

Part I Worlds of Economic Geography

Editors' Introduction: Paradigms Lost

*Trevor J. Barnes, Adam Tickell, Jamie Peck,
and Eric Sheppard*

David Harvey's essay, which begins this section, is called "The difference a generation makes." It would make an apt title for this editorial introduction. The age span that separates us four editors is less than a generation, but the kind of economic geography into which each of us was first socialized as undergraduates was radically different. Sheppard attended one of the iconic centers of quantitative, model-based geographical training of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Bristol University, and imbibed the purity of those methods. Barnes went to University College London during the mid-1970s, by which time political economic change was in the air, resulting in an incongruous educational mix of Markov chain and Marxian value analysis, sometimes within the same lecture. When Peck finished his BA at Manchester during the early 1980s, there was only one approach to economic geography – political economy, solidified by the publication of Doreen Massey's (1984) watershed book, *Spatial Divisions of Labour*, which for Peck made everything written before seem irrelevant. Finally, when Tickell completed his degree in 1987, again at Manchester, political economy was still central, but there was also the first whiff of a social and cultural sensibility, linked to discussions of gender and local culture (later culminating in the locality project; Cooke, 1989). The difference a generation makes in economic geography, then, is at least three different paradigms.¹

That term paradigm comes from the work of the historian and philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn (1962), and is found in his classic, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. There is some debate over what exactly he meant – critics say that there are over twenty separate definitions of paradigm within his slim book – but the gist is clear enough. A paradigm is a way of looking at the world, like Galileo's heliocentric view of the solar system, or David Harvey's class-based (Marxist) view of industrial capitalism. Kuhn was also keen to stress that a paradigm includes an affiliated set of practices that bind practitioners to a common culture and social group. That is, paradigms are not just ethereal abstractions, but are embodied in people, in their relationships and interactions, in institutions, in artifacts, and in a culture's very form of life. This is what made Kuhn's book itself revolutionary: he recognized that academic enquiry, even of the most rarefied form, is never just academic.

For this reason, changing paradigms can be fraught, the stakes and consequence sometimes enormous. Galileo was locked up by the Inquisition for suggesting a change in paradigms from geocentrism to heliocentrism, while Darwin was (and still is) denounced in pulpits, legislatures, and court rooms for favoring an evolutionary paradigm over a creationist one. In economic geography, the consequences of paradigm change have not been quite so dramatic, although it is still likely that some assistant professors and lecturers have been denied tenure or promotion, and certain that some students have done less well in their exams and projects, because of the paradigms that they held. In economic geography there have been some famous paradigm quarrels, such as the mid-1950s Hartshorne–Schaefer debate signaling a move from regional geography to spatial science, or the mid-1970s Berry–Harvey exchange in which the spatial scientist Berry took on Harvey’s Marxism on its home turf of *Antipode*, or yet again the early 1990s Harvey–Massey dispute in which Massey castigated Harvey’s brand of Marxism for omitting the culture of gender. In line with Kuhn’s broader thesis, these various disputes were won or lost partly on rational, intellectual criteria, but also on social and cultural ones. For example, Hartshorne fell to Schaefer not because he lacked good, plausible arguments – Hartshorne wears you down with his inexorable, grinding logic – but because he was fighting against the rising tide of a postwar American culture and society, and the economic geography that emerged from it that valued science and technology, instrumental reasoning, and the young and the new (for more details see Barnes, 2000).

As these examples indicate, and as is clear from our opening story, paradigm change has come thick and fast in economic geography over the past fifty years. It’s not quite “if it’s Tuesday it must be Marxism,” but intellectual change has been the disciplinary name of the game for the past half-century. While this might be viewed as a sign of immaturity, of a juvenile flavor-of-the-month mentality, we believe the opposite. We think it indicates intellectual maturity, and that it is characterized by vibrancy, dynamism, and openness. The contemporary American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty argues that there is always hope as long as the conversation continues. From the pieces we have assembled, it is clear that the conversation in economic geography sparkles, and that hope remains vitally alive.

And to prove the point, the first essay by David Harvey (2000) comes from his book, *Spaces of Hope*. Harvey is the foremost Marxist in Anglo-American geography. In his earlier volume *The Limits to Capital*, Harvey (1982) provided a geographical exegesis of Marx’s three volumes of *Capital*, and the *Grundrisse*, giving economic geographers a body of theory, concepts, and a vocabulary to understand the capitalist space economy. But as Harvey now reflects, the Marxism found in that volume, and in the sometimes-covert seminars and lecture courses he has run on Marx since 1971, is out of fashion, or perhaps even worse, normalized. Marx has become just another dead, white European male we need to know a smattering about in order to pass the exam. For Harvey this is both tragic and comic. Marx’s theories, he argues, have never been more relevant to the present generation than they are right now. They are the spitting image of our times. The present generation, including economic geographers, often shuns Marx, however, or provides only ritualistic acknowledgment. They are concerned with carrying out a different paradigm, cultural analysis, rather than political economy, which for them is “much

more fun than being absorbed in the dour world and crushing realities of capitalist exploitation.” But for Harvey it is on those crushing realities that we must concentrate: it is our political and moral obligation.

