New geographies, old ontologies

Optimism of the intellect

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The broad rediscovery of space in social, cultural and political discourse in the last three decades owes to many sources, but in terms of intellectual inspirations the work of David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre has had an extraordinary effect, the depth and breadth of which we are only now beginning to appreciate. Lefebvre, steeped in the French Communist Party tradition yet one of its most trenchant critics, and just as much a situationist come the 1960s, offered a highly philosophical rationale for the reframing of politics as inherently spatial. Space *is* the ontology of politics for Lefebvre. The production of space is what capitalism does – capitalism has survived since the nineteenth century, he once famously remarked, *'by occupying space, by producing a space*'.[1] The production of space is, *ipso facto,* the main thing we will have to do differently in a post-capitalist world. These at least were the conclusions of Lefebvre's work for a decade or more after the mid-1960s, and whatever the often philosophical language, these spatial theorizations were inspired directly by the Paris uprisings of 1968 and their global counterparts. 1968 was for Lefebvre a spatial as much as a historical moment; space was coming into its own.

1968 was also a crucial moment for David Harvey. It was the year in which he completed a mammoth study of *Explanation in Geography*, which provided an unprecedented philosophical rationale for the erstwhile rag-tag explosion of scientific positivism in geography since the mid 1950s.[2] About the same time he decided to move from Britain to the United States, where he would witness a very different set of political uprisings, especially the Baltimore aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. A certain political innocence was lost in the process: the virtues of Fabian socialism that offered critical comfort in early-1960s Britain proved diaphanous in the new time and place in which he found himself. Unlike Lefebvre, Harvey was already convinced about the centrality of space in everyday social life. His transition after 1968 was less spatial than political, as he sensed that to understand the world he now inhabited he would have to deal directly with the theoretical underpinnings of socialism – Marx. Whereas Lefebvre carried his philosophical predilection and political instincts to the discovery of space, Harvey brought a deep geographical sensibility to a late-1960s and 1970s politicization. They came at the question of the politics of space from dramatically opposite starting points, but ended up, despite considerable differences, in broad agreement on a wide range of issues.

Whereas Lefebvre's spatialization of politics came out of a French political and social theory that was already, in some ways, turning spatial – in response partly to Stalinism but also to a certain hegemony of time institutionalized by Bergson – Harvey emerged from an English-speaking tradition increasingly led from the United States, where a geographical sensibility about social relations was largely missing in the twentieth century. Geographical narratives of social change were widely discredited in the early decades of the twentieth century in favour of history. There were various reasons for this. On the one hand it represented a particular response to the geographical closure of capitalist expansion – now that the world was fully colonized, lamented one anguished observer in 1899, 'what is left for the [Royal and American] Geographical Societies do?' But it was also a response to the rise of US economic power rooted less in colonial possession of territory than in control of international market flows. World War I was a highly geographical affair – a cubist war for Stephen Kern – in which

control of the economic and political geography of future capitalist expansion was the main prize, but the failure of the Versailles settlement was largely a failure to fix a stable geography for future capitalist expansion. Its ugly geographical offspring – European and Asian fascism, which, especially in the German case, was premissed on the language of geopolitics and demands for an expanded German *Lebensraum* – only intensified the sense that geography was no longer the language of a progressive or even liberal future. In this context, the tendency toward the self-understanding of emerging US hegemony came to be expressed not in terms of a new empire but rather Henry Luce's 'American Century'.[3] This much at least Luce had in common with Lenin: in stark contrast to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, history not geography now embodied the most fervent hopes for a different world.

Time again for space

The subsequent reassertion of space as a vital language of politics since the late 1960s is nothing short of astonishing, in both its speed and its extent. It is far more deeply rooted than simply a new academic fashion. Since 1987 the US Congress has sponsored a 'Geography Awareness Week', convinced that the geographical ignorance of the American people is no longer functional but rather undermines the national interest. Caspar Weinberger, Secretary of Defense under President Reagan, has used the pages of the magazine *Forbes, A Capitalist Tool*, to excoriate Harvard University for dropping geography and to insist it be reinstated. In a quite different vein, space became the language of choice in cultural studies and social theory in the 1980s and 1990s, albeit with metaphors to the fore. As much as feminist and social theory focus on the body since the 1980s, the ubiquitous language of globalization is symptomatically spatial, and, as the 1999 Seattle uprising and subsequent events suggest, the 'spatial turn' may be abstractly conceptual in some academic quarters but it is also a crucial ingredient of emerging contests over the production of global and local space on the ground. Oxford literary theorist Terry Eagleton has weighed in with the assessment that geography is poised to become 'the sexiest academic subject of all'.[4]

