominent role in the constitution and operation of its exclusion-producing dynamism.

With respect to the term exclusion, it is important to bear in mind the observations made by Castel (2015) about the traps implicit in the contemporary use of the term:

- The fuzziness or blurred specificity of the situations, such that it becomes impossible to identify exactly what is missing.
- The consideration of the situation of exclusion as something autonomous, alien to the series of processes that occur around it, when the sense of the “states” of exclusion is better sought in the trajectories and processes that lead to them and cut across society as a whole, and that originate at the heart and not at the edge of social life—for this reason, Castel prefers to speak of disaffiliation.
- The paralysis or ineptitude of action due to a reflection limited to the description of states of dispossession, overlooking their presence within broader processes, which actually offers a better understanding of the processes running through society. To avoid an ambiguity that creates an impression of awareness of what is going on, we will not speak here of “capitalism,” but rather of concrete processes that operate in ordinary life, although, because they are ideology, they remain “invisible” even as they are perceptible.²

THE UTOPIA OF PROPERTY

Transition from surviving to living—a concise description of the modern ideal of human existence. The reading of human history as overall progress in modernity—although not exclusive to it, at least as far as the hierarchy of activities goes, already present in antiquity—assumed that the essential task of surviving corresponded to an inferior stage of being, characteristic

2. “They do not know it, but they are doing it” is the pithy description of ideology offered by Marx (2016).

of animals—seen in a demeaning light; it followed that humanity’s job was to focus on living, which historically encompasses everything from the division of labor to the democratization of hedonism and the aestheticization of life. This division—one of the many fictions of modernity—hierarchized from surviving/living ignored the fact that the two (surviving and living) could be kept in dialectical tension, as humanity has done in other contexts.³ To appreciate the ancientness of this tension in human history we must only look at the Genesis’ biblical account, which defines as part of the human condition in nature the mandate to on one hand name and collaborate⁴ as the gardener of Eden, and on the other to dominate and multiply⁵ as Eden’s conqueror and what lies outside of it. This dual and contradictory mandate can be seen as an expression of the chronic tension between living and surviving, much more noticeable perhaps in a desolate, inhospitable context, for which the biblical account offers no resolution. However, as the following texts from Locke (2017) make clear, living consists not just of self-preservation but of improvement, of both the self and the world. We reference Locke for two reasons: his relevance in modernity to understand the history and configuration of property, and his usefulness to sparkle discussion (not as a canonical source) in our meditation on property today. As mentioned earlier, modern utopia considers improvement to be an essential feature, and according to Locke (2017),⁶ property is an essential part of this utopia.

The labour of [man’s] body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, *he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own*, and thereby makes it his property. [...] *His labour hath taken it out of the hands of nature*, where it was *common*, and

3. One key reference is Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s research and objections to the division nature/culture, for example in Viveiros de Castro (2013).

4. Gn 2:18-20: “Yahweh God said: ‘It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a *helpmate*.’ So from the soil Yahweh God fashioned all the wild beasts and all the birds of heaven. These he brought to the man to see what he would call them; each one was to bear the name the man would give it. The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of heaven and all the wild beasts...”

5. Gn 1, 27-28: “God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying to them, *‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it! Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living reptiles on the earth!’*”

6. The italics in Locke’s texts are the author’s.

belonged equally to all her children, and hath thereby *appropriated it to himself*. (pp. 66-67)

God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it for their benefit, and the greatest conveniencies of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational (and labour was to be his title to it); not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious. He that had as good left for his improvement, as was already taken up, needed not complain, ought not to meddle with what was already improved by another's labour. (p. 71)

The measure of property nature has well set by the extent of men's labour and the conveniencies of life: no man's labour could subdue, or appropriate all; nor could his enjoyment consume more than a small part. (p. 73)
[...] for it is labour indeed that puts the difference of value on every thing... (p. 78)

For whatever bread is worth more than acorns, wine than water, and cloth or silk, than leaves, skins or moss, that is wholly owing to labor and industry [...] how much [finished products for consumption] exceed [raw material] in value, when any one hath computed, he will then see how much labor makes the far greatest part of the value of things we enjoy in this world. And the ground which produces the materials, is scarce to be reckoned in, as any, or at most, but a very small part of it; so little, that even amongst us, land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste; and we shall find the benefit of it amount to little more than nothing. (p. 80)

And thus came in the use of money, some lasting thing that men might keep without spoiling, and that by mutual consent men would take in exchange for the truly useful, but perishable supports of life. (p. 85)

From the previous texts, we can highlight some of the elements that make up the conception of property—clearly oriented along the lines of liberalism and utilitarianism—and that shed more light on the relation we mentioned between property, metaphysics, and utopia, at least as a first attempt to sketch an outline.