Andrew Sayer argues that our obligation as economic geographers is to employ a set of methodological precepts drawn from critical realism. Only by drawing on this paradigm can we ensure that radical (Marxist) theorizing and empirical research of the kind sparked by people like Harvey remains consistent, coherent, and compelling. Originating with the writings of two British philosophers, Roy Bhasker and Rom Harré, during the 1970s, critical realism was introduced into geography by Sayer (1984) in the early 1980s, quickly becoming the unofficial paradigm of economic geography for a decade, especially in the UK.

At its most basic, critical realism is an alternative to positivist science (of the kind that dominated economic geography during the 1960s and 1970s) that sought simple empirical relations of association, taken as equivalent to causes. In contrast, Sayer conceives causation as more complicated. He argues that objects, including social objects, contain within them necessary causal powers and liabilities to make things happen, but which are realized only under specific contingent conditions. To use Sayer’s favorite example, a barrel of gunpowder by virtue of its constituent components contains the necessary causal powers to produce an explosion, but whether it does depends upon the contingent fact of someone throwing in a lighted match. Under critical realism, then, we are led to two different but related forms of enquiry. On the one hand, to an abstract examination of the necessary relations that constitute the causative power of an entity (what is it about the abstract chemistry of the various compounds found in gunpowder that makes the combination so volatile?), and, on the other, to a concrete investigation into the multifarious contingent circumstances under which that power is released (Does gunpowder explode when someone accidentally drops a match? Or when a soldier primes the pan of their musket? Or when a miner lights a fuse?).

What does any of this have to do with the project of radical economic geography? Sayer’s argument is that it has been methodologically slipshod, undermining the politically important analysis it carries out on such important topics as industrial location and uneven development. The problem is that radical economic geographers foist abstract, necessary relations on to the concrete world without recognizing the effects that contingent, mediating relations produce. For example, a necessary relation within Marx’s abstract conception of capitalism is the movement of capital to low-cost, profit-maximizing locations; it is as much a defining feature of an abstract capitalism as is the chemical formula for gunpowder. Some radical geographers have then used this necessary relation to make concrete claims about the world. For example, as in the new international division of labor thesis, the idea that manufacturers in developed countries switch their industrial investment to much cheaper developing countries. The problem, though, as Sayer argues, is that a bevy of contingent, concrete relations interrupt the abstract relation, changing its form and consequence, if not negating it altogether. Note, Sayer is not denying the importance of Harvey’s Marxist agenda focusing on a “dour world” and “crushing realities,” but he is saying that to achieve the best purchase on them requires use of at least an ancillary paradigm: critical realism.

The paradigm favored by Ash Amin, institutionalism, is quite different. Originally formulated by the maverick American economist Thorstein Veblen, at the turn of the twentieth century, institutionalism is a third way lying between, on the one hand, a more politically driven and often deterministic Marxism, and, on the other, a more abstract and formal orthodox economics with its uncritical belief in the beneficence of the market. In contrast, institutionalism insists on the centrality of contingent and concrete social, cultural, and political institutions, and their interaction, in the constitution and maintenance of the economy. The economy is always embedded in a set of complex institutional relations that shape and animate it. Failure to recognize their importance results in a failure to comprehend both the economy (and its geography), and the means to effect propitious change. It is around this last issue that Amin works out the meaning of an institutionalist paradigm in economic geography by focusing on policies designed to benefit less-favored regions within industrialized countries. During the 1990s, those policies were often predicated on neo-liberalism, the belief that a market-based solution is best. Following institutionalism, Amin convincingly shows the inadequacy of such a policy, and of the wider approach of orthodox economics justifying it. The problem is that market-based solutions appear best only because of the theoretical assumption of an asocial, acultural, maximizing individual, *homo economicus*. The effect of such an assumption is to make institutions disappear; they are reduced to the sum of the rational maximizing individuals that compose them. For Amin this is nonsense. Institutions are the very stuff of a real economy, and integral to any solution to economic failure such as found in less-favored regions. The answer is not to ignore institutions, but to nurture tighter, broader, and thicker linkages among them, and by doing so unequivocally rejecting fictions such as *homo economicus* (satirized by Veblen as a “homogenous globule of desire”). Moreover, this is an inherently geographical project. Institutions are not free-floating, waiflike entities, but substantially grounded in particular places. To practice institutionalism is to practice economic geography.