David Harvey's new book, *Spaces of Hope*,* can be read as the latest leg in a long journey out from the endeavours of his 1960s scientific geography and towards a more sharply defined vision of political alternatives, a further amplification of the broad Marxist melding of space and politics that he has pursued for thirty years. His previous books are widely appreciated or critiqued as analytical texts: especially perhaps *Social Justice and the City* (1973), which became a foundational work in urban geography and urban studies; *Limits to Capital* (1982), which reworked *Das Kapital* as a preface to spatializing political economy; and *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), which adeptly wove the postmodern cultural turn into an analysis of flexible accumulation in the modern economy and revealed postmodernism as the rediscovery of a lost lineage within modernism itself.[5] *Spaces of Hope* corrals a number of familiar arguments about Marx, political economy, cultural politics and what Harvey has long presented as historical-geographical materialism – a Marxism rewritten in a spatialized lexicon – but it also reframes the familiar towards a more explicit consideration of, and call for, alternatives to capitalism.

This book comes at a specific time and place. The ubiquitous globalization rhetoric of the 1990s was an act of extraordinary class bravado by an international, if not global, ruling class which thought it saw a clear capitalist road ahead, devoid for the first time of any significant challengers. Theirs is a utopianism of finance capital as the only possible future; the end of history *is* neo-liberalism. National borders are leaking so profusely that they are barely recognizable, and geographical obstacles of all kinds are crumbling at radioactive rates of decay. The withering away of the state *is* the future, thanks not to Vladimir Lenin but to Bill Gates, the Internet and on-line stock trading. Its haughtiest and most authoritarian expression may have come from Margaret Thatcher: 'there is no alternative'. The true Leninists today, it seems, work Wall Street.

If the 1990s gave powerful voice to this brave new capitalist utopia in stock market indices, corporate investment plans and newspaper headlines across the world, the decade also closed with abundant signs of its vulnerability. The explosive Asian economic crisis, spreading to Russia, Brazil and Mexico, marked a decisive break. (Economists, symptomatically, could only comprehend the economic geography of this event in terms of the vaguely racist, epidemiological imagery of 'contagion'.) Suharto's downfall in Indonesia intimated the possible political consequences while the grand

* David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2000. 320 pp., £45.00 hb., £14.95 pb., 0 748 61269 6 hb., 0 748 61268 8 pb. All page references in the text refer to this book.

up-yours to global capital by a re-regulating Malaysian government showed that even within the rules of capitalism itself alternatives could be found.[6] IMF neo-liberalism, as the self-ordained strategic leading edge of globalization, now stood indicted not simply by Asian, African and Latin American opponents but by its closest partner in global crime, the World Bank, for the bankruptcy of its doctrinaire, free-market utopianism. The Seattle uprising in the belly of the beast quickly followed, as did militant protests in London, Washington and Prague, and an anti-WTO movement quickly galvanized that saw itself, in part, as not just anti-corporate but anti-capitalist. Even as the class arrogance of 'no alternative' weighed like lead on local oppositions around the world, capitalism itself crystallized as no alternative.

Harvey has an astute talent for addressing his analyses to the needs of the political moment. This book was written before the Seattle uprising, and while it represents a continuity with earlier themes it also reconnects more powerfully and explicitly than any of his intervening works with his Fabian concerns of more than three decades ago. 'We desperately need a revitalized socialist avant-garde', he urges, 'an international political movement capable of bringing together in an appropriate way the multitudinous discontents that derive from the naked exercise of bourgeois power in pursuit of a utopian neo-liberalism' (49).

Despite the declining interest in Marx since the 1970s, the project of neo-liberalism may make Marx's critique of capitalism and his *Communist Manifesto* more relevant and more timely than ever before. Certainly Wall Streeters think so, and before the Asian crisis were prepared to say so. With the threat of socialist political alternatives apparently vanquished into the never-never land of Thatcher's unthinkable, and as the 150th anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto* approached, the world's finance capitalists came out of the boardroom woodwork to admit that, actually, Marx's critique did identify the Achilles heel of capitalism even if, naturally, his class solutions were unthinkable.[7] It took a certain smugness of class power to make such breezy concessions to one's sworn enemy, a smugness that evaporated with barely a trace as the Asian crisis seemed to threaten global catastrophe.