First of all, it is noteworthy the way Locke frames property as being the primordial status of existing entities. Primordial, not original, because rather than a genealogy of property Locke is giving an ontological explanation, i.e., pointing out what continues to operate in existing entities in one way or another, that which sustains them as such, in their different configurations, and is also the “place” of their opening and not of their closing. Locke’s theological reference is not limited to a historiographic affirmation insofar as it presupposes the continued operativity of that which was given from the beginning of time “in divine will.” In other words, the world can access truth—and its truth—to the extent that its character of being property gives access to it. Property is an existential⁷ of existing entities; it is a condition of the truth—not just propositionally but ontologically.

In this conception, the world never ceases to be property. This is reinforced by the proposition that human action is governed by an intentionality that precedes it—symbolized by the allusion to God—and that operates as an imperative to bring the world out of its state of nature through human intervention and the introduction of a human element into the world, which is also determined by its very being as property-of-itself and property-for-itself. Labor is the human activity that introduces the distinction and transition between the forms of property: It is the property (of itself) operating upon other beings waiting to become property in order to transform them into property (for itself), insofar that as it acts on them, it extracts them from their “nothingness” or not-being-property and turns them into property. In other words, property appears as the ultimate dynamism (efficient and final causality) of existing entities. In this way, property designates the primordial stage of existing entities, and as such, it is also the horizon that points to their ultimate realization. The manifestation of the being of existing entities appears, and is made by possible, through labor, with respect to both things and humans, and therefore we can say that in Heideggerian terms, the *alétheia* is, first and foremost, the revelation of existing entities as property. Following this logic, without property there is no truth.

7. The term existential corresponds to what Heidegger designates as distinctive of being, constitutive of existence, of being-in-the-world, or else, of its ontological condition, while existential has to do with the historically varied determinations of the ontic, i.e., with the different answers to the question of the meaning of being or ways of understanding oneself when being-in-the-world. Cf. Heidegger, *Ser y tiempo*, §4.

Secondly, the previous ontological reading requires concrete insights that enable us to understand and configure the ontic, i.e., the world of things as we deal with them beyond ontological concerns. Locke explains some of these insights with the terms “improvement,” “right,” and “conveniencies” used in the texts quoted above. These terms are not unfamiliar to contemporary Western societies, although we should not assume that they have the same meaning as they had for Locke; that would be an ingenuous mistake. Nevertheless, what interests us here is their presence and use in today’s ordinary discourse. In current Western societies, each of these terms expresses normative forms of contemporary existence, which are often quite popular, in different spheres, and all are loaded with utopian connotations.

“Improvement” refers to a technological imperative as it relates the power of action and efficiency of and upon existing entities to a practical requirement calling for the continuous perfecting of existing entities simply because it is possible to do so. The upgrade already forms part of the guiding principles of human existence, not only with respect to the things upon which it acts but also to itself, and has a greater impact on the human psyche than freedom does, because in this proposal, improvement is not subject to ethics; instead it is something that is beyond question insofar as it constitutes ethics itself. Property is a kind of historical existential of improvement as an effective condition of its realization—Locke suggests as much in his use of the terms—and also, to the extent that it assumes the positive character of improvement as inexorable and undeniable, it becomes the material condition of the *telos* or finality of existing entities. Consequently, utopia would seem not to be conceivable but for the mediation and presence of property, as can be seen in the “last utopia:” human rights (Moyn, 2012, pp. 35, 223).