Amin’s article begins to push economic geography away from strict political economy as imagined by Harvey and Sayer, allowing through the role of institutions an expanded role for the social and cultural. Such a shift is even more clearly defined in Thrift and Olds’ essay that follows. Published in 1996, it has become a manifesto within economic geography for Harvey’s dreaded paradigm of “cultural analysis.” Thrift and Olds’ argument is that there have been sea changes both in the way economies operate, and in the way social sciences represent them, and economic geographers must respond to the new agenda. On the one hand, economy and culture have become “incurably intertwined,” which they illustrate using the example of Christmas. Marking the birth of one of the world’s greatest cultural religious figures, Christmas in high-income Western countries is now also fundamentally about money: of shopping until you drop, of crowded retail malls and shopping centers, of sales and bargains, of gifting, re-gifting, and de-gifting. Is Christmas a cultural celebration? Or is Christmas a once-a-year economic bonanza for capitalism? It is both. And such hybridity, as Thrift and Olds illustrate, is now pervasive: culture and economy are so blurred that it is difficult to know where one begins and the other ends. On the other hand, if blurring is the new reality, how should economic geography as a social science deal with it? They argue, first, by becoming more polycentric, that is, by “celebrating a qualitative multiplicity of ‘economic’

times and spaces.” And second, by drawing on the panoply of social scientific theorizing available, and not just the one thin slice found in orthodox economics. In doing so, economic geography become “more inclusive and more able to mix in company.” More generally, Thrift and Olds recommend a loosening up in how economic geographers theorize; that they move away from the straight and narrow paradigms of orthodox economics and Marxism to more inventive, creative, and experimental theoretical forms. This is what Thrift and Old do at the end of their paper when they offer up a series of topological metaphors to conceive economy and culture. This is not Economics 101, but precisely because it’s not, it is so important.

Related arguments about economy and culture, but presented in even starker terms, and expressing perhaps an even more dreaded version of cultural analysis, are continued in Gibson-Graham’s essay which appeared in their now classic book, *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)* (1996). They – Gibson-Graham are two separate authors, Kathy Gibson and Julie Graham – are concerned with metaphor, in this case, metaphors that underpin the very notion of the economy. Metaphors for them are not mere figures of speech, interchangeable, frivolous, and of no consequence. Rather, they produce profound material consequences, determining within the economy, for example, which person does what job, how much they are paid, and whether industries and associated communities are saved or let slip. In particular, they argue that the metaphorical origins of the economy are with the body. But it is not any old body, it is the body of a heterosexual man. In turn, the masculinity of that body shapes the now familiar characteristics of the economy on to which it is transposed: its purity, its sovereignty, its heroicness, and its mastery. These metaphors create, to use Gibson-Graham’s vocabulary, a particular discourse about the economy. Discourse is a difficult term, but the general idea is that rather than language reflecting the world, the world comes to reflect language. Furthermore, language is never neutral, and transparent, but reflects all number of social interests, and relations of power. So, in this case, once people begin to use (male) bodily metaphors to represent the economy, and structure their actions and beliefs accordingly, the economy discursively takes on those characteristics, shaping its material form.

Gibson-Graham, however, want to challenge that discourse, which means challenging the dominant cultural metaphor of the male, heterosexual body that underlies it. Only in this way, they suggest, is progressive political change possible. They do so by trying out new metaphors taken from feminist interpretations of the female body, and contra the male body, conceived as porous, non-hierarchical, and partial. Through these alternative metaphors, they argue, it is possible to imagine other discursive possibilities for the economy, and other material prospects than the one promised by capitalism. This too is a space of hope, but the paradigm from which it is envisioned is quite different from Harvey’s classical Marxist one.

In reading these essays, we would like you to bear in mind the following questions. As economic geography has moved from Marxism to critical regionalism and now to some form of cultural analysis, has there been any progress? Is economic geography a better discipline now than it was, say, twenty or even thirty years ago? If so, how is it better? What are the criteria? But if we can’t claim progress, then how do we interpret the methodological changes represented by the five chapters?

Are we left only with a relativist view that says each approach is as relatively good as any other? But if so, how do we choose among them? Or do we have to choose among them at all? Can we combine different paradigms? Or, again, is it possible to undertake economic geography without using any paradigm at all? What does a paradigm give you that you might need in carrying out economic geography, and what are the grounds for picking one over another?

