

Capitalism is at odds with the particular. This is an axiom for much of critical thought, though exactly what this entails is often left to the side of the discussion. The process by which a large variety of particular things come to be exchanged in a single market is not trivial, however, and is often obscured. Karl Polanyi, in **The Great**

Transformation Q R W H V W K D W ³ W K H F R P P R G L W \ G H V F U L S W L R Q

entirely fictitious. Nevertheless, it is with the help of this fiction that the actual markets

I R U O D Q G O D E R U D Q G P R Q H \ D U H R P L A N D I S A D D E S I N G 3 R O D Q \ L

the vexing fact that land, among other things, is not specifically produced for sale and yet is still somehow sold. This viewpoint suggests that this capacity for exchange, the basis

for markets, derives from the very fiction that allows for commensurability between things, the process of abstraction that shaves down the splinters of the particular. Marx, in

Capital, identifies this commodity fiction as the fetishistic misrecognition of the social character of the commodity ² the relationships of the producers to its production ² seeing

instead its value as based in objective traits rather than an extractive labor process (Marx 1978: 320). μ & R P P R G L W \ e n L F W L R Q i n W K

discursive transformation that allows for radically different things to be exchanged in a market and as the blinding glimmer that obscures the material relations underlying

V R P H W K L Q J i s a c o m m o d i t y .

It follows that newly emerging commodity markets are sites at which the initial construction of this double fiction can be glimpsed, its discursive anatomy laid bare. So-called carbon trading is a market that has only emerged substantially in this decade. Carbon-based commodities take two main forms, cap-and-trade allowances and carbon offsets, both of which will be explained in more detail later. Carbon trading is projected

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in fits and starts, due to inconclusive policies on climate change. (No REDD Papers 2011: 26). One development is a massive program that has been in the works for several years called Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation in developing countries (REDD), negotiated in successive rounds of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It is designed to incentivize forest conservation by

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in the abstraction of particular things or places into commensurable items that can be exchanged. As may be evident, the problem of violence, both epistemic and vital, intersects these processes and the commodity form generally. This essay, then, will seek a partial answer to the question of what has to be broken in order to render something abstract.

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Climate change mitigation has increasingly become a common goal of various institutions around the world. In 1992, the UN- VSRQVRUHG ³(DUWK 6XPPLW´ PH Janiero to discuss, among other things, an international environmental treaty called the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The stated

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atmosphere at a level that would not exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels by the end of the 21st century.

emissions exceeded the allowed range (Subprime Carbon 2009: 2). This is theorized to offer the most cost-efficient method of reducing emissions, as it offers a mechanism for incorporating J SROOXWLRQ HXSKHPLVWLFDOO\ RYHUORRNHG D chain.

The Kyoto Protocol (KP) of 1997, a UNFCCC initiative to commit developed countries to an emissions reduction regimen, furthered the concept of market-based mitigation by introducing so-

The projects themselves **HQFRPSDVV D YDULHW\ RI μHQYLURQP**
H[DPSON electrification project using solar panels or the installation of more
energy- **HIILFLHQW ERLOHUV´ 81)&&& ZHEVLWH &'0 ,Q**
WKH ,QWHUJRYHUQPHQWDO 3DQHO RQ &OLPDWH &KDQJH
)RUHVWVCF) that detailed how such offset credits could be generated through the
GHSOR\PHQW RI QDWXUDO FDUERQ VHTXH VWUDWLRQ LQ
2000: 8). However, such forestry projects were considered unworkable under the CDM,
due to the difficulty of measuring the offset capacity, even if they were theoretically

within the development apparatus that the World Bank can, in all seriousness, purport to

these pools [sinks] and exchanges between them and the atmosphere through land use,

ODQG XVH FKDQJH DQG IRUHVWU\ 2003) This makes

forest biomes as sites of intervention for climate change mitigation. This is not to say that

these claims are not technically true ² human activities certainly affect the efficiency of

the carbon cycle. Rather, it is to emphasize that ecological knowledge is here deployed to

define an exclusive site in which mitigation can occur. While ostensibly designed to

garner a net reduction in atmospheric CO₂, the structure of offsets allows polluters to

continue unabated and displaces the imp**HUDWLYH WR DFW RQ SURYLGHUV**

VHUYLFH asymmetry recapitulates other global power differentials, as richer,

Northern countries emit the most gases and most offset projects break ground in the

South.

Furthermore, the UN assumes a ver**EURDG GHILQLWLRQ RI μIRUHY**

monoculture re/afforestation projects can qualify as offsets (No REDD Papers 2011: 50).

