

Introduction: Troubling Geographies

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There is something troubling about geographies . . .

Harvey 2000c

Destinations

David Harvey's work can be read in many ways, but whatever else it may be, it is surely both an affirmation and a critique of the power of geographical knowledges. The plural is deliberate. Although Harvey's early writings traced and extended the frontiers of a formal if necessarily fuzzy Geography, he came to realize that geographical knowledges cannot be confined to any one discipline. They are produced in multiple locations, inside and outside the academy, and they shape multiple publics, for good and ill.¹ If 'geography is too important to be left to geographers', as Harvey has repeatedly claimed, he has also insisted that the potency of geographical knowledges does not reside in the accumulation of data in inventories or gazetteers, or even in their selective diffusion through the corridors of power and the circuits of the public sphere. It resides, rather, in the use of ideas – if you prefer (and Harvey does prefer), concepts and theories – that produce a systematic and ordered representation of the world that is sufficiently powerful to persuade others of its objectivity, accuracy and truth. When I describe Harvey's work as an affirmation of the power of geographical knowledges, I do so because he insists that geography matters, that it makes a difference to critical analysis, and because he believes that concepts of space, place

¹ See David Harvey, 'Cartographic identities: geographical knowledges under globalization', in his *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001) pp. 208–33; idem, 'Geographical knowledges/Political powers', in John Morrill (ed.), *The Promotion of Knowledge* (*Proc. British Academy*, 122 (2004)) pp. 87–115.

and landscape unsettle and dislocate mainstream social theory to such a degree that they open up altogether different perspectives on the world. And I describe it as a critique because the development of Harvey's project has distanced him from concepts whose purchase is limited by the calculus of spatial science or whose provenance lies in Continental European philosophy, and because his purpose is to invest the emancipatory potential of other concepts in the materialization of a truly human geography.

This introduction is a rough guide to Harvey's project, written in the first instance for those who may be unfamiliar with the details of his work, and I will argue that his writings in their turn provide a sort of guidebook to the turbulent landscapes of modern capitalism. Not only is there a spatial systematics to his project, a series of itineraries shot through with critical recommendations and evaluations, but there is also something panoramic, selective and authoritative about his view of the world. This is not an unassailable position, however, and the perils of proceeding like this were underscored by one of Harvey's favourite novelists, Honoré de Balzac, when he introduced the *Comédie humaine*. 'The author who cannot make up his mind to face the fire of criticism', he wrote from Paris in 1842, 'should no more think of writing than a traveller should start on his journey counting on a perpetually clear sky.' Fortified by that observation, I propose to map some of Harvey's routes (and roots), and provide some critical signposts to other paths and other destinations that are explored in more detail in the chapters that follow.

Co-ordinates

While it would be a mistake to collapse Harvey's work into a single journey, two key texts frame his project and reveal a remarkably consistent template: *Explanation in Geography* and *The Limits to Capital*. These are usually read as opposing contributions, separated by the transitional essays of *Social Justice and the City* that recorded Harvey's movement from spatial science to historical materialism. This is a perfectly valid interpretation, but for all the differences between them, I think that there are also a number of revealing continuities.²

² For a cogent contextual reading of the transition, see Trevor Barnes, 'Between Deduction and Dialectics: David Harvey on Knowledge', this volume; for further discussion of the continuities that span it, see Eric Sheppard, 'David Harvey and Dialectical Space-Time', this volume.

Explanation in Geography, published in 1969, was written against the background of two revolutions. The first was the 'Quantitative Revolution' that convulsed geographical inquiry in the 1960s. This is a shorthand expression (a misleading one at that) for a concerted movement away from traditional regional geography towards a formal spatial science. The study of world regions as building blocks in a global inventory was criticized for its reduction of geographical inquiry to a mundane exercise in compilation and cartography, and in its place a new geography equipped with properly scientific credentials was to be devoted to the search for generalizations about spatial organization in both nominally 'human' and 'physical' domains. Harvey was no observer standing on the sidelines. He occupied a central place in the experimental reconfiguration of the field, and had made several avant-garde contributions to spatial analysis.³ That spatial science was self-consciously experimental bears emphasis; much of this work was highly speculative, inquisitive, pragmatic, and conducted with little or no awareness of (or even interest in) wider philosophical and methodological issues. If *Explanation in Geography* can be read as an attempt to provide a warrant for those endeavours, however, it also sought to retain the flexibility required by their frontier character. For Harvey insisted on a 'vital' distinction between philosophy and methodology. He claimed not to be concerned in any direct way with philosophical arguments about the 'nature' of geography (though he plainly had views about it) or with the ways in which philosophers of science had established criteria for what he called 'sound explanation'. His focus was on the application of these criteria to geographical inquiry, on the 'logic of explanation', which prompted him to distinguish between 'those aspects of analysis which are a matter of logic and those aspects that are contingent upon philosophical presupposition'.⁴

But it was not possible to uncouple philosophy and methodology as conveniently as this implied. Indeed, Harvey's entire project was based on a central philosophical claim. He rejected the tradition of exceptionalism that

³ See, for example, David Harvey, 'Theoretical concepts and the analysis of land use patterns', *Ann. Ass. Am. Geogr.* 56 (1966) pp. 361–74; idem, 'Geographical processes and point patterns: testing models of diffusion by quadrat sampling', *Trans. Inst. Br. Geogr.* 40 (1966) pp. 81–95; idem, 'Some methodological problems in the use of the Neyman Type A and negative binomial probability distributions in the analysis of spatial series', loc. cit., 43 (1968) pp. 85–95; idem, 'Pattern, process and the scale problem in geographical research', loc. cit., 45 (1968) pp. 71–7.

⁴ David Harvey, *Explanation in Geography* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969) pp. 3–8.

could be traced back to Kant's foundational distinction between different knowledges, and which had received its canonical disciplinary statement in Hartshorne's *The Nature of Geography* in 1939, because he believed that the division had both marooned Geography and History outside the mainstream of scientific progress and also separated them from one another. Unlike the sciences that organized the world into categories on the basis of logical classifications (equivalence, similarity, affinity), and which thus allowed for replication and generalization, Geography and History were supposed to be predicated on physical classifications: that is, on observations of phenomena that occurred together, as singular and unique constellations in either space or time. Against this, Harvey focused on the delineation of a recognizably scientific method, grounded in the philosophy of science in general and positivism in particular, that could underwrite the search for an order (in spatial structure and sequence) beneath the particularities of place. The sense of 'grounding' was crucial: Harvey's project was a foundational one, anchored in bedrock, and he rejected what he called 'extreme' versions of logical positivism precisely because they claimed that knowledge 'could be developed independently of philosophical pre-suppositions'. The approach that he outlined in *Explanation* derived from Braithwaite, Carnap, Hempel, Nagel and other philosophers of (physical) science who had established the deductive-nomological model as what he termed 'the standard model of scientific explanation'.⁵ Again, standardization was essential: for Harvey, like most of his contemporaries, there was only one ('the') scientific method capable of sustaining the production of systematic and generalizable geographical knowledge.