NOTE

1. Of course, there have been more than just these three. For a fuller discussion see the Introductory essay to this book, and Barnes's (2000) essay which appeared in the *Companion*.

Chapter 1

The Difference a Generation Makes

David Harvey

1 Marx Redux

Every year since 1971 (with the exception of one) I have run either a reading group or a course on Marx's *Capital* (Volume 1). While this may reasonably be taken as the mark of a peculiarly stodgy academic mind, it has allowed me to accumulate a rare time-series of reactions to this particular text. In the early 1970s there was great political enthusiasm for it on the part of at least a radical minority. Participation was understood as a political act. Indeed, the course was set up (in parallel with many others of its sort across American campuses at the time) to try to find a theoretical basis, a way of understanding all of the chaos and political disruption evident in the world (the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the urban uprisings that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King in the United States, the growing opposition to the imperialist war in Vietnam, the massive student movements of 1968 that shook the world from Paris to Mexico City, from Berkeley and Berlin to Bangkok, the Czech "Spring" and its subsequent repression by the Soviets, the "Seven Days' War" in the Middle East, the dramatic events that occurred at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, just to name a few of the signal events that made it seem as if the world as we knew it was falling apart).

In the midst of all this turmoil there was a crying need for some sort of political and intellectual guidance. Given the way in which Marx's works had effectively been proscribed through the long history of McCarthyite repression in the United States, it seemed only right and proper to turn to Marx. He must have had something important to say, we reasoned, otherwise his works would not have been suppressed for so long. This presumption was given credibility by the icy reception to our efforts on many a campus. I disguised the name of the course, often ran it of an evening, and gave "independent study" credit for those who did not want any mention of it on their transcript (I later learned from someone high up in the administration that since the course was taught in the geography program and was called "Reading Capital" it took them nearly a decade to figure out it was Marx's *Capital* that was being taught).

Capital was not an easy text to decipher, at least for the uninitiated (and there were many of us in that condition and only a few old hands could help us on our way, most of them of European extraction where communist parties had long remained active). But for those of us in universities the intellectual difficulty was, at least, a normal challenge.

In these early years many young faculty members participated, as did many graduate students. Some of them have gone on to be famous (and though some have changed their stripes most will generously acknowledge the formative nature of the whole experience). They came from all manner of disciplines (Philosophy, Math Sciences, Political Theory, History of Science, English, Geography, History, Sociology, Economics . . .). In retrospect I realize what an incredible privilege it was to work through this text with people armed with so many different intellectual skills and political perspectives. This was how I learned my Marx, through a process of mutual self-education that obeyed little or no particular disciplinary logic let alone party political line. I soon found myself teaching the text well beyond the confines of the university, in the community (with activists, teachers, unionists). I even got to teach some of it (not very successfully) in the Maryland penitentiary.

Teaching undergraduates was somewhat more fraught. The dominant tone of undergraduate radicalism in those days was anti-intellectual. For them, the academy seemed the center of ideological repressions; book learning of any sort was inherently suspect as a tool of indoctrination and domination. Many undergraduate student activists (and these were, of course, the only ones who would ever think of taking the course) thought it rather unradical to demand that they read let alone understand and write about such a long and tortuous book. Not many of them lasted the course. They paid no mind to Marx's injunction that "there is no royal road to science" nor did they listen to the warning that many readers "always anxious to come to a conclusion, eager to know the connexion between general principles and the immediate questions that have aroused their passions, may be disheartened because they will be unable to move on at once." No amount of "forewarning and forearming those readers who zealously seek the truth" (Marx, 1967 edition, p. 104) seemed to work with this audience. They were carried forward largely on a cresting wave of intuitions and bruised emotions (not, I hasten to add, necessarily a bad thing).

The situation is radically different now. I teach *Capital* as a respectable regular course. I rarely if ever see any faculty members and the graduate student audience has disappeared (except for those who plan to work with me and who take the course as some kind of "rite of passage" before they go on to more important things). Most of the graduate survey courses in other departments now allot Marx a week or two, sandwiched in between, say, Darwin and Weber. Marx gets attention. But in academia, this is devoted either to putting him in his place as, say, a "minor post-Ricardian" or passing him by as an outmoded "structuralist" or "modernist." Marx is, in short, largely written off as the weaver of an impossibly huge master-narrative of history and an advocate of some totally impossible historical transformation that has in any case been proven by events to be just as fallacious politically and practically as it always was theoretically.