This figures forests as merely a quantity of trees, themselves uniform carbon

sequestration stocks. This has everything to do with the measurement techniques

employed. Due to the immensity of the task of monitoring forest carbon, a variety of

techniques (such as direct measurements, statistical models, satellite imaging and soil

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DQ DFFXUDWH DQG SUHFLVH DVVHVPHQW RI FKDQJHV

2000: 11). This, of course, introduces a premium on inaccurate measurements in order to

maximize the exchange-value of offset credits.

While dubiously reliable, a more subtle intervention takes place in the

measurement process. By using such a variety of techniques, each individually providing

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amenable to a variety of landscapes. The REDD+ Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV) manual sets out a standardized set of techniques for the assessment

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deployed depending on available resources and the type of biomass being assessed (MRV 2013: 36-37). While this flexibility

stocks² is perceived as objective, when it is in fact the social forms² historical colonialism, the desire of polluters to continue polluting, practices of carbon trading² that produces it. Thus, the carbon cycle is not only recognized as a commodity, but it is constructed as such.

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Carbon stocks have become objects of analysis, mobilizing the creation of value. But these carbon stocks will only realize their value if they can be delivered to the market, in the form of certification. All versions of REDD include language about accepted forms of land use in order for a forest to qualify as an offset. Questions about land are really questions about territory² and those are really questions about sovereignty. REDD projects run the gamut of corruption charges: evictions, fraud, intimidation, coercion and human rights violations (No REDD Papers 2011:19). It has

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In Chiapas, Mexico, for example, the government has cut off medical aid to certain tribes in the Lacandon forest, which had been previously displaced in 1978 to establish the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve. This reserve is being inventoried to bring its carbon storing potential to ma**UNHW IXUWKHU FRQWHVWLQJ WKH**

thousand homes in the process (Sengwer 2014). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Batwa people, who have been evicted, are reportedly being rehired to collect data, as they

DUH ³WZR WR WKUHH WLP HV FK HDSHU´ WKDQ SURIHVVLR
2011: 65).

In 2002, the Nature Conservancy, a major conservation nonprofit, partnered with Chevron, General Motors and American Electric Power to purchase 50,000 acres of Atlantic rainforest in the Brazilian state of Paraná to create three reserves, collectively referred to as the Guaraqueçaba Environmental Protection Area (GEPA; Shapiro 2009).

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more nefarious speculative schemes must be erased (Shapiro 2009). No one can enter, by threat of force.

These examples serve as metonyms for various forms of dispossession that are common, and in fact **QHFHVVDU\ IRU 5(' UHDGLQHVV HHULO\ PLU** of the enclosures in 17th **FHQWXU\ %ULWDLQ ³:KHUH WKHUH DUH QR WR JHW ULG RI WKH µFOHDULQJ¶ RI FRWWDJHV EHLQV´** acts of **YLROHQFH´ SURGXFHG ZDV QRW VLP SO\ ODQG IRU V** almost servile condition of the mass of the people [and] the transformation of them into **PHUFHQDULHV DQG WKHLU PHDQV RI ODERU LQWR FDSLW ³FRQTXHVW HQVODYHPHQW UREEHU\ >DQG@ PXUGHU´ L** Marx the process of primitive accumulation, which cleared the way for the capitalist mode of production. However, these methods of strategic violence are not a thing of the precapitalist past; they serve as the most reliable technique for inscribing the commodity form onto land.

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Carbon credits require a stoichiometry between two things ² greenhouse gas emissions and forest biomass ² that are quite distinct. More pointedly, it requires an equivalence between a variety of practices that flattens the ethical plane to include both indigenous

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FLWLQJ WKDW GHIRUHVWDWLRQ DFFRXXQWJDRUVRQBJDLQ

note the possessive). This establishes an environmentalist globalism that envisions

common responsibility and common resources. The forests E HORQJ WR WKH 'ZRUOG

opens up the question of their use to parties claiming to represent the world. This gestures

at the uncertain bu>900B

Appendix A:



Escobar, Arturo. 1995. Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World. Princeton.

Forest Carbon partnership Facility. N.d. Home page.
<http://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org>, accessed March 31, 2014.

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derivatives market. Industry report.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. N.d. About emissions trading. http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/mechanisms/emissions_trading/items/2731.php, accessed March 31, 2014.

About clean development mechanism. http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/mechanisms/clean_development_mechanism/items/2718.php, accessed March 31, 2014.