Explanation was about more than the projection of these methods onto the terrain of geographical inquiry. Its conceptual fulcrum was space, which Harvey identified as 'the central concept on which Geography as a discipline relies for its coherence'. But for this coherence to be realized, he argued, a double transformation was necessary: space had to be transformed from the planar categories of Euclidean geometry, and its materializations had to be transformed by process ('the key to temporal explanation'). From the very beginning, therefore, one of Harvey's central concerns was to establish the connection between spatial structure and process. The issue had emerged out of his doctoral research on agricultural change in nineteenth-century Kent, a study in traditional historical geography, but Harvey subsequently

⁵ Ibid., pp. 8, 29–30. This is the only explicit reference to positivism in the whole book but despite Harvey's hostility to these 'extreme' versions of logical positivism, *Explanation* – like most of spatial science more generally – was fully consistent with the protocols of positivism.

reformulated the question in the lexicon of modern location theory. If, as now seemed likely, it was simply impossible to infer generative process from geometric form, then how could a process-based geography be developed? Although he never put it quite like this, how could History and Geography be convened within a plenary, integrated – in a word, unitary – science of terrestrial change? Harvey's principal methodological objective in *Explanation* was to identify modes of spatial analysis that would displace the conventional conception of space as a 'container' (absolute space), and build from but ultimately transcend other geometries of spatial form by setting them in motion. At the time, Harvey took this to be a matter of translation, a means to move between Euclidean (form) and non-Euclidean (process) languages, but the more important point is that processes of geographical transformation were at the very heart of Harvey's project from the outset.⁶

Harvey would later describe Bhaskar's prospectus for a non-positivist social science as a work of 'intimidating difficulty and intensity', but one might say the same of *Explanation*. I was reading Geography at Cambridge when it was published, and even for someone being expertly schooled in spatial science, locational analysis and systems theory it was an unusually demanding text. But it was also unsatisfactory, not least because I was also being taught an historical geography that took Harvey's central question – geographical transformation – with the utmost seriousness, but which also required a close engagement with the empirical, in the field and the archive, that modulated its theoretical dispositions and advanced an analysis of the dynamics of space-economies and landscapes in substantive terms. 'By our theories you shall know us', Harvey had concluded, but I had become drawn to an historical geography that was less about knowing 'us' – forming the disciplinary identity that, to my surprise, still haunted

⁶ 'A study of process is not the prerogative of the historical geographer alone', he had written two years earlier, and yet 'an unfortunate gap has developed between the scholarly studies of the specialist historical geographers . . . and the analytical techniques of human geographers concerned with contemporary distributions': David Harvey, 'Models of the evolution of spatial patterns in human geography', in R. J. Chorley and Peter Haggett (eds.), *Models in Geography* (London: Methuen) pp. 549–608: 550. The emphasis on process explains both Harvey's admiration for and his distance from one of the architects of the modern discipline of Geography, Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859). Harvey clearly admires the systematicity of Humboldt's project, most evident in the multi-volume *Cosmos*, but insists on the need to transcend Humboldt's Kantian view of geographical knowledge 'as mere spatial ordering [to be] kept apart from the narratives of history': David Harvey, 'Cosmopolitanism and the banality of geographical evils', *Public Culture* 12 (2000) pp. 529–64: 554.

Harvey at the very end of *Explanation* – than it was about knowing the world. In fact, he later attributed the limitations of the book to its preoccupation with language, and distanced himself from the formal language systems that structured spatial analysis in favour of ordinary language systems capable of capturing the substance of social practices. You could see the problem in the closing chapters of *Explanation*, where the systems to be modelled remained spectacularly unidentified, so many empty boxes to be tied together, and where their geography had all but disappeared. It had been a long journey down the yellow brick road, and I was left with the uncomfortable feeling that there was nothing behind the wizard's curtain.

As Harvey was soon to remind his readers, however, Marx had warned that there was no royal road to science. *Explanation in Geography* had been written against the background of another revolution of sorts, one that animated the academy but which also filled the streets: the anti-war and civil rights movements in the United States and the events of May 1968 in France, Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Harvey confessed that he had been so preoccupied with methodological issues that he had been more or less detached from these events, and they find no echo in the austere pages of *Explanation*. But soon after its publication, and coinciding with his move from the UK to the United States, Harvey began to explore the ethical and political dimensions of geographical inquiry that had been suspended during his ascetic pilgrimage through the philosophy and methodology of science. His initial forays were recorded in the essays that compose *Social Justice and the City*. This was a much more subversive book than *Explanation* and it had much more of an impact inside and outside the discipline. Harvey gave a lecture based on one of the early essays in the book to an undergraduate conference I attended at Bristol, and the effect was electric. There is always something thrilling about Harvey's performances – I've never seen him read from a prepared text let alone a series of overheads or slides – but this was more than a matter of style: the intellectual apparatus, the political passion and the urban texture were all a long way from the abstracted logics of *Explanation*. Later essays widened the gap, until it must have been difficult for many readers to believe that the two books had been written by the same author. Harvey's denunciation of the trivial pursuits of spatial science (the 'clear disparity between the sophisticated theoretical and methodological framework we are using and our ability to say anything really meaningful about events as they unfold about us') and his exuberant endorsement of the power of historical materialism ('I can find no other way of accomplishing what I set out to do') fused to shock what was one of the very last disciplines in the English-speaking world to take Marx's writings with the seriousness they deserved. And yet, despite Harvey's desire to spark

a 'revolution in geographical thought', he continued to insist on the importance of science (though he now defined it in different terms and understood it as an intrinsically social practice) and reaffirmed the need to provide systematic theorizations of space and spatial transformations (though he now insisted 'there are no philosophical answers to philosophical questions that arise over the nature of space – the answers lie in human practice').⁷

Social Justice was only a bridgehead; Harvey knew he needed to do much more work on Marx. I choose my words with care: the object of his studies, and of the various reading groups and courses in which he was involved, was Marx not Marxism. 'I wanted to see how far I could get', he explained, 'from within the framework laid out in Marx's *Capital*, *Theories of Surplus Value*, the *Grundrisse*, and some of the ancillary writings on political economy.'⁸ It took him the best part of a decade, and the result was *The Limits to Capital*, published in 1982. This emphasized two central dimensions. First, echoing his earlier insistence on systematicity, Harvey argued that Marx's visionary contribution was 'the capacity to see capitalism as an integrated whole', as a dynamic and dialectical totality. Harvey's previous attempts to exorcise the demons of fragmentation through appeals to systems theory (in *Explanation*) and structuralism (in the coda to *Social Justice*) had been as diffuse as they were formalistic, but he now grounded his arguments in a focused and forensic rereading of Marx's critique of political economy. The discipline, rigour and clarity of Harvey's exposition have been noted by many commentators, though, as I will explain later, these qualities are not universally admired!⁹ Second, reinforcing his focus

⁷ David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973; Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) pp. 13, 17, 128. The pathbreaking effect of *Social Justice* was recognized by an appropriately forward-looking conference commemorating the twentieth anniversary of its publication: see Andy Merrifield and Erik Swyngedouw (eds.) *The Urbanization of Injustice* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996).