Even before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, in the early 1980s, Marx was definitely moving out of academic and political fashion. In the halcyon years of

identity politics and the famous “cultural turn” the Marxian tradition assumed an important negative role. It was ritualistically held up (incorrectly) as a dominant ideology that had to be fought against. Marx and “traditional” Marxism were systematically criticized and denigrated as insufficiently concerned with more important questions of gender, race, sexuality, human desires, religion, ethnicity, colonial dominations, environment, or whatever. Cultural powers and movements were just as important if not more so than those of class, and what was class anyway if not one out of many different and cross-cutting cultural configurations. All of that might have been fair enough (there were plenty of grounds for such criticisms) if it had not also been concluded that Marxism as a mode of thought was inherently antagonistic towards any such alternative formulations and therefore a totally lost cause. In particular, cultural analysis supplanted political economy (the former, in any case, being much more fun than being absorbed in the dour world and crushing realities of capitalist exploitation).

And then came the collapse of the Wall, the last nail in the coffin of any sort of Marxist credibility even if many of a Marxian persuasion had long distanced themselves (some as long ago as the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and still more with the crushing of the Czech Spring in 1968) from actually existing socialism of the Soviet–Chinese sort. To pretend there was anything interesting about Marx after 1989 was to sound more and more like an all-but-extinct dinosaur whimpering its own last rites. Free-market capitalism rode triumphantly across the globe, slaying all such old dinosaurs in its path. “Marx talk” was increasingly confined to what might best be described as an increasingly geriatric “New Left” (I myself passed none too gently into that night known as “senior citizen”). By the early 1990s the intellectual heft of Marxian theory seemed to be terminally in decline.

But some undergraduates still continue to take the *Capital* course. For most of them this is no longer a political act. The fear of communism has largely dissipated. The course has a good reputation. A few students are curious to see what all the fuss with Marxism was about. And a few still have some radical instincts left to which they feel Marx might add an extra insight or two. So, depending on their timetable and their requirements, some undergraduates end up in Marx’s *Capital* rather than in Aristotle’s *Ethics* or Plato’s *Republic*.

This contrast I have drawn between then and now in terms of political and intellectual interest and response to Marx is hardly surprising. Most will recognize the broad outlines of what I have described even if the specific lens I am using exaggerates and distorts here and there.

But there is another tale to be told that makes matters rather more confusing. In the early 1970s it was hard to find the direct relevance of Volume I of *Capital* to the political issues that dominated the day. We needed Lenin to get us from Marx to an understanding of the imperialist war that so unnerved us in Vietnam. We needed a theory of civil society (Gramsci at least) to get us from Marx to civil rights, and a theory of the state (such as Miliband or Poulantzas) to get us to a critique of state repressions and welfare state expenditures manipulated to requirements of capital accumulation. We needed the Frankfurt School to understand questions of legitimacy, technological rationality, the state and bureaucracy, and the environment.

But then consider the historical-geographical conditions. In much of the advanced capitalist world, the trade union movement (often far too reformist for our radical

tastes) was still strong, unemployment was broadly contained, everywhere (except in the United States) nationalization and public ownership was still on the agenda and the welfare state had been built up to a point where it seemed unassailable if flawed. Elsewhere in the world movements were afoot that seemed to threaten the existence of capitalism. Mao was a preeminent revolutionary leader in China while many other charismatic revolutionaries from Che Guevara and Castro in the Latin American context to Cabral and Nyerere in Africa actively held out the possibility of a socialist or communist alternative.

Revolution seemed imminent and we have subsequently learned that it was actively feared among many of the rulers of the time (even going beyond what might be expected from the evident paranoia of someone like Richard Nixon). How that revolution might occur and the kind of society to which it might lead were not topics even remotely touched upon in Marx's *Capital* (though there were plenty of other texts of Marx and the Marxists to which we could turn for enlightenment).

In short, we needed a whole host of mediations to get from Marx's *Capital* to the political issues that concerned us. And it frequently entailed an act of faith in the whole history of the Marxist movement (or in some charismatic figure like Mao or Castro) to believe in the inner connection between Marx's *Capital* and all that we were interested in. This is not to say there was nothing in the text to fascinate and delight – the extraordinary insights that came from consideration of the commodity fetish, the wonderful sense of how class struggle had altered the world from the pristine forms of capital accumulation that Marx described. And once one got used to it, the text provided its own peculiar and beguiling pleasures. But the plain fact was that *Capital* did not have that much direct relevance to daily life. It described capitalism in its raw, unmodified, and most barbaric nineteenth-century state.