Law is the normative form that operates and governs in the intersubjective realm and in being-in-the-world—i.e., in humans’ being, doing and relating with themselves and with the rest of the world’s creatures. As an institutional imperative, law appears as dynamism and structure; the expression of a metaphysical order or its substitution in response to the disappearance or negation of said order. The obligation of the task of instituting ties and relations takes on a peculiar feature when it comes to property. Given the intentionality that the law must be the expression not of mere will but of reason, the preservation and ratification of property through law lays out in its most extreme form the quandary of property vs. irrationality, of property

vs. nihilism. The very intentionality of fulfilling a divine mandate or intention through property would seem to confirm this quandary. However, the discussion about legal nihilism remains open, as Zagrebelsky (2012) points out and tries to resolve—not compellingly, in our opinion, although with practical implications.

Indeed, the *horror vacui* or law’s abhorrence of a vacuum seems to be key, both for the affirmation of private property—keeping violence at bay—and for promoting it, because it constitutes an essential foundation in the project of the juridical ideology that tends toward the juridification of all possible social relations, since in this way it makes them foreseeable and calculable (Capella, 2008). Once again, the utopia of a rational, violence-free world, a world of law, seems to be upheld by private property. Moreover, the juridical ideology—which is a feature of the administered world posited by Horkheimer—seems to make steady progress, since law’s scope in everyday life appears to know no limits. On the basis of the premise of ensuring existence and affirming subjectivity, whether of human beings or of things, law has not only infiltrated the most intimate areas of life, it has also allowed private property to do the same. While the inclusion of property as part of human’s material existentials—human rights—highlights the reach of private property in the order that replaces the metaphysical order, or that confirms it in its ordinary use, ordinary life also reflects this reach inasmuch as the property-based ideology goes so far as to touch and configure the relations with one’s own body and with ideas. In this sense, law is one of the allied principles of private property today.

“Conveniencies” is an expression of the intentional imperative or the subjective interest. In the eyes of modernity, it is unquestionable that one ought to pursue one’s individual interest, that which proves to be most convenient for oneself, which can be extended to one’s own projects or plans, given their implication in the realization of one’s own existence. In Locke’s thinking, “conveniencies” can regulate property and the striving for ownership. However, the objective character of the amount of labor put in—which by right would confer property—exists in tension with the subjective character of conveniences, because the determination of “the conveniencies of life” involves either dealing with the arbitrariness of human interest or assuming a pre-established objective measure. Here two utopian ideals emerge: Society organized by the productive selfishness of liberalism, and the ideal of sharing

in socialism and communism. In both social formations the utopian element plays a significant role (Hinkelammert, 2002).

For his part, Locke (2017), takes the side of objective conveniences perceived subjectively⁸ from his stance in favor of property, builds his argument on the basis of the dual assumption of the limited capacity of human labor to appropriate everything and humans limited capacity for enjoyment. Nevertheless, as time passed the two assumptions were called into question because the relation between property-owners and non-property-owners (this goes back far before Locke) proved susceptible of creating a situation in which there was an amount of work (and this amount even tended to increase) incapable of leading to direct ownership; while, the capacity for enjoyment, due to technological advances and the consolidation of institutions that guaranteed a certain social stability, extended into the future and could draw on a wider array of possibilities for enjoyment.

However, labor that is no longer capable of producing property ownership due to the pre-existence of property, in an age that purports to affirm the freedom of all human beings, suffers from a loss of ontological density in the face of, and because of, that which was its social and ontological effect: Labor made something property, but given the pre-existence of property—and all the more so seeing its prolongation and perpetuation—labor became incapable of producing property ownership. Its effect/product is thus separated from human activity and becomes something abstract, or else it turns out to be the primordial principle that gave labor its meaning and reason for being: To make property present as an existential of existing entities. Human activity also loses ontological density as doing is subordinated to having. Likewise, it is no longer simply social stability that ensures the permanence of property; instead, property is shown to be what procures social and ontological stability and, therefore, what ensures the enjoyment of life. A well-being that guarantees the stability of security and the abundance of enjoyment appears to be a utopia, a utopia that either serves the human being's interest or is primarily convenient to property and secondarily to property-owners, although it manages to be seductive and almost convincing.