⁸ David Harvey, 'Retrospect on *The Limits to Capital*', *Antipode* 36 (2004) pp. 544–9: 544; see also Alex Callinicos, 'David Harvey and Marxism', this volume.

⁹ It is a measure of the rigour of Harvey's exegesis that it should have attracted the equally rigorous commentaries published in the 'Symposium on *The Limits to Capital*: Twenty years on', *Antipode* 36 (2004): the essays by George Henderson, 'Value: the many-headed hydra' (pp. 445–460) and Vinay Gidwani, '*The Limits to Capital*: questions of provenance and politics' (pp. 527–543) in particular are models of serious, scrupulous intellectual engagement, and there are (sadly) precious few books in the field that could attract or sustain such consideration. See also Bob Jessop's careful excavation of *Limits* in 'Spatial Fixes, Temporal Fixes and Spatio-Temporal Fixes', this volume.

on spatial transformations, Harvey argued that Marx's analysis of the dynamics of capitalism as a mode of production, in contradistinction to the pinhead formulations of neoclassical economics, was predicated on (that is, assumed and depended on) the production of a differentiated and integrated (urbanized) space-economy.¹⁰ This was a contribution of unsurpassed originality. The spatial problematic remained latent within Marx's own corpus, and none of the (very few) writers who had thus far registered the production of space under capitalism – including most prominently Henri Lefebvre – had integrated its turbulent landscapes within the logics of capital accumulation.¹¹ While Marx prioritized time (in the labour theory of value) and historical transformation (in the creative destruction of successive capitalisms) – these were the limits to *Capital* in Harvey's title – Harvey showed that the volatile production of space was at once the solution (or 'spatial fix') and dissolution of capitalism (hence the limits to capital).

If Harvey had shown how space could be built into the framework of historical materialism, as what Perry Anderson has called 'an ineliminable element' of its deductible structure, this was not the last word on the matter, and Harvey never presented it as such (quite the opposite); in fact, he considers the third-cut theory of crisis to be the least satisfactory part of his argument. I know many geographers who were dissatisfied by the closing chapters of the book too, not least because they had expected a detailed reconstruction of the uneven geographies of capital accumulation and circulation. But two decisions had foreclosed that possibility: Harvey's determination to stay close to Marx's own writings rather than trace the subsequent advances of Marxist political economy or economic geography more generally (there are scattered commentaries on some key contemporary controversies, but these are usually relegated to the footnotes); and Harvey's decision to divest the argument of its complicating 'historical content' and instead present his theorizations as a series of 'empty boxes' (his term). These are both serious limits to *Limits*, to be sure, and yet even

¹⁰ This is not the only difference between neoclassical economics and historical materialism, of course. I remember Harvey being taxed at a conference by a cocksure critic who insisted on the superior analysis afforded by the neoclassical trinity of land, labour and capital. Turning to the board where he had developed a complex circuit diagram in the course of his presentation, Harvey showed that the categories he had worked with were landlords, labourers and capitalists. His rejoinder was unforgettable: 'You are telling us you are happier dealing with things than with people.' The emphasis on social relations (and hence on social change) is of vital importance to Harvey's project.

¹¹ See my discussion of Harvey and Lefebvre in *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) pp. 348–416.

on these reduced terms the scale of the task is such that I sympathize with Harvey when he wryly notes the common tendency ‘to criticize texts for what they leave out rather than appreciate them for what they accomplish’.¹²

In a thoughtful commentary on these questions, Trevor Barnes records how much he admired *Social Justice* for its ‘unfinished quality’ – the sense of Harvey arguing not only with others but with himself – whereas *Limits* seemed to him to be preoccupied by a ‘search for definitiveness’ and a sense of closure.¹³ In this too, *Explanation* echoes in *Limits*. But when I suggest that the connections between the two provide the foundations for Harvey’s subsequent work, I do not mean to imply that the development of his project has been fully formed around them. Science and systematicity, space and transformation have remained its watchwords.¹⁴ But, as I now want to show, Harvey has also used them to illuminate other paths that have opened up new views over new landscapes.

Directions

Two new directions seem most significant to me, one conceptual and the other substantive. Although Harvey has continued to remain close to Marx’s critique of political economy, he has also registered the importance

¹² David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982; London: Verso, 1999); idem, ‘Reinventing Geography’ (interviewer: Perry Anderson), *New Left Review* 4 (2000) pp. 75–97; idem, ‘Retrospect’.

¹³ Trevor Barnes, “‘The background of our lives’: David Harvey’s *The Limits to Capital*”, *Antipode* 36 (2004) pp. 407–413.

¹⁴ The absence of any consideration of Harvey’s work from a collection of essays on social theory and space – edited by two geographers – is bizarre (especially when one considers some of the other subjects of their critical acclaim): see Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (eds.) *Thinking Space* (London: Routledge, 2000). Harvey’s focus on ‘space’ has been unwavering, and its centrality is confirmed by his ‘Space as a Keyword’, this volume. That said, another, looser thematic can be traced through his project: ‘nature’. Although this too is a keyword for both Geography and historico-geographical materialism, Harvey accords it much less systematic discussion. The model of science set out in *Explanation* was derived from a particular reading of the physical sciences, but the question of nature remained submerged in Harvey’s work, breaking the surface only in a clutch of essays on population and ecology (in which Marx sees off Malthus) and in a section of the Paris studies (where Harvey provides a tantalizingly brief account of aesthetic and scientific appropriations of a distinctively urban ‘nature’ in Haussmann’s Paris). It receives its most sustained treatment in his *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996). See Bruce Braun, ‘Towards a New Earth and a New Humanity’, this volume.

of other writings, notably the luminous *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, that were more attentive to the significance of cultural and social relations. I suspect that the vivid prose of the *Eighteenth Brumaire* helped renew Harvey's interest in narrative as a means of conveying the sense that, as Marx famously put it in that pamphlet, 'people make history, but not just as they please nor under conditions of their own choosing', and perhaps it also played a part in his newfound interest in the capacity of the modern novel to capture the urban condition. 'I find myself most deeply impressed', Harvey wrote in *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, by 'those works that function as both literature and social science'.¹⁵ The finest writings to flow from Marx's pen (and Engels's too) have that same extraordinary power to evoke as well as explain. In addition, Harvey has provided a rereading of the account of primary ('primitive') accumulation found in the first volume of *Capital*, where Marx traced the erasure of non-capitalist economic forms, the supercession of petty commodity production and the final emergence of wage-labour as the dominant modality of the capitalist economy. In *Limits*, Harvey had mapped the circuits of expanded reproduction with precision – the dispersed and distributed exploitation of living labour – and, like Marx, had relegated primary accumulation to the formative stages of the transition from European feudalism to capitalism. But Harvey has since recognised the continued salience of primary accumulation, which – precisely because the process is ongoing – he prefers to call 'accumulation by dispossession', and he has shown how its violent predations are insistently inscribed within contemporary globalizations.¹⁶