The situation today is radically different. The text teems with ideas as to how to explain our current state. There is the fetish of the market that caught out that lover of children Kathy Lee Gifford when she was told that the line of clothing she was selling through Wal-Mart was made either by thirteen-year-olds in Honduras paid a mere pittance or by sweated women workers in New York who had not been paid for weeks. There is also the whole savage history of downsizing (prominently reported on in the *New York Times*), the scandals over child labor in Pakistan in the manufacture of carpets and soccer balls (a scandal that was forced upon FIFA's attention), and Michael Jordan's \$30 million retainer for Nike, set against press accounts of the appalling conditions of Nike workers in Indonesia and Vietnam. The press is full of complaints as to how technological change is destroying employment opportunities, weakening the institutions of organized labor and increasing rather than lightening the intensity and hours of labor (all central themes of Marx's chapter on "Machinery and Modern Industry"). And then there is the whole question of how an "industrial reserve army" of labor has been produced, sustained, and manipulated in the interests of capital accumulation these last decades, including the public admission by Alan Budd, an erstwhile advisor to Margaret Thatcher, that the fight against inflation in the early 1980s was a cover for raising unemployment and reducing the strength of the working class. "What was engineered," he said, "in Marxist terms was a crisis in capitalism which re-created a reserve army

of labour, and has allowed the capitalists to make high profits ever since” (Brooks, 1992).

All of this now makes it all too easy to connect Marx’s text to daily life. Students who stray into the course soon feel the heat of what amounts to a devastating critique of a world of free-market neo-liberalism run riot. For their final paper I give them bundles of cuttings from the *New York Times* (a respectable source, after all) and suggest they use them to answer an imaginary letter from a parent/relative/friend from home that says:

I hear you are taking a course on Marx’s *Das Kapital*. I have never read it myself though I hear it is both interesting and difficult. But thank heavens we have put that nineteenth-century nonsense behind us now. Life was hard and terrible in those days, but we have come to our collective senses and made a world that Marx would surely never recognize . . .

They write illuminating and often devastatingly critical letters in reply. Though they dare not send them, few finish the course without having their views disrupted by the sheer power of a text that connects so trenchantly with conditions around us.

Herein, then, lies a paradox. This text of Marx’s was much sought after and studied in radical circles at a time when it had little direct relationship to daily life. But now, when the text is so pertinent, scarcely anyone cares to consider it.

2 The Work of Postmodernity

The paradox I have described relates to a massive discursive shift that has occurred over the past three decades. There are all kinds of aspects to this shift and it is easy to get lost in a mass of intricacies and complexities. But what is now striking is the dominance of an almost fairy-tale-like belief, held on all sides alike, that once upon a time there was structuralism, modernism, industrialism, Marxism, or what have you and now there is post-structuralism, postmodernism, postindustrialism, post-Marxism, post-colonialism, and so forth. Like all such tales, this one is rarely spoken of in such a crude or simplistic way. To do so would be particularly embarrassing to those who deny in principle the significance of broad-based “metanarratives.” Yet the prevalence of “the post” (and the associated inability to say what it is that we might be “pre”) is a dominant characteristic of contemporary debate. It has also become a serious game in academia to hunt the covert modernists (if you are a dedicated postmodernist) or to hunt the decadent postmodernists (if you happen to be in favor of some sort of modernist revival).

One of the consequences of this prevalent fairy tale (and I call it that to capture its beguiling power) is that it is impossible to discuss Marx or Marxism outside of these dominant terms of debate. For example, one quite common reaction to my recent work, particularly *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, is to express surprise and disbelief at how I seem to merge modernist and postmodernist, structuralist and poststructuralist arguments (see, e.g., Eagleton, 1997). But Marx had not read Saussure or Lévi Strauss and while there are some powerful structuralist readings of Marx (principally by Althusser) the evidence that Marx was a

structuralist or even a modernist *avant la lettre*, as these terms came to be understood in the 1970s, is neither overwhelming nor conclusive. Analyses based on Marx's work collide with the beguiling power of this fairy-tale reading of our recent discursive history. Put bluntly, we do not read Marx these days (no matter whether he is relevant or not) because he is someone whose work lies in a category that we are supposed to be "post." Or if we do read him, it is solely through the lenses provided by what it is we believe we are "post."

Now it is indeed interesting to look at Marx's *oeuvre* through such lenses. He was, of course, an avid critic of classical bourgeois political economy and devoted much of his life to "deconstructing" its dominant principles. He was deeply concerned with language (discourse) and was acutely aware of how discursive shifts (of the sort he examined in depth in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*) carried their own distinctive political freight. He understood in a deep sense the relationship between knowledge and "situatedness" ("positionality") though it was, of course, the "standpoint" of the worker that was the focus of his attention. I could go on and on in this vein, but my point here is not to try to prove that much of what passes for innovative in our recent discursive history is already pre-figured in Marx, but to point to the damage that the fairy-tale reading of the differences between the "then" and the "now" is doing to our abilities to confront the changes occurring around us. Cutting ourselves off from Marx is to cut off our investigative noses to satisfy the superficial face of contemporary intellectual fashion.