8. It remains open for debate whether subjective perception can actually grasp an objectivity that determines its convenience or whether it is more about an apparent or perspectivist objectivity, or else, whether the subjective perception of convenience is more the result of an influx of the configuration of the objective.

Thirdly, value from the perspective of property appears as something “out of this world,” since Locke’s text reflects a clear disdain for matter in favor of human action. The almost total negation of any value for the earth, or wood, makes property not just the sign of the negation of matter but also the inversion of order to the extent that property becomes the condition of existence of the material. A “supernatural” world, a metaphysical order of human manufacture, becomes the support of the “natural.” The order of property is the order of submission—and negation—of the material, biological, and physical to human activity, submission of a dialectical nature, inasmuch as, on the one hand, property calls for placing the material on the edge of nothingness—at least in terms of value—, while it simultaneously requires the material as a place for the realization of property. On the other hand, it is human activity that appears as the producer of value, both of itself by means of its own quantification and also of that upon which it acts. Existing entities are nothing but, on the basis of their being submitted by property, they become something, albeit in a fleeting and dependent way, because without human labor, without property, they irrevocably return to their initial nothingness or non-value. Property serves to save being from being nothing.

For this, as Locke describes it, the relation between the corruptible and the incorruptible becomes viable, because through the use of money, the necessary and the unnecessary enter into an exchange, which is the constitution of a perverse equivalence. The necessary becomes “unnecessary” and the unnecessary, “necessary.” The incorruptible displaces the necessary, such that the value of use is submitted and degraded by the value of exchange, and property finds a way to escape from the ephemeral temporality and integrates into that which stretches over time: Property becomes a symbol of the abstract and permanent—in the sense of what endures—, which is the realization of human action, and at the same time, its ideal. Without property, there is nothing but impermanence, ephemeral existence, and non-transcendent action. Being a property-owner is the utopia; not being one, the dystopia.

Thus, the utopian dimension of property proposes in a normative way—as a sign of improvement, with the force of law and as the realization of convenience—that “everyone can be a property-owner.” Property is framed as the framework in which humans can realize their ideal: utility, improvement, security, freedom, satisfaction, and legality; moreover, things find their realization by way of the improvement produced by human intervention. Property is

presented as the means and experience of transcendence in full immanence; it is utility and sense of value. It is the authentic utopia of utopias, because it is posited as historically achievable, although, at the same time, kept at a distance, because trying to make heaven on earth only produces hell (Hinkelammert, 2002). As a utopian proposal, the dynamism of property takes on the problematical tension, to be expected of any historical dynamism, consisting of proposing a general idea and at the same time resisting its effective realization (it is no secret that, while the discourse affirms the desire and conviction that “everyone should be a property-owner,” in practice not only is this considered unfeasible and unsustainable, but undesirable). Without a doubt, it will be important to tread carefully around the two unequivocal and unsustainable positions that arise with respect to utopia: systematic dismissal and acritical exaltation (Abensour, 2017).

The utopia of property is, in the final analysis, the utopia of property; not ours, as Marx (2018) insinuates:

Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., —in short, when it is used by us. Although private property itself again conceives all these direct realizations of possession only as means of life, and the life which they serve as means is the life of private property—labor and conversion into capital. (p. 179)

PRIVATE PROPERTY... AND ITS SECRET

Nothing becomes property on its own. There is no natural or ontological autogenous mechanism for becoming-property; no teleological principle that determines becoming-property as the realization of being or of a specific entity; no deontological principle that demands the becoming-property process for being or for a specific entity. The expression becoming-property refers to more than just “turning something into property,” an action that is merely external, an imposition that, while it has no ontological implication, does purport to have one, i.e., to determine to such an extent something’s being-in-the-world that that it is capable of altering it as far as removing and denying any resistance, opposition or dissidence with respect

to the regime, dynamism, and logic of property. In this sense, in the face of the process of becoming-property, two affirmations are possible: Either that human action actually exerts power on being, on all that is in the world, or that this action only coincides with an intrinsic dynamism of the very reality of things: within themselves, they carry the becoming-property dynamism and human action simply helps this to happen. In any case, becoming-property implies a metaphysical support, because insofar as it has no metaphysical “complicity,” property must be recognized as an exterior phenomenon, a label, just another artifice that, given its lack of metaphysical character, can only pretend to have one, clothe itself in a metaphysical disguise that allows it to compensate for this lack with the exaggeration of its dominion on the plane of ordinary things and that can operate by wielding its apparent power in dimensions such as duration, rootedness, or participation in the real and the determination of existence.