These developments have done more than advance Harvey's project in a conceptual register, for they have also involved a series of substantive considerations that has considerably widened and deepened the scope of his historico-geographical materialism. The *Eighteenth Brumaire* was the date in the French revolutionary calendar when Bonaparte staged his coup d'état in 1799, and Marx drew an ironic parallel between the original mobilization and its 'farcical' repetition by Bonaparte's upstart nephew, Louis Napoleon, in 1851. The subsequent tensions between imperial spectacle and

¹⁵ David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985) p. xv.

¹⁶ See Nancy Hartsock, 'Globalization and Primitive Accumulation', this volume. Cf. Michael Perelman, 'The secret history of primitive accumulation and classical political economy,' *The Commoner* 2 (2001); Massimo De Angelis, 'Marx and primitive accumulation: the continuous character of capital's 'enclosures', loc. cit.; Werner Bonefeld, 'The permanence of primitive accumulation: commodity fetishism and social constitution', loc. cit. These essays are all available at <http://www.thecommoner.org>.

the spectacle of capital provided the epicentre for Harvey's study of Second Empire Paris, originally published as an extended essay in *Consciousness* and recently reissued as *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. The revised version is studded with additional images, many of them drawn from contemporary photographs and prints, but Harvey's interest in cultural forms is most visible in the mirrors he places between Baudelaire's attempts to capture the fugitive traces of modernity, 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent', and the whirlwind world of Marx's capitalist modernity where 'all that is solid melts into air'. The same analytic is evident in Harvey's critique of *The Condition of Postmodernity*, where the lessons of the *Eighteenth Brumaire* and Second Empire Paris are invoked to draw the contours of modernism and capitalist modernity. But Harvey's primary purpose there is to establish a connection between the volatile cultural formations of postmodernism (in architecture, art, cinema and fiction) and the basal emergence of a new regime of flexible or post-Fordist accumulation. Beginning in the early 1970s, he argued that the logics and disciplines of flexible accumulation had recomposed the circuits of expanded reproduction, and that this was not only coincident with but also causally implicated in the rise of post-modernism as a cultural dominant.¹⁷ There are passages in the book that seem to tremble on the edge of a discussion of primary accumulation, but Harvey was clearly unaware of its contemporary (and contemporaneous) significance. Since then, he has argued with others that 'accumulation by dispossession became increasingly more salient after 1973, in part as compensation for the chronic problems of overaccumulation arising within expanded reproduction'. Harvey's belated awareness of the continuing significance of what Marx had called a 'reserve army of labour' is inseparable from the army of reservists that was called up after 9/11 to serve on the frontlines of American Empire in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere in the world, and the connection he makes between the two armies enriches the critique of the global couplings of neoliberalism and neoconservatism that he provides in *The New Imperialism*.¹⁸

¹⁷ David Harvey, 'Paris, 1850–1870', in *Consciousness* op. cit., pp. 62–220 and revised and reissued as *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003); idem, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989). For a discussion of the trope of 'mirroring' that I use here, see Meaghan Morris, 'The man in the mirror: David Harvey's "Condition" of postmodernity', *Theory, Culture and Society* 9 (1992) pp. 253–279; Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* op. cit., pp. 398–400. But see my cautionary remark on mirroring below, p. 17.

¹⁸ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p. 156.

These developments are of great interest, but they raise two issues of considerable moment. First, in the pursuit of these other paths, how far have the co-ordinates Harvey established in the trajectory from *Explanation to Limits* continued to guide his project? Can his work still be read through the same grid? Second, in extending the conceptual and substantive boundaries of his project, to what degree has Harvey integrated the theoretical with the empirical? What is the connection between these registers? These questions provide the framework for the rest of this chapter.

Ariadne's Threads

Science and systematicity, space and transformation: the four threads that I have suggested guide Harvey through the labyrinth of capitalism. The first two enable him to map its logic and reveal the structures of capital accumulation that persist into our own present. The last two enable him to set its geographies in motion and show how the dynamics of capitalism are embedded in its turbulent spaces. I will consider each in turn.

Harvey's interest in Paris was aroused by the year he spent in the French capital in 1976–7. He had planned to spend his time learning more about the debates that were taking place in French Marxism, but he ended up becoming less and less interested in them and 'more and more intrigued by Paris as a city'. Soon he began to wonder how 'the theoretical apparatus in *The Limits to Capital* [might] play out in tangible situations'. The model for his investigations was Carl Schorske's account of late Habsburg Vienna. Harvey was captivated by what he saw as Schorske's extraordinary ability to convey 'some sense of the totality of what the city was about through a variety of perspectives on material life, on cultural activities, on patterns of thought within the city'. This was precisely his own problem: 'How can some vision of Paris as a whole be preserved while recognizing, as Haussmann himself so clearly did, that the details matter?' In a later essay, incorporated within the extended version of the Paris study, Harvey even describes Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project – the multiple files in which the Marxist critic sought to re-present Paris as the capital of the nineteenth century – as an unfinished attempt to tease out 'persistent threads that bring together the whole and render some vision of the totality possible'. But the priority Harvey accords to seeing Paris as a totality is brought into boldest relief in his celebration of what he calls Balzac's 'synoptic vision'. The novelist's greatest achievement, so Harvey argues, was his ability 'to get beneath the surface appearance, the mad jumble, and the kaleidoscopic shifts' of early nineteenth-century Paris; to 'penetrate the labyrinth' and

'peel away the fetishism' imposed on its inhabitants through the circulation of commodities; and to reveal Paris as 'a product of constellations and clashes of class forces'. For Harvey, Balzac's analytic successfully exposed 'at the core' of the city 'the utter emptiness of bourgeois values' based on the calculus inscribed in fictitious forms of capital. I don't think it fanciful to read this as a wish-image for Harvey's own project; the same language reappears in his own renditions. But these are of course modelled directly on Marx; Harvey's purpose is to show how 'the fiction of the commodity' came to reign supreme in Second Empire Paris, and how Haussmann's grandiose schemes exercised in the name of the Emperor were instrumental in transforming the capital city into the city of capital.¹⁹