By contrast, capitalism's opponents may never have been so divided as in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The work of postmodernism in particular, Harvey argues, has not only fragmented political opposition but has recast that fragmentation as a badge of intellectual honour. Now is the time for political reconnection, for multiple visions of alternatives, for a renewed if cautious and critical utopianism: not just an optimism of the will but an optimism of the intellect, to amend Gramsci's prison aphorism, is today's urgent need.

Dialectical utopianism

One of the most fertile areas of geographical theory today concerns the question of spatial scale. In general, geographical scale is treated as more or less fixed. The scale of the global or of the body is simply given, while that of the community or the urban, the national or the regional may be much more variable but is also to all intents and purposes given. Scale is not generally seen as an interesting theoretical or philosophical question; it is at best a methodological question pertaining to the choice of scale at which one chooses to view a problem, chooses to do research. Current discussions of globalization and localization, bodies and the fate of the nation-state suggest otherwise, however. It is not simply that the spatial arrangement of social processes is being restructured but that the *scales* at which these processes are collected into discrete, coherent and differentiable spatial units – local, national, global, and so on – are also being restructured. Contemporary geographical theory therefore sees the somewhat hierarchical mesh of spatial scales as simultaneously the result of social processes *and* an active spatial metric that frames and shapes those processes. Body politics are very different from urban politics or, in turn, from global politics, and the making of spatial scales is implicated in these differences.

Lefebvre taught us the profundity of conceiving space in terms of its production, but he was much less erudite – surprisingly silent – about the means of producing spatial difference. This is especially ironic in so far as 'differential space' was Lefebvre's code for a socialist future that he so ardently wanted. As recent work is beginning to suggest, scale is the means by which societies produce and organize spatial difference. The 'production of scale', therefore, is not just historically mutable but is a matter of extraordinary political importance. Scales are the geographical infrastructures that organize social difference into spatial difference, refracting it back as part of the landscape, fixed, naturalized. The production of scale is simultaneously a means of shaping and *containing* social struggle and a means of *empowering* specific struggles.[8]

Harvey picks up this work on scale, suturing his discussion of possible futures into a scalar framework. After arguing the enhanced relevance of Marx today

and offering his own critical survey of globalization-speak, he reiterates the ways in which global capitalist development is inevitably uneven. Not only is uneven development at the core of capitalist expansion in economic terms, but this unevenness carries over into the question of rights. Capitalist and Marxist institutions alike (the United Nations and the First International) have had to grapple with the dilemma of universal rights in a world of radical economic, cultural and political difference among people and between places. What reality can universal rights have in such a highly differentiated world? This theme threads through several earlier essays in Harvey's preceding book, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996), especially the discussion of 'militant particularism and global ambition', which draws on Raymond Williams's fictional writings about Wales, and leads in turn to a reconsideration of Leibniz. For Leibniz the individual acts as 'the measure of all things' and the entire world can therefore be apprehended in the monadic individual. Harvey recognizes this move as a certain kind of solution to the dialectic of universal and particular but rejects it as desperately idealist, observing nonetheless that the political failures of the Left in recent years have come from a parallel kind of 'retreat into a windowless Leibnizian world of internalized relations'.[9]

Harvey now takes the argument a step further. It is no accident that the body became such a central theoretical and political object at the end of the twentieth century, but the threads connecting a body politics from inside the Leibnizian world to its outside have to be continually woven. Bodies are bearers of economic value as much as cultural signification. Borrowing from Donna Haraway, he emphasizes that 'the body is an accumulation strategy in the deepest sense' (97) and proposes that the site of most intense struggle around this issue in the USA today may be the living-wage struggles being fought in cities around the country where much of the routine janitorial, domestic, secretarial and public- and private-sector service work is done by people of colour, often immigrants, and disproportionately women, for derisory wages. He focuses specifically on the living-wage movement in Baltimore, which encroached directly on the university that then employed him.