Property thus requires a metaphysics to back it up, either as an effective or as an apparent support. In fact, the very idea that everything would be chaos in its absence suggests that a certain essentiality is recognized in property, or attributed to it, with respect to existing entities. However, property, inasmuch as it is no more than an appearance—who can compellingly demonstrate the existence of this thing called property?—and an appearance that purports to be the realest thing of all, to the extent that it is decreed as law, is the radicalization of an immanence that cynically affirms the awareness of its own artificial character or the facticity governed by it as an inexorable fact and thus would also seem to deny metaphysics itself. In this sense, property today is held up simultaneously as a metaphysical artifice and as the negation of metaphysics. These first dense, but empirically observable observations begin to give an idea of how “[a]ll things of this world subsist in a perceptible exile”⁹ (Tiqqun, s.f.), or else, how (contemporary private) property leads us to be-thrown-out-of-the-world.

The expression being-thrown-out-of-the-world has at least two meanings. First, it indicates the opposite of the expression being-thrown-into-the-world with which the philosopher Martin Heidegger described human beings’ existential condition. Humans find themselves in the world as entities whose

9. <https://tiqqunim.blogspot.com/2015/05/metafisica.html>

way of being-in-the-world—of existing—consists of being a project, being thrown into the world to deal with the world, which implies that they pose the question about being, about the meaning of being. The answer to this question supposes both the entity posing the question and all of being and therefore, that cannot count on a single simple answer, and that also cannot lead to an exaltation of the entities who ask about the meaning of being to constitute them as dominators or owners of being—of all that exists—or to place them in the world as something separate from it. Human beings have world to the extent that they configure a world and, with that, they also operate on themselves, although this must not be taken to mean that they are the decisive center of everything—as an anthropocentrically-inclined humanism might lead one to believe—. Thus, being-thrown-out-of-the-world refers to confinement in a condition of radical impotence and insignificance; it is the condition inherent to the spectacle in which there is no more than the mere fact of being there while witnessing a gradual loss of being, of weight and consistency of everything. If being-thrown-into-the-world was characterized by a certain anxiety, being-thrown-out-of-the-world is defined by the sensation of being absent when one is present; each person is the most alien thing to him/herself (Tiqqun, 2005, par. 3).

To be sure, [s]olitude, precarity, indifference, anxiety, exclusion, misery, the statute of stranger, all the categories that the Spectacle deploys to make the world illegible from the social angle, make it simultaneously lucid on the metaphysical plane. They all recall, albeit in different ways, man's utter helplessness at the moment in which *the illusion* of “modern times” has just become uninhabitable [...]. And it is then that the Exile from the world is more objective than the constant of universal gravitation fixed at $6.67259 \cdot 10^{-11} \text{ N} \cdot \text{m}^2 / \text{kg}^2$.¹⁰

This condition of exile in the world of property is put explicitly into words in the following monologue taken from the movie *Trainspotting*:

10. <https://tiqqunim.blogspot.com/2013/01/bloom.html>

Choose Life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose a fucking big television, choose washing machines, cars, compact disc players, and electrical tin openers. Choose good health, low cholesterol, and dental insurance. Choose fixed-interest mortgage repayments. Choose a starter home. Choose your friends. Choose leisurewear and matching luggage. Choose a three-piece suit on hire purchase in a range of fucking fabrics. Choose DIY and wondering who the fuck you are on a Sunday morning. Choose sitting on that couch watching mind-numbing, spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fucking junk food into your mouth. Choose rotting away at the end of it all, pishing your last in a miserable home, nothing more than an embarrassment to the selfish, fucked up brats you spawned to replace yourself. Choose your future. Choose life... But why would I want to do a thing like that? I chose not to choose life. I chose somethin' else. And the reasons? There are no reasons. Who needs reasons when you've got heroin? (Boyle, 1996)