The same thematics reappear in Harvey's critique of *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Postmodernism is in many ways the antithesis of Harvey's predilections: it revels in fragmentation, he says, wages war on totality (the phrase is Lyotard's) and thumbs its nose at any metanarrative that might bring it to order. For all its apparent novelty, however, he insists that it is not exempt from 'the basic rules of a capitalist mode of production', and he invokes them to discipline and domesticate its excesses. Postmodernism is supposed to express and even enforce the logics of flexible accumulation, and Harvey recapitulates some of the key arguments from *Limits* to theorize the transition from one regime to another. 'Re-reading [Marx's] account in *Capital*', he says, produces a 'jolt of recognition': 'It is not hard to see how the invariant elements and relations that Marx defined as fundamental to any capitalist mode of production still shine through, and in many instances with an even greater luminosity than before, all the surface froth and evanescence so characteristic of flexible accumulation'. The depth model is constantly in play, in *Condition* and elsewhere, to explain how the 'underlying logic of capitalism' can account for a postmodernism that 'swims in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is'. Against this, but repeating the metaphor in a different register, Harvey maintains:

There are laws of process at work under capitalism capable of generating a seemingly infinite range of outcomes out of the slightest variation in

¹⁹ Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Random House, 1981); Harvey, 'Reinventing Geography' op. cit.; idem, *Paris* op. cit., pp. 17–18, 33, 35–6, 51, 102. The essay on Balzac was written after the main study was completed, but it brings out the organizing architecture of Harvey's investigations with clarity and concision. Harvey's Paris studies are set in the context of his studies of other cities and his general analysis of the urban condition in Sharon Zukin, 'David Harvey on Cities', this volume.

initial conditions or of human activity and imagination. In the same way that the laws of fluid dynamics are invariant in every river in the world, so the laws of capital circulation are consistent from one supermarket to another, from one labour market to another, from one commodity production system to another. (p. 132)

Echoing both *Explanation* and *Limits*, Harvey insists that it is possible to derive 'laws of process' and to theorize the turbulent transformation from one regime of accumulation to another in a systematic manner.²⁰

In *The New Imperialism* Harvey turns to a different 'regime change' – the war in Iraq – but he sees this too as a surface expression of something much deeper. In one of the closing chapters of *Condition* he had insisted on the continuing importance of historical materialism, but in subsequent essays he had raised the bar to claim that its insights into political economy had become steadily more acute. *Limits to Capital* was 'now even more deeply relevant to understanding how a globalizing capitalism is working'.²¹ In *The New Imperialism*, accordingly, he seeks 'to uncover some of the deeper transformations occurring beneath all the surface turbulence and volatility'. He invokes the analysis of the production of a capitalist space-economy and the dynamics of a spatial fix within the circuits of expanded reproduction that he had developed in detail in *Limits*, but he now complements this with a delineation of 'the iron laws within the contingencies of accumulation by dispossession'. His central focus is on the United States: indeed, he writes from within the belly of the beast and, for that matter, from New York, 'the empire state' itself. Within the United States, Harvey argues, the intercut projects of neoliberalism and neoconservatism have consistently attempted to solve what he diagnoses as 'chronic problems of overaccumulation of capital through expanded reproduction' by reactivating, intensifying and introducing radically new means of accumulation by dispossession. The two circuits are not antagonistic but dialectically intertwined; so too are internal politics and external expansion. It is politically more expedient 'to pillage and debase far-away populations' than to attempt domestic reforms, but the imperial projects of neoliberalism produced 'chronic insecurity' within the United States. Harvey argues that the neoconservative response to this predicament has been to repatriate the culture of militarism and violence by strengthening the national security state, activating a nationalist rhetoric of 'homeland', and appealing to a religious fundamentalism to exorcize

²⁰ Harvey, *Condition* op. cit., pp. 44, 179, 187–8, 343.

²¹ See also David Harvey, 'The difference a generation makes', in his *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) pp. 3–18.

demons at home as well as abroad. If 9/11 was a moment of opportunity for neoconservatism, therefore, and the Iraq war the most visible and violent realization of privateering, this was made possible – in all sorts of ways, internal and external – by the ‘creative destruction’ previously wrought by neoliberalism. In Harvey’s analysis, these twin politico-economic projects fold in and out of each other, and privatization and militarism are the two wings of a vulture capitalism fighting to restore class power to the richest strata at home and to plunder markets abroad.²²

In none of these studies does Harvey’s analysis of the systematics of capitalism congeal into a static architecture; it remains a resolutely *historical* geography (or historico-geographical materialism). The interest in space and transformation runs like a red line through all his texts. In the extended Paris essays, for example, it becomes clear that Balzac’s artistic and critical achievement is all the more impressive to Harvey because his novels reveal the machinations of capital in the city through a sort of spatial dynamics. He is particularly appreciative of the ways in which the ‘spatial rigidities’ in the early novels yield to a much more malleable view of space in which the spatiality of Paris is rendered as ‘dialectical, constructed and consequential’. I’ve said the same about Harvey’s own investigations, where the ‘rigidity’ of the opening sections and their stylized reconstructions of the geometry of

²² Harvey, *Imperialism* op. cit., pp. 1, 17, 87–136, 135, 188, 193; idem, ‘Neoliberalism and the restoration of class power’, available at <http://www.marxsite.com/updates.htm>.; idem, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). In *Limits* Harvey had noted the links between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ transformations in periodic attempts to stabilize capitalism, and the intimate relations between colonialism, imperialism and ‘primitive accumulation’ (pp. 436–8), but (like Marx) he placed these sutures in the past rather than the present. Cf. Retort, ‘Blood for oil?’ *London Review of Books* 28, 8 21 April 2005: ‘We are not the first to think Marx too sanguine in this prognosis. In fact, it has turned out that primitive accumulation is an incomplete and recurring process, essential to capitalism’s continuing life. Dispossession is crucial to this, and its forms recur and reconstitute themselves endlessly. Hence the periodic movement of capitalism outwards, to geographies and politics it can plunder almost unopposed. (Or so it hoped, in the case of Iraq.)’ That outward movement is propelled by environmental catastrophe as well as military violence. Vulture capitalism also feeds off earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis, and Naomi Klein’s suggestive sketch of ‘the rise of a predatory form of disaster capitalism’ as a sophisticated form of contemporary colonialism reveals another dismal axis of accumulation by dispossession: ‘The rise of disaster capitalism’, *The Nation*, 2 May 2005. This intersects, at least in outline, with Harvey’s discussions of the production of nature.