A resilient philosophical question remains, however, which is also eminently practical. The question of universality vis-à-vis particularity is of immediate political importance today in the arbitration of claims among different oppressed, marginalized and exploited identities, but it is of paramount importance in any proposal of alternative social forms. The degenerate utopia of globalizing capital and the Truman Show

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hermeticism of deconstructive poststructuralism both represent the future in terms of universals disguised by a language of difference, but in so doing they highlight the extent to which the dilemma of universality and particularity lies at the heart of any vision of a makeable or desirable future. We can all dream wildly different futures, and most of us do, but how to make them work has a lot to do with reconciling particularity and universality.

In the most original and interesting chapters of *Spaces of Hope*, Harvey tackles this issue directly. Chapter 8 begins with a vivid indictment of the deepening deindustrializing dystopia of Baltimore since 1968 then puzzles over why so many utopian proposals – from Homer and Plato to Bacon and More, through to Fourier and nineteenth-century feminist utopias, Robert Owen and Ebenezer Howard, the New Urbanism – have embraced the figure of the city. These are all what he calls 'utopias of spatial form' in which certain spatial arrangements allow for and encourage certain kinds of social change; imaginative play with spatial form unleashes myriad possibilities for different utopias. But the comparative fixity of spatial form has its own drawbacks and the freedom of the polis inevitably implies a police function; actually materialized utopias of this sort generally failed at the altar of flawed social processes, a connection that has fuelled the more recent twentieth-century rejections of utopianism. By contrast, there are what Harvey identifies as 'utopias of social process', and he has in mind Adam Smith's laissez-faire world market and Hegel's World Spirit, or latter-day fusions of them both, from Fukuyama's 'end of history' to Margaret Thatcher's inevitable capitalism. But this kind of utopianism also fails in so far as its realization in practice involves an inescapable negotiation with existing geographies. Inherited territorialities, fixed states, obdurate spatial difference, the systemic unevenness of capitalism, are no ideal *tabula rasa* on which to build ideal worlds. Every spatialization of utopic social process necessarily involves a choice of one spatial form over another, an inevitable either/or decision, and if the new geography is correct, broadly speaking, the choice of spatial form is itself a powerful choice among social alternatives. To borrow a wholly different motif, Salman Rushdie's tale of the systematically mistranslated holy verses are a precise allegory: the 'satanic geographies of globalization' deepen rather than ameliorate the miseries that this utopianism promises to erase.

The contradiction between social-process and spatial-form utopias might be resolved, Harvey proposes, via 'dialectical utopianism' (Chapter 9), which he sketches by way of several critiques. Lefebvre's brilliant notion of the 'production of space' in the end remains too open ended, he says. Lefebvre is only too well aware that spatialization involves an enforced closure, an either/or choice of some spatial arrangements over others, and largely refuses this move as an inherently authoritarian act. Foucault's proposal of 'heterotopias' likewise emerges from an attempt to spatialize a utopianism of social process, but its celebratory embrace of seemingly endless and unstructured difference also fails eventually to grapple with the inevitable choice of closures and alternatives that accompanies the making of alternative, lived geographies. A series of recent novels, especially by women – Marge Piercy, Doris Lessing, Ursula Le Guin – may inspire a more sensitive imagination about alternatives, highlighting the fact that a dialectical utopianism is necessarily a spatio-temporal utopianism. Its construction has to begin from the existing historical geography. The dilemma of universal and particular is re-materialized as the problem of place-specific demands at all scales in a constantly shifting globalism, and its resolution has to hold two seemingly contradictory things in constant tension: it has to allow a continually dynamic production of space on the one side and a willing embrace of the necessity of 'either/or' decisions – at least temporary fixity – on the other.

In the concluding chapters Harvey ventures some preliminary ideas about what might be included among the 'plurality' of alternatives populating a 'spatio-temporal utopianism'. He is drawn to architecture since architects have no choice but to create spatial forms, and in the best of all worlds are acutely aware of the socio-temporal implications of produced space, but he also shifts rather abruptly here from space and time to nature – the substance of space–time, as it were. He uses Marx's famous aphorism about the difference between architects and bees ('the architect raises the structure in imagination before he erects it in reality') to argue that 'our human nature' is not just socially and historically created but is deeply biological as well. He evokes ontological interpretations of Marx to argue that there are 'universal qualities to our species-being' that the Left has generally skirted, but that the imagination of alternatives must tackle directly. If the construction of alternative futures is about eschewing alienation and pushing to the limits of human nature, don't we need to know what the 'nature imposed condition of our existence looks like?' (206–7). If bees have their own 'nature', he suggests, in a markedly agreeable engagement with sociobiologist E.O. Wilson, don't

human beings? Critiquing the metaphorical muddle-headedness that marks much environmental politics today, Harvey resorts to the metaphor of the 'web of life' to begin thinking about what alternative socialized natures might look like.