Bearing this in mind, let me now focus on two facets of this discursive shift that have occurred since around 1970: those captured through the terms "globalization" and "the body." Both terms were little if at all in evidence as analytical tools in the early 1970s. Both are now powerfully present; they can even be regarded as conceptual dominants. "Globalization," for example, was entirely unknown before the mid-1970s. Innumerable conferences now study the idea. There is a vast literature on the subject, coming at it from all angles. It is a frequent topic of commentary in the media. It is now one of the most hegemonic concepts for understanding the political economy of international capitalism. And its uses extend far beyond the business world to embrace questions of politics, culture, national identity, and the like. So where did this concept come from? Does it describe something essentially new?

"Globalization" seems first to have acquired its prominence as American Express advertised the global reach of its credit card in the mid-1970s. The term then spread like wildfire in the financial and business press, mainly as legitimation for the deregulation of financial markets. It then helped make the diminution in state powers to regulate capital flows seem inevitable and became an extraordinarily powerful political tool in the disempowerment of national and local working-class movements and trade union power (labor discipline and fiscal austerity – often imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – became essential to achieving internal stability and international competitiveness). And by the mid-1980s it helped create a heady atmosphere of entrepreneurial optimism around the theme of the liberation of markets from state control. It became a central concept, in short, associated with the brave new world of globalizing neo-liberalism. It helped make it seem as if we were entering upon a new era (with a touch of teleological inevitability thrown in) and thereby became part of that package of concepts

that distinguished between then and now in terms of political possibilities. The more the left adopted this discourse as a description of the state of the world (even if it was a state to be criticized and rebelled against), the more it circumscribed its own political possibilities. That so many of us took the concept on board so uncritically in the 1980s and 1990s, allowing it to displace the far more politically charged concepts of imperialism and neocolonialism, should give us pause. It made us weak opponents of the politics of globalization particularly as these became more and more central to everything that US foreign policy was trying to achieve. The only politics left was a politics of conserving and in some instances downright conservative resistance.

There is, however, one other angle on much of this that may have equally deep significance. The NASA satellite image entitled "Earth Rise" depicted the earth as a free-floating globe in space. It quickly assumed the status of an icon of a new kind of consciousness. But the geometrical properties of a globe are different from those of a two-dimensional map. It has no natural boundaries save those given by lands and oceans, cloud covers and vegetation patterns, deserts and well-watered regions. Nor does it have any particular center. It is perhaps no accident that the awareness of the artificiality of all those boundaries and centers that had hitherto dominated thinking about the world became much more acute. It became much easier, with this icon of the globe hanging in the background, to write of a "borderless world" (as Miyoshi, 1997, has so persuasively done) and to take a radically decentered approach to culture (with the massive cultural traditions of China, India, South America, and Africa suddenly looking as salient and as geographically dominant across segments of the globe as those of the West). Travel around the world, already much easier, suddenly had no natural stopping point and the continuity of spatial relations suddenly becomes both practically and rhetorically a fundamental fact of life. And it may well be that the focus on the body as the center of all things is itself a response to this decentering of everything else, promoted by the image of the globe (rather than the two-dimensional map) as the locus of human activity and thought.

So what of the body? Here the tale, though analogous, is substantially different. The extraordinary efflorescence of interest in "the body" as a grounding for all sorts of theoretical enquiries over the last two decades has a dual origin. In the first place, the questions raised particularly through what is known as "second-wave feminism" could not be answered without close attention being paid to the "nature–nurture" problem and it was inevitable that the status and understanding of "the body" became central to theoretical debate. Questions of gender, sexuality, the power of symbolic orders, and the significance of psychoanalysis also repositioned the body as both subject and object of discussion and debate. And to the degree that all of this opened up a terrain of enquiry that was well beyond traditional conceptual apparatuses (such as that contained in Marx), so an extensive and original theorizing of the body became essential to progressive and emancipatory politics (this was particularly the case with respect to feminist and queer theory). And there is indeed much that has been both innovative and profoundly progressive within this movement.