the class-divided city gradually yields, often in close proximity to his reflections on Baudelaire and Benjamin, to a fluid sense of the fleeting encounters and multiple spheres that made up the geographies of everyday life in Second Empire Paris. Harvey shows how the 'rationalization' of urban space under the sign of modernity depended on the mobilization of finance capital – on a new prominence for money, credit and speculation – that installed spaces as commodities and, on the other side of the coin, displayed commodities in spaces as the centre of Paris was increasingly given over to the conspicuous commodification of bourgeois social life. There are countless accounts of the reshaping of the capital during the Second Empire, of course, but what distinguishes Harvey's geography of Paris from Colin Jones's *biography* of the same city (for example) is its refusal to reduce space to a stage or setting. Harvey's interlocking thematics are intended to spiral together, as he says himself, 'to set the space in motion as a real historical geography of a living city'. Most other studies display Paris as possessive, Haussmann's Paris, a geometric arena and an abstract space of Reason, in which straight lines are drawn on maps, avenues are blazed through tenements, and a grand plan is inexorably materialized. But Harvey shows Paris to have been an insurgent city not only during the commotions of 1848 and the Commune of 1870–1 but also in the creative destructions and the no less creative accommodations to them that animated the spaces of the city in the intervening years.²³

'Creative destruction' arises out of crises within the circuits of capital accumulation; it marks the sites of rupture between fixity and motion within the tense and turbulent landscape of capital. In *Condition* Harvey continues to work with the concept, and within the first twenty pages Second Empire Paris appears as an epitome of capitalist modernity. But his 'experimental punchline' of the book was the introduction of the supplementary concept of time-space compression. Creative destruction disrupts the sedimentations and stabilities that inhere within the meanings, routines and expectations that usually attach to 'place', he argues, but this experience of dislocation in all its particularity is threaded into more generalized

²³ Harvey, *Paris* op. cit., pp. 41, 105; Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* op. cit., pp. 221–2; Colin Jones, *Paris: Biography of a City* (London: Allen Lane, 2004). Readers who are unpersuaded by Harvey's reading of Balzac's urban geography will find an instructive comparison in the cartographic 'plottings' of Balzac's novels in Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1998) pp. 87–101. Moretti's central claim is that 'specific stories are the product of specific spaces' and, indeed, that 'without a certain kind of space, a certain kind of story is simply impossible (p. 100). But even as Moretti connects stories and spaces he has to separate them, and so renders the spaces of Paris as pre-given to (rather than produced through) their representations.

processes of time-space compression. Harvey explains that the term is intended to signal 'processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves'. He uses the word 'compression', he continues, because the development of capitalism 'has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us'. There is a trace of spatial science in this – of its preoccupation with the 'friction of distance', and with changing lapse rates and distance-decay curves – but only a trace. Harvey has not forgotten his critique of spatial science, and he repeats his rejection of the view 'that there is some universal spatial language independent of social practices'. Instead, he insists that 'spatial practices derive their efficacy in social life only through the structure of social relations within which they come into play'. In contradistinction to the geometric abstractions of spatial science, therefore, time-space compression functions as a sort of conceptual switch; its origins lie in the circuits through which the rotation time of capital is reduced and its sphere of circulation is increased, while its effects are registered in parallel and serial circuits of cultural change. Harvey provides an argumentation-sketch, which is suggestive but plainly not intended to be definitive, to demonstrate that revolutions in the capitalist production of space, from the European Renaissance through the Enlightenment to the long nineteenth century, were wired to revolutions in the representation and calibration of time and space. This narrative effectively prepares the ground for Harvey's central charge against postmodernism. If crises of capital accumulation are articulated (not, I think, merely mirrored) by crises of representation, time-space compression is the crucial process that mediates the double transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation and high modernism to postmodernism. Seen thus, postmodernism is at once the cultural logic and the cultural landscape of late capitalism.²⁴

One of Harvey's most dramatic images of time-space compression was his rendition of 'the shrinking globe', and the stream of commodities and images cascading into the cities of the global North to be cannibalized into the hybrid cultures of postmodernity. But it was a curiously monotonic map. It planed away the variable geographies of time-space compression, and it discounted the contrary possibility of time-space expansion. Yet

²⁴ Harvey, *Condition* op. cit., pp. 222–3; 240; cf. Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* op. cit., pp. 398–9; Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). Harvey also connects postmodernism to neoliberalism in his *Brief History* op. cit.

for many people the world had become much larger. These experiential variations were inflected by class and gender; as the artist Barbara Kruger pointedly observed, 'the world is a small place – until you have to clean it'. They were compounded by racialization. 'The globe shrinks for those who own it', Homi Bhabha noted, but 'for the displaced or the dispossessed, the migrant or the refugee, no distance is more awesome than the few feet across borders or frontiers.'²⁵ Harvey's willingness to recognize the significance of differences other than those produced through capitalism's grid of class relations has become a lightning rod for criticism. Most commentators agree that the multiple, material discriminations that arise from gender, sexuality, racialization, and other cultural and social markings that cannot be reduced to the impositions of capital demand a much more sustained discussion.²⁶ But Harvey's blindness to the geography of these variations derived as much from within his critique of capitalism as from without. It was, I think, his focus on expanded reproduction that directed his gaze inwards, to the global North and its metropolitan conjunctions of flexible accumulation and postmodernism. In *The New Imperialism*, however, the new emphasis on accumulation by dispossession turns Harvey's gaze outwards. The process is not confined to the global South, of course, and the pursuit of American Empire involves securing 'the exaction of tribute from the rest of the world', so it is important not to lose sight of the chains yoking North and South. But Harvey is now sensitive to the localization of some of the 'most vicious and inhumane' incidents of accumulation by dispossession in some of 'the most vulnerable and degraded regions' on the planet.

Harvey diagrams this global sphere as an insurgent space, its places and regions stripped and taken in the most violent of ways, racked by a chronic disjunction between what he identifies, following Giovanni Arrighi, as territorial logics of power that pivot around fixity and capitalist logics of power that require fluidity. There is something unsatisfactory about this polarity, because the twin logics of power need not confound each other: they may on occasion reinforce one another. It is not necessary to accept

²⁵ See Doreen Massey, 'Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place', in Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson and Lisa Tickner (eds.) *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London: Routledge, 1993) pp. 59–69; Cindi Katz, 'On the grounds of globalization: a topography for feminist political engagement', *Signs* 26 (2001) pp. 1213–34; 1224–5; Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) pp. 252–56.

²⁶ Rosalyn Deutsche, 'Boys town', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 9 (1991) pp. 5–30; Melissa Wright, 'Differences that Matter', this volume.