Existing would seem to be, more than being *in* the world, the effort to get *out of* the world, although the possibilities of that, in the property-world, seem to be very slim or nil, or more to the point, inherent to a tragic process or a catastrophe. Here is where the second meaning of the expression being-thrown-out-of-the-world comes into view: In a very literal sense, the world of property gradually cuts the threads that sustain beings as part of it—especially, but not exclusively, human beings—until it throws them out; human beings are no longer characterized as project, but as abject. This “cutting of threads” alludes to the disaffiliation posited by Castel, and also to the progressive restriction of habitable spaces, whether they be places to live, stroll, get from place to place, have fun, interact; even art and talking itself.

In the dynamism of private property, the world where the meanings operate is gradually conditioned to the capacity to pay, conditioned precisely by this operating. The use of compositions of words, images, sounds, flavors, and smells in public seems to be more and more limited by the private property regime; to take this idea even further, what occupies and constitutes a good part of the content of everyday life is the spectacle of private property that exhibits itself, seduces, and appropriates every aspect of life: videos, songs, vehicles, texts, homes, clothes, everything is a vast parade and exhibition of private property strutting around in front of everyone and everywhere.

The more the ontological and hegemonic status of property is affirmed, the more abject human beings become, along with their lives and everything in the world. *Ab-ject* lives¹¹ refers to the dynamically and continually disposable form that we can also call utopian lives, placeless lives, because they are thrown out of the world.

In a world that prioritizes stability and individuality, private property takes on the appearance of tiny bubbles floating in the vast magma of that which has not-yet-become-property; nevertheless, as the emphasis shifts toward mobility and the diffuse, that vast magma might be what becomes private property and the bubbles are just the dead zones, isolated, unable to communicate without passing through the tribute given to the property-owner. In other words, to escape from the confinement, from the bubbles of exclusion, it will be necessary to pay, to pay to be part of the world, of a class, of a society, if only for a short time and in a certain space. Freedom is exclusively for those who can pay to live and move about the world of freedom of property: free *for* property, but not freed *from* property (Marx, 2015).

UTOPIAN LIVES: THE NEGATION OF PROPERTY

The utopia of private property actually does produce utopian lives, i.e., placeless lives, lifeless places. Speaking of property thus implies speaking of negation or, more precisely, of the dual negation of property: the negation that property creates by producing placeless lives, and the negation of property through utopian lives—lives-out-of-place, so to speak, in their lack of adjustment to the property regime—that open up other routes of existence.

The negation brought about by private property today consists of the fact that, given the negation of recourse to an indisputable metaphysics, inherent to a post-metaphysical time and thinking (Habermas), it is always possible to resort to the metaphysical simulacrum without mentioning it or making it

11. The etymology of abject: ab- indicates “of,” “from,” “separation,” “distancing,” and *jacere* means “throw,” “hurl.” Utopia comes from *ou-* “negation” and *topos* “place.” The latter word thus means placeless, and the former seems to indicate the dynamism or condition of realization of that placelessness. This usage is different from the way utopia is traditionally used; nonetheless, it falls within the possible understandings of the term, especially due to the paradoxical anti-utopian character of this utopia of property, as suggested by Hinkelammert (2002).

evident,¹² for which the device of property will have to put on a show to make people experience the inviability of existence without property, for reasons of either logic or practicality, which will at the same time convince them of the desirability of existence with private property. Therefore, the first thing property will show is its capacity to make things last by combating ephemerality, its power to incorporate and root in the world by creating a link between property-owners and things, and finally its potential for producing meaning and value. In other words, property appears as a remedy for nothingness and oblivion, as access to enjoyment, to passions, to the sensation of reality, and as mediation of the transcendence of existing entities. According to the development of the “spectacular strategy” of property, those who are not property-owners are left exposed to nothingness and oblivion, lack enjoyment—or the right to it—in their exclusion from reality, and are intranscendent. Those who are not property-owners are deemed dispossessed of existence—existence for property, since it has already been suggested that existence might be the effort to get out of the property-world—; in other words, non-property-owners are beings-thrown-out-of-the-world. Although in the final analysis, paradoxically, property-owners are also beings-thrown-out-of-the-world: They also find themselves in exile since property is a reified form of identity to the extent that subjects define themselves by their property (Gorz, 1969) and, to take it further, if their being-in-the-world is determined by it. Property is indifferent to the property-owner. There is no personalization or link that confers aura or singularity. In terms of alienation, Gorz (1969) explains it as follows:

Non-ownership is not in itself an alienation. The proletariat is not alienated because it does not own anything in a world where all things (and therefore, its work on things and its production of new things) are owned by others. It makes no sense to try to unchain the proletariat by giving it properties or the possibilities of acquiring them. Because ownership, far from being a de-alienation, is always an alienation to the owned thing (which explains, by the way, Christianity’s embrace of poverty as a value).
(p. 173)

12. This is suggested by Baudrillard in his book *On Seduction* (1981).

As we managed to see, private property today would negate metaphysics, and pass itself off as a world order without metaphysics, but it is actually a metaphysics of negation by which existing entities are shown to be tentative, hanging by a thread called property, as described by Tiqqun (n.d.):

All things of this world subsist in a perceptible state of exile. They are victims of a slow and constant loss of being. To be sure, the modernity that purported to lack any mysteries and that swore to liquidate metaphysics has actually *realized* it. It has produced a decor made entirely of phenomena, of entities that go no further than the simple fact of remaining there, in their empty positivity.¹³

The negation of property as we lay it out here is perhaps better understood as a phenomenon of “destitution,” i.e., rather than mounting an active opposition to property, we propose attacking our need for it; rather than criticizing it, we propose laying claim to what it supposedly does, but from outside of it (Comité Invisible, 2017). In this sense, the Franciscan praxis of poverty (*altissima povertà*) can be seen as destitution in deed, not just as a practice but as a way of life. As Agamben (2013) points out in his book *Altissima povertà*, the Franciscan way of life incarnates a life-outside-of-the-law, which does not make it illegal because it arises from an *abdicatio iuris* (renunciation of a right) on account of the fact that it makes use of things without owning them, by exercising the right to waive a right. The deactivation of property and its law is not feasible by simply carrying out isolated acts; it must come about from a way of life that prioritizes use over ownership, by which the waiving of the right to property is not an isolated act but the result of an affirmative option that turns this renunciation into a way of life.

This proposal is sure to bring immediately to mind the idea of utopia, but it is worth recalling that we are dealing with a historical fact, so instead of directing our gaze toward the future—as people usually do when they talk of utopia—, we look to the past that bears witness to an irruption of the unthinkable in the form of Francis of Assisi and his radical living of the Gospel. His life-out-of-place could provide clues for rethinking our present, so that

13. <https://tiqqunim.blogspot.com/2015/05/metafisica.html>

instead of waiting for a future realization, we get down to the work of recovering traces of what has already happened in the past but was given up for lost, in the hopes of reigniting that spark that already blew up our world once, if only for a short time. Moreover, those who live in the condition of being-thrown-out-of-the-world already offer of a kind of living that does not always and necessarily go through property or debt. This does not imply taking up the mendicant Franciscan life, but rather experimenting and remaking other ways of living in practice..., although, as Benjamin (2013) said, “the hallmark of salvation is its solid, apparently brutal assault” (n.p.), which suggests that perhaps we should not dare to experiment until catastrophe hits us and puts us in a place where a new idea of life emerges and a new propensity to joy, which is the distinguishing characteristic of a revolutionary situation (Hazan & Kamo, 2013).

To conclude, it is worth evoking the words of Morris (2013):

[...] I must point out where in my opinion we fall short in our present attempt at decent life. I must ask the rich and well-to-do what sort of a position it is which they are so anxious to preserve at any cost? and if, after all, it will be such a terrible loss to them to give it up? and I must point out to the poor that they, with capacities for living a dignified and generous life, are in a position which they cannot endure without continued degradation. (pp. 48-49)

And perhaps, like at no other time, we will have to recognize that an immense majority of human beings are in a position we cannot endure without continued degradation, and that we are anxious to preserve it at any cost.

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