This book has two endings, neither of which is in any way a conclusion. First, urging that we are all insurgent architects of a collective future, Harvey insists that all so-called universal struggles have quite particular origins and that the translation between 'militant particularism' and collective action will always have to be mediated by institutions and environments that we self-consciously construct for the purpose. In the ongoing flow of practical translation, the 'moment of universality' emerges. Universality is not some final or fixed achievement but rather 'a moment of existential decision' when 'certain principles are materialized through action in the world'. The personal is political in the deepest possible way: universals are forged in the decision to join or not to join specific struggles, but even in that context they draw their power from embedded conceptions of species-being. A radicalized and amended list of rights in the UN Declaration of Human Rights provides a first draft of universal rights worth fighting for if we insurgent architects of an alternative world only have the courage to take the speculative plunge.

The second ending records Harvey's own speculative plunge into a possible future, sandwiched between two depressing, real-life walks around contemporary Baltimore. It is 2020, and environmental destruction, a major stock market crash and a military takeover have produced massive social chaos, exploited by a women-led global peace movement which is now reconstructing daily life from the bottom up in a nested hierarchy of scaled social units. In doing so, they are thoroughly alert to Thomas More's observation that existing society 'is a conspiracy of the rich to advance their own interests under the pretext of organizing society', and that the best solution for poverty will be the abolition of money (279).

Ontology or revolution?

Some will read this book as simply a continuation of Harvey's long-standing commitment to Marxism, albeit with a new and possibly exciting, possibly dubious, utopian bent. That it is, in part; but it is also much more. Its personal and political release of imagination represents a willingness by the author to make himself vulnerable in an alien genre, unprotected by the armour of analytical argumentation that has been his hallmark. Harvey is here flying with considerably less of a Marxist parachute than in the past. The recognition that critics of capitalism desperately need to find creative ways of reopening the future is astute and catches a broad and rising clamour for alternatives. If it is simultaneously a new iteration of preexisting concerns and a significant contribution in a collective search for a language that conveys possible futures as inherently geographical projects, this may only suggest that Harvey has been on the right track for a while. Not just the past and present but the future are irreducibly spatio-temporal, and Harvey's insistence on the *critical* spatialization of utopian discourse – the alloying of spatial-form and social-process utopianisms rather than an all-or-nothing approach to utopian spatiality – should adjust our vision of alternative futures accordingly.

Spaces of Hope is without question Harvey's most personal book. It is also his most deeply humanist, even if the humanism of his more analytical contributions, such as *Limits to Capital*, is less apparent but no less real. As this humanism expresses itself more and more in the text, the pronouns shift toward the 'we' of humanity construed as a whole. Harvey unabashedly defends our ability to conceive of humanity in such universal terms, indeed the necessity of doing so. His dialectical utopianism is as much premissed on this humanism as the latter is on the conception of 'species-being'. What distinguishes his argument here, however, is the conjunctural nature of his universals: the moment of universality is no final end, revelation or absolute truth. Rather it is 'a moment of existential decision', a kind of *jouissance* of radical clarity paired with political action. Utopia does not transcend choice but embraces its permanence.

The risks associated with proposing a cautious utopianism today are high. The embrace of the universal moment is simultaneously the inescapability of momentary authoritarianism – the either/or decision – but the danger is that the authoritarianism stretches beyond the moment, is reproduced, becomes habitual, institutionalized. This may well describe the tragic history of Soviet communism in the twentieth century. Precisely this dilemma led Trotsky and later Mao to advocacy of permanent revolution; in an earlier revolutionary period Thomas Jefferson made a broadly similar proposal.

This leads us to the question of ontology and the status of ontology in any revolutionary or utopian vision. The study of the essence of things or of pure being, ontology can be seen as comprising a collection of institutionalized universals in which the conjunctural moment has largely dissipated. Ontology

occupies an important place in Harvey's scheme. A deep ontological thread connects dialectical utopianism with species-being, the malleability of social futures with pillars of human nature. The comparison with Lefebvre helps illuminate the broader issue. For Lefebvre, history lurched forward along two mutually entwined tracks. He was enough of a Marxist to insist that class struggle, broadly conceived as the practical and symbolic contests of different social groups both within and outside the state, was a powerful motor of history, but he was equally a Hegelian to the extent that for him history unfolded from the logical development of its own concept. The Hegelian becoming of space *is* the ontology of politics for Lefebvre, yet by the same token space changes radically according to the empirics of social struggle. Lefebvre never quite reconciles this duality of historical change, inviting the conclusion that history and ontology for Lefebvre are, if not contradictory, at least 'malcongruent'.[10] Socialism for Lefebvre is marked precisely by their new-found congruence, the end of a history now folded into ontology.