Zygmunt Bauman's characterization of liquid modernity and its 'planetary frontierland' to realize that territorial logics of power can be terrifyingly mobile; and Harvey has himself shown how molecular processes of capital accumulation are shot through with a tension between fixity and motion. Within this force-field, one of the pinions of Harvey's argument is that the contemporary crisis of overaccumulation within the global North is being resolved at the expense of the global South. The spatio-temporal solution is axiomatic: 'Regional crises and highly localized place-based devaluations emerge as the primary means by which capitalism perpetually creates its own "other" in order to feed upon it.' In the present conjuncture, however, and the other pinion of Harvey's argument, the resolution of this structural crisis has produced creative destruction with a vengeance, as the violence of accumulation by dispossession has been aggravated by territorial logics of power turned outwards and visited on those 'others' by the military violence of aggressor states.²⁷

Achilles' Heels

The consistency and clarity of Harvey's project is at once his strength and weakness. The continuities that I have identified do not make Harvey's work predictable. He has repeatedly introduced theoretical and thematic innovations, and his writings have moved in a spiral as he reactivates and revises concepts from earlier studies and puts them to work in later ones. That last verb is significant; Harvey's project is not a mechanical repetition of Marx. Those who think it is should read him carefully rather than skim the references. He sees his work as an endless dialectic between reflection and speculation that is designed to produce new understandings, and when I read Harvey I often feel 'I've never thought of it like that before.' This doesn't mean I always agree with his arguments – disagreement and debate are vital moments in the production of knowledge – but it is a mistake to underestimate his capacity to surprise.²⁸ Similarly, the clarity of Harvey's exposition may make his analysis seem straightforward, but that is just the conceit of hindsight: once a trail has been blazed, it's much easier to follow. There is no doubt that his explanations are astonishingly assured – as Nigel

²⁷ Harvey, *Imperialism* op. cit., pp. 77, 151, 173; cf. Zygmunt Bauman, 'Reconnaissance wars of the planetary frontierland', *Theory, Culture and Society* 19 (2002) pp. 81–90; idem, 'Living and dying on the planetary frontierland', in his *Society Under Siege* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002) pp. 87–117.

²⁸ Cf. Harvey, *Consciousness* op. cit., p. xvi.

Thrift says, 'Harvey knows what he knows'²⁹ – but they are rarely simple. To paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, Harvey has a gift for replacing a complexity you don't understand with a complexity you do. The art of explanation lies not in simplicity but in intelligibility.

None of this exempts Harvey's work from critique and criticism. The most common complaints revolve around his commitment to Marxism and metanarrative; we are supposed to have gone beyond both of them. Put like that, these observations are as uninteresting as they are unproductive. They close down debate by combining a Whiggish promotion of the present with a Kuhnian model of knowledge production: or, in the plainer prose of George W. Bush, 'I think we agree, the past is over.' Well, no. This is yet another reason to disagree with the President, and I much prefer William Faulkner: 'The past is not dead. It is not even past.' I want to restate these objections in radically different terms, therefore, and to consider two sets of questions that touch Marxism and metanarrative but also pirouette more suggestively around the relationship between the theoretical and the empirical. The first concerns the space of Harvey's discussion: whom does he recognize as interlocutors? If all knowledge is situated, as Donna Haraway insists (and Harvey certainly admires her work), and if in consequence we need to enter into conversations and form solidarities with those who occupy other positions, who are Harvey's others? The second concerns the space of Harvey's world: how can he discover so much order within it? If the world doesn't come as clean as you can think it, as A. N. Whitehead almost said (and Harvey holds his work in high regard too), and if in consequence we need to recognize and respect the diversity and variability of life on earth, what worlds are lost in Harvey's explorations?³⁰

Harvey's circle of theoretical reference is tightly drawn, and this invests his project with an unusual purity. This has two sources. First, Harvey's work goes forward on the foundations of a classical Marxism, on a creative rereading of Marx's own writings, and he has shown little interest in postclassical controversies within historical materialism. In failing to consider these contemporary debates, however, he runs the risk of ignoring the predicaments that brought Western Marxism (in particular) into being in the first place. Second, Harvey's suspicion of work outside the perimeters of historical materialism has become steadily more pronounced. In his later writings, for example, he repeatedly invokes Heidegger only to dismiss him. Irredeemably tarnished by his proximity to German fascism, Heidegger's

²⁹ Nigel Thrift, 'David Harvey: A Rock in a Hard Place', this volume.

³⁰ For Harvey on both Haraway and Whitehead, see his *Justice, Nature* op. cit.

contribution is reduced to a series of arch-conservative renditions of 'place' and 'dwelling'. His profound influence on deconstructions of what Timothy Mitchell calls the 'world-as-exhibition', on radical critiques of modernity, on debates over the production of nature: all go unremarked. Much the same is true of Foucault. Harvey turns his fire again and again on Foucault's dismal squib on 'heterotopia' – which I too find deeply problematic and, in places, frankly objectionable – but even if Foucault only interests Harvey for what he has to say about space (which seems a needlessly flattened reading: what of bio-politics?) how is it possible to say so little about *Birth of the Clinic* or *Discipline and Punish*? And how can Harvey constantly reduce the material spaces that recur in so many of Foucault's studies to mere metaphors? These examples could be multiplied many times, from economic geography through feminism to postcolonialism and beyond. I am not of course saying that Harvey ought to have read everything; there are enough essays in our field weighed down by the excess baggage of bibliomania. And I'm not looking for a grand synthesis, which I think neither possible nor desirable. I am simply dismayed by Harvey's marginalization of contributions that speak to his own concerns. You might object that his project is directed towards the construction of historico-geographical materialism, and that this explains the excision of authors outside the traditions of Marxism. This would not account for his lack of interest in debates within Marxism in any case, but like Perry Anderson, I believe that historical materialism is not compromised by a careful acknowledgement of work outside Marxism; it requires it.³¹

Harvey's circle of geographical reference is also circumscribed. Most of his work has been concerned with Europe and North America, and in his interview with Anderson he conceded that this was a 'real limitation': 'For all my geographical interests, [my work] has remained Eurocentric, focused on metropolitan zones. I have not been exposed much to other parts of the world.'³² This is more than an empirical matter, and reducing places outside the global North to exotic suppliers of the empirical, to so many instances

³¹ What Anderson actually wrote was this: 'Maximum awareness and respect for the scholarship of historians outside the boundaries of Marxism is not incompatible with rigorous pursuit of a Marxist historical inquiry; it is a condition of it': Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: Verso, 1971) p. 9. This is a particular version of the more general argument that can be derived from Anderson's accounts of the uneven development of historical materialism: see his *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1976) and *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1983).

³² Harvey, 'Reinventing Geography' op. cit.

and exceptions to be shipped back to the metropolitan *ateliers* in which High Theory is fashioned, only compounds the problem. For it is a profoundly theoretical matter. The issue is by no means confined to Harvey; it bedevils Euro-American social theory at large including, as its qualifier suggests, Western Marxism.³³ And it assumes a particular force in studies of globalization, where J. K. Gibson-Graham has objected to the 'rape script' that represents global capitalism as transcendently powerful and inherently spatializing. This works to reduce non-capitalist forms of life to feminized sites to be mastered by capitalist modernity: passive places carried off in the virile embrace of His-tory, silent victims waiting to be victimized. Now I know that Harvey would be horrified if these characterizations were applied to his work; *The New Imperialism* is an impassioned attack on the global plunder of neoliberalism and neoconservatism. Nevertheless, Vinay Gidwani has argued that Harvey theorizes within the epistemic space of capitalism's universal history, and 'writes back dispersed geographies of life into the expansionist narrative of capital's becoming – as variations in a singular, relentless process of capitalist development'.³⁴ Gidwani was commenting specifically on *Limits*, but I'm not convinced that the accent on accumulation by dispossession in *The New Imperialism* would fundamentally revise this judgement. Harvey's analysis remains at a high level of abstraction, and he pays more attention to political events within the United States than to the multiple ways in which accumulation by dispossession is implemented and resisted elsewhere in the world. The places that he enumerates – Afghanistan, Argentina, Chile, China, India, Iraq and the rest – become so many signs of something else, and while Harvey knows that the world does not exist in order to provide vignettes of our theorizations of it, one still aches for a recognition of the committed journalists to whom he dedicated *Social Justice*, of the novelists and essayists he invokes in his Paris studies, and of the role of critical ethnographies in grounding, worlding and denaturalizing the violence whose contours he maps with such clinical precision.³⁵ In his *Brief History of Neo-Liberalism* Harvey

³³ David Slater, 'On the borders of social theory: learning from other regions,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 10 (1992) pp. 307–27.

³⁴ J. K. Gibson-Graham, 'Querying globalization', in *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) pp. 120–147; Gidwani, 'Questions' op. cit., p. 528.

³⁵ Here I am indebted to the brilliant discussion provided by Gillian Hart, 'Denaturalizing dispossession: critical ethnography in the age of resurgent imperialism', Paper prepared for *Creative Destruction: Area Knowledge and the New Geographies of Empire*, Center for Place, Culture and Politics, City University of New York, April 2004.

does pay closer attention to uneven development and to variations in neo-liberal programmes beyond the United States, but even here his analyses of (for example) China or Mexico remain at an aggregate, macro-level. Although Harvey explicitly acknowledges that the violence of neoliberalism is registered within the integuments of everyday life, the fractured spaces of experience, how such a promissory note is to be redeemed through his own way of working remains unclear.³⁶

To meet these criticisms would require a different way of theorizing, a different way of working the theoretical and the empirical, that would disrupt the plenary ambitions of Harvey's project. These cannot be laid at the door of historical materialism, however, which Terry Eagleton insists 'is not some Philosophy of Life or Secret of the Universe, which feels duty bound to pronounce on everything from how to break your way into a boiled egg to the quickest way to delouse cocker spaniels'. He once described Harvey's encyclopedic propensities as 'comically ambitious'. (This is the same man, it should be said, who proclaimed on the jacket of *The Condition of Post-modernity* that 'those who fashionably scorn the idea of "total" critique had better think again'.)³⁷ And yet Harvey constantly reasserts the scope and systematicity of his project through a restatement of its logic: everything is assigned to its proper place (apart from the eggs and the spaniels). Again, this is not peculiar to him. Major social theory is always architectonic. Its constructions move towards completion, and in their most imperious forms they seek not only to order the partially ordered but also to display the whole world within a self-sufficient grid. It never works out quite like that, but to unlearn these privileges requires an openness to what Cindi Katz calls theory in a minor key: to theorizations that are situated, partial, incomplete, and constantly muddled by what she describes as 'the messy entailments of indeterminacy'.³⁸

This is the crux of the critique of Harvey's project. He used to repeat Pareto's artful remark about Marx's words being like bats: 'you can see in them both birds and mice'. But Harvey's own writings sometimes lose this suppleness. I think at one pole of his dogged rendering of the princi-

³⁶ Harvey, *Brief History* op. cit.

³⁷ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2003) pp. 33–4; idem, 'Spaced out', *London Review of Books*, 24 April 1997.

³⁸ Cindi Katz, 'Messing with "The Project"', this volume; see also her critique of my own work, 'Major/minor: theory, nature, politics', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85 (1995) pp. 164–8. For a critical discussion of Harvey's ontology in a different register, see Marcus Doel, 'Dialectical Materialism: Stranger than Fiction', this volume.

ples of dialectics as a series of numbered (and numbing) propositions, and at the other of his global cartography of economic and political power with its centres, hierarchies and peripheries.³⁹ To be sure, Harvey at his best isn't like this at all; and yet the concern runs throughout thoughtful commentaries on his work. This is about more than the poetics of prose or the mechanics of metanarrative. It is, at its heart, about ontology: about the concatenations of ordering and disordering that make and unmake our world, and about particular places that are not passively caught up in general processes that 'play out' within them. Ultimately it is about geographies that are even more troubling than Harvey allows them to be.

Beginnings

In several recent interviews, Harvey says he has come full circle – from a childhood when much of the map of the world was still coloured red by the British Empire to a late modern world ravaged by the blood-red rise of an American Empire. But he has also brought many of us full circle with him. His work spans more than forty years, and it has traversed the space of more than forty disciplines. It stands as an enduring testament to the power of a geographical imagination: one that is intellectually rigorous, ceaselessly critical, and inspired by a deep concern for the human condition. Harvey may not be an activist, but he is keenly aware of the active power of ideas to shape the world in which we live and die.⁴⁰ This is why he attaches so much importance to teaching – and he has supervised or co-supervised some of the most creative geographers working in our field today – and to writing. Travelling with him is always demanding, and I suspect that Don Mitchell speaks for many of us when he suggests that this arises not only from

³⁹ Harvey, *Justice, Nature*, op. cit.; pp. 48–57; for a critique of the global cartography of *The New Imperialism* that emphasizes the ambiguities and contingencies of power, see John Allen, 'Arm's length imperialism', *Political Geography* 24 (2005) pp. 531–541.

⁴⁰ This may seem surprising, given Harvey's political commitment and passion, but he has repeatedly said that he is not an activist. He has been drawn into struggles in the places where he has lived and worked – he was involved in a number of campaigns over housing in Baltimore, for example, but his (avowedly peripheral and largely academic) involvement in a labour dispute at Cowley (Oxford) was evidently a bruising experience: see *Justice, Nature* op. cit., pp. 19–23. For a full discussion of these and related issues, see Noel Castree, 'The Detour of Critical Theory', this volume.

the man's astonishing intellectual agility but also from the provocation, the open invitation, to go beyond the bounds. Reading Harvey, he says, is an exercise in being convinced and then engaging in the hard task of working out why you shouldn't be so convinced.⁴¹ Moreover, as I've tried to show, the journey is never predictable. Even when Harvey returns to familiar sites – to science and geography, to space and the city, and to capitalism – there is a freshness about his apprehensions that constantly challenges those of us who travel with him to see them differently. This is an open invitation to critical reading, to critical debate – and, above all, to the unfolding of a critical geographical sensibility adequate to a world of such volatility and violence.

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⁴¹ Don Mitchell, pers. comm., 23 April 2005.