Harvey's dusting off of 'species-being' as a central concept in the question of political alternatives represents a quite different attempt to negotiate this dilemma of historical change and ontology. In recent decades scholars have generally been content to leave 'species-being' among the earlier, more mystical forays of Marx's critique of Hegel, and not without reason. But this concept accomplishes two things for Harvey's optimism of the intellect. On the one hand, it provides an implicit critique of idealist claims concerning social constructionism that have become *de rigueur* in social and cultural theory. Biology matters. The insistence on a reconnection with biology via Feuerbach's notion of 'species-being' provides an *entrée* to scientific investigations of what makes us human, and to science more broadly as a certain kind of framing of possible futures. This is in marked contrast to some strands of cultural radicalism for which a reconnection to science is unimportant, either because science represents simply another discourse among many or because it challenges the authority of the humanities to arbitrate what makes us human. If Harvey's critique of E.O. Wilson is disappointingly unengaged, telling us only that Wilson's sociobiology is reductionist, the Sokal affair should provide adequate warning of the potential reductionisms to which Harvey is responding.[11]

But species-being serves a second more questionable purpose here. With so many conceptual and political balls in the air, fixity has to be found somewhere if perspective is to be gained, and the moment of maximum flexibility (simultaneously the moment of greatest possibility and vulnerability concerning an optimism of the intellect) is enabled by an equally explicit mobilization of ontology around the notion of species-being. It provides a place to stand amidst the uncertainty of not only the present but even more so the future. The argument that 'universals of species-being' provide a fixed core to human nature raises obvious dangers and narrows significantly what Marx seems to have had in mind. Marx raises the question of species-being in an early effort to wring a critique of alienation out of what he sees as Hegel's one-sided idealism concerning 'man's' self-construction. It is through acts of consciousness, for Hegel, that man both makes himself and finds himself alienated from his own conception, whereas for Marx man makes himself in a double sense, through labour *and* through consciousness. Marx does talk of universals in this context but not so much in the sense that such universals create some core human nature. 'Man is a species-being', he proposes, 'not only because he practically and theoretically makes the species … but also … because he looks upon himself as the present, living species, because he looks upon himself as a *universal* and therefore free being.' In a similar vein, and obviously in an earlier version of the architect and the bees:

> It is true that animals also produce. They build nests and dwellings, like the bee, the beaver, the ant, etc. But they produce only their own immediate needs or those of their young; they produce one-sidedly while man produces universally; they produce only when immediate physical need compels them to do so, while man produces even when he is free from physical need and truly produces only in freedom from such need; they produce only themselves, while man reproduces the whole of nature.[12]

Norman Geras has offered a spirited defence of the notion that Marx held to the 'idea of a universal human nature', and Harvey's revival of 'species-being' weighs in very much on the same side.[13] The striking thing about the above quotation from Marx, however, is the extent to which universality is already imbued with a geographical more than philosophical intent and that this works to attenuate any simple impulse to ontology. This is precisely the direction in which Harvey pushes us, his embrace of Geras notwithstanding, when he argues so powerfully that the apparent contradiction between universality and particularity can be resolved

only by undoing the philosophical abstraction via which the contradiction is expressed – in short by spatializing the dilemma of universality and particularity in view of the inherently uneven development of capitalism. Viewed this way, the awkwardness of Harvey's shift, towards the end of the book, from a spatial discourse to one about nature alerts us to certain limits of the argument. Whereas Lefebvre effectively jettisons nature in favour of a priority of space with strong pre-Einsteinian roots – the capitalist production of space leads to a 'murder of nature' and the rise of anti-nature for Lefebvre – Harvey insists on a more nuanced connection between space and nature. Yet this connection is undertheorized and itself remains abstract. The residual ontology is built around notions of nature and human nature, 'internal' and 'external' nature, that may be too rigid to expose the capitalist reproductions of 'the whole of nature' and to map the alternative productions of nature he wants to materialize.

This is not to argue the absence of universals of daily life, but rather to raise questions about their significance. Of course, there are basic 'universal' needs such as eating and drinking, sleeping and excreting, reproducing, even staying warm (or cool, depending on the climate). The problem is that recognition of the universality of these basic needs does not tell us very much, especially since these needs are satisfied by indescribably diverse social means. There is a significant discrepancy between the relative mundaneness of such needs and the far more weighty sense of universal codes and limits implied by 'species-being'. To put it simply, the question of human nature may, as many have argued, be a red herring. To pose the question of future possibilities against the issue of human nature may be an unnecessary constraint. The question of human nature may be the wrong question.

Harvey's geographical history and ontology are much more closely knitted to each other than Lefebvre's, deriving in part from the far greater distance he wants to put between himself and Hegel. He is especially incisive in arguing that universals emerge as materialized decisions wedded to momentous political actions. Such a reconceptualization of universals has all sorts of exciting political possibilities that rise well above the discussions of nature and species-being, and are expressed in the release of political imagination that animates the analytical discussions in *Spaces of Hope* as much as the appendicular musings on 2020. Harvey's own optimism of the intellect allows for a cautious critique of some aspects of Marx and Marxism. The *Communist Manifesto* underestimates the resilient power of spatial differentiation and uneven development and the 'rhetoric of imperialism and neocolonialism' he finds nugatory. But it is a controlled release, and reading the final pages of this book one is never quite sure whether a much more undisciplined imagination is chafing to get out, only just kept in place by the necessity to keep dialectical utopias with one foot in the present, or whether the imagination is hindered by having a foot still planted in ontology.

How fundamental historical change can and does take place is the greatest enigma for political theory and organizing, all the more so for revolutionary politics. This question is understandably acute in a book devoted to a judicious optimism of the intellect. The insurgent architect always has the chicken-and-egg problem that a changed historical geography can transform people's consciousnesses but it takes a politically changed person and collectivity to make the new geographies. 'None of this', Harvey concludes, 'can occur through some radical revolutionary break.' The 'perspective of a long revolution is necessary' and one can only aspire to be 'a subversive agent, a fifth columnist inside of the system, with one foot firmly planted in some alternative camp' (238).

There is something paradoxical here in so far as one kind of traditional historical change – revolution – appears to be precluded amidst the call for a renewed optimism. Revolution is the sworn enemy of ontology, it might be noted, and this may have a bearing on the issue. But the hard line on revolution may equally represent a modest bow to the reality of life for the academic critic in the English-speaking world today. Certainly it stretches all of our skills and imaginations to craft a language through which to put revolutionary change on the intellectual horizon while remaining credible: isn't revolution the stuff of past histories rather than future geographies? Is there really an alternative? But that predicament bespeaks a very particular location from which to see the possibilities for social change, and the universalization of such a circumscribed political ambition may itself be problematic.

And so the issue of revolutionary change resurfaces in the poetic appendix, which actually recounts a dream. The utopian reconstruction of 2020 was only possible, it turns out, because of a 'revolutionary' upsurge a year earlier leading to mass defection by the military and the professional classes. It was a spontaneous uprising expressing the will of a 'massive movement of non-violent resistance' led by women, although 'how exactly it happened remains obscure'. One thing is clear: despite whisperings to the contrary, the uprising was not the work of 'revolutionary organizers' (261).

Photo: Martha Gimenez

There is no question that it will take generations to work the violence of capitalism, racism, patriarchy, imperialism, and many other structured oppressions out of the habits and assumptions of everyday life. Revolutions also have a habit of throwing up their own obstacles. The 'long revolution' is just such a process, marking the distinction, however viable, for Marx, between socialism and communism. This is in no way to argue some equally abstract Leninist faith that classical proletarian revolution – whatever that is – provides the only possible salvation. On the contrary, without romanticizing revolution in the least, it is to insist that the spontaneity of beneficent revolutionary change cannot be guaranteed and that a lot of work is necessary to cajole unleashed social imaginations in that direction. If it is time to think positive thoughts about the possibilities for genuine social change, an imagination about revolutionary change and how it can be encouraged is surely part of this process. The current collective embarrassment with revolutionary rhetoric derives not so much from some innate impossibility as from the success of the neo-liberal ideologies that are so powerfully challenged and exposed in this book. The spaces for such rhetoric have had the oxygen sucked out of them, but they are not vacuums and never can be. The distribution of political oxygen is also very uneven. In many places and for many people the idea that things can indeed be radically different represents a very real 'space of hope'; they have no choice but to inhabit these spaces while desperately seeking means to reinflate, reimagine and reinvent their own futures.

In a much-quoted passage, art historian John Berger, writing about the time of Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* and Harvey's *Social Justice and the City*, once observed that 'prophesy now involves a geographical rather than historical projection; it is space not time that hides consequences from us.'[14] The idea of radical change has become so abstract as its need has become extreme, but things can and do change suddenly. Seattle helps a lot. The anti-capitalist movement must not only outpace the media's Pac-Man mulching of its identity and promise into comfortable categories of acceptable reform, but tie its global ambition to an imaginative strategy of its own making. The politics of transnational wage rates and organizing strategies, the eradication of sweatshop and child labour, environmental change mandated by democratic choice rather than free-market logic, global organization responsive to social rather than economic logics, ending the criminal redlining of sub-Saharan Africa in the global market, fending off any recrudescence of American protectionism masquerading as labour rights – these and myriad other challenges are intimately expressed via a thick vocabulary of geographic universals and particulars. The unevenness of capitalist development is both an unavoidable historical geographical starting point and yet the target of this political movement.

Seattle helped to open up spaces of hope, and Harvey's genius over the last three decades has been

to insist that the prize before our eyes is a question of geography as much as history. From his work on cities, Marx, postmodern culture and now political alternatives, Harvey more than anyone else in the English-speaking world is responsible for the spatialization of our political imagination. The reconquest of politics as a struggle over space opens up revolutionary possibilities for change that may not be entirely foreseeable, but that we will recognize to the extent that optimism of the intellect comes into its own. Without getting too far ahead of ourselves, perhaps the next focus for this emerging optimism should be the geographies of revolutionary change, past and future.

Notes

Thanks as ever to Cindi Katz for a critical reading of earlier drafts of this piece.

1. Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism*, Allison & Busby, London, 1976, p. 21.
2. David Harvey, *Explanation in Geography*, Edward Arnold, London, 1969.
3. Neil Smith, 'The Lost Geography of the American Century', *Scottish Geographical Journal* 115, 1998, pp. 1–18; Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983, p. 287.
4. 'International Books of the Year', *Times Literary Supplement* 5 December 1997, p. 11.
5. David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*, Edward Arnold, London, 1973; *Limits to Capital*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1982; *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989. See also, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1996.
6. In response to the massive evacuation of Malaysian financial and currency markets by international capital in late 1997, the Malaysian government re-regulated financial transfers in and out of the country. Thenceforth, new financial investments in Malaysia were subject to fairly strict temporal controls limiting how quickly profits and principal could be withdrawn. Malaysia recovered quickly from the 1997 crisis and began a cautious relaxation of the new regulations in 1999.
7. John Cassidy, 'The Return of Marx', *New Yorker*, 20 and 27 October 1997, pp. 248–59.
8. For a review of the scale debates, see Sallie Marston, 'The Social Construction of Scale', *Progress in Human Geography* 24, 2000, pp. 219–42. See also Neil Smith, 'Toward a Theory of Uneven Development: Spatial Scale and the See-saw of Capital', in *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984, pp. 131–54; Neil Smith and Ward Dennis, 'The Restructuring of Geographical Scale', *Economic Geography* 63, 1987, pp. 160–82; Erik Swyngedouw, 'Neither Global nor Local: "Glocalization" and the Politics of Scale', in K. Cox, ed., *Spaces of Globalization*, Guilford, New York, 1997, pp. 137–66.
9. Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, p. 75.
10. See my 'Antinomies of Space and Nature in Henri Lefebvre's "The Production of Space"', *Philosophy and Geography* 2, 1997, pp. 49–69.
11. In 1995, New York physicist Alan Sokal published an article purporting to provide a poststructuralist and postmodernist interpretation of contemporary physics. The article was a hoax aimed at exposing the vacuity of cultural studies. Alan Sokal, 'A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies', *Lingua Franca*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1996, pp. 62–4.
12. Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1975, pp. 327–30, 385–92.
13. Norman Geras, *Marx and Human Nature*, Verso, London, 1983.
14. John Berger, quoted in Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, Verso, London, 1988, p. 22.