The second impulse to return to the body arose out of the movements of post-structuralism in general and deconstruction in particular. The effect of these

movements was to generate a loss of confidence in all previous established categories (such as those proposed by Marx) for understanding the world. And it is in this context that the connexion between decentering and the figure of the globe may have done its undermining work. The effect, however, was to provoke a return to the body as the irreducible basis for understanding. Lowe (1995, p. 14) argues that:

[T]here still remains one referent apart from all the other destabilized referents, whose presence cannot be denied, and that is the body referent, our very own lived body. This body referent is in fact the referent of all referents, in the sense that ultimately all signifieds, values, or meanings refer to the delineation and satisfaction of the needs of the body. Precisely because all other referents are now destabilized, the body referent, our own body, has emerged as a problem.

The convergence of these two broad movements has refocused attention upon the body as the basis for understanding and, in certain circles at least (particularly those animated by writers such as Foucault and Judith Butler), as the privileged site of political resistance and emancipatory politics.

[Let me] comment on the positioning of these two discursive regimes [– “globalization” and “the body” –] in our contemporary constructions. “Globalization” is the most macro of all discourses that we have available to us while that of “the body” is surely the most micro from the standpoint of understanding the workings of society (unless, that is, we succumb to the reductionism of seeing society as merely an expression of DNA codings and genetic evolutions). These two discursive regimes, globalization and the body, operate at opposite ends of the spectrum in the scalar we might use to understand social and political life. But little or no systematic attempt has been made to integrate “body talk” with “globalization talk.” The only strong connections to have emerged in recent years concern individual and human rights (e.g., the work of Amnesty International), and, more specifically, the right of women to control their own bodies and reproductive strategies as a means to approach global population problems (dominant themes in the Cairo Conference on Population in 1994 and the Beijing Women’s Conference of 1996). Environmentalists often try to forge similar connections, linking personal health and consumption practices with global problems of toxic waste generation, ozone depletion, global warming, and the like. These instances illustrate the potency and the power of linking two seemingly disparate discursive regimes.

The line of argument I shall use is broadly based in a relational conception of dialectics embodied in the approach that I have come to call “historical-geographical materialism.” I want, at the outset, to lay out just one fundamental tenet of this approach in order to lay another of the key shibboleths of our time as firmly to rest as I can. And this concerns the tricky question of the relation between “particularity” and “universality” in the construction of knowledge.

I deny that we have a choice between particularity or universality in our mode of thinking and argumentation. Within a relational dialectics one is always internalized and implicated in the other. There is a link between, for example, the particularities of concrete labors occurring in particular places and times (the seamstress in Bangladesh who made my shirt), and the measured value of that labor arrived at through processes of exchange, commodification, monetization, and, of course,

the circulation and accumulation of capital. One conception of labor is concrete and particular and the other is abstract and “universal” (in the sense that it is achieved through specific processes of generalization).

Obviously, there could be no abstract labor at all without a million and one concrete labors occurring throughout the world. But what is then interesting is the way in which the qualities of concrete labor respond and internalize the force of abstract labor as achieved through global trade and interaction. Workers engaging in productive concrete labors suddenly find themselves laid off, downsized, rendered technologically obsolete, forced to adapt to new labor processes and conditions of work, simply because of the force of competition (or, put in the terms proposed here, the concrete labor adjusts to abstract conditions at the same time as the qualities of abstract labor depend upon movements and transitions in concrete labor processes in different places and times).

I have used this example to illustrate a general point. The particularity of the body cannot be understood independently of its embeddedness in socio-ecological processes. If, as many now argue, the body is a social construct, then it cannot be understood outside of the forces that swirl around it and construct it. One of those key determinants is the labor process, and globalization describes how that process is being shaped by political-economic and associated cultural forces in distinctive ways. It then follows that the body cannot be understood, theoretically or empirically, outside of an understanding of globalization. But conversely, boiled down to its simplest determinations, globalization is about the sociospatial relations between billions of individuals. Herein lies the foundational connexion that must be made between two discourses that typically remain segregated, to the detriment of both.

Part of the work of postmodernity as a set of discursive practices over the last two decades has been to fragment and sever connexions. In some instances this proved a wise, important, and useful strategy to try to unpack matters (such as those of sexuality or the relation to nature) that would otherwise have remained hidden. But it is now time to reconnect.

There is a final point that I need to make. One important root of the so-called “cultural turn” in recent thinking lies in the work of Raymond Williams and the study of Gramsci’s writings (both particularly important to the cultural studies movement that began in Birmingham with Stuart Hall as one of its most articulate members). One of the several strange and unanticipated results of this movement has been the transformation of Gramsci’s remark on “pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will” into a virtual law of human nature. I wish in no way to detract from the extraordinary feats of many on the left who have fought a rearguard action against the wave of neo-liberalism that swept across the advanced capitalist world after 1980. This showed optimism of the will at its noble best. But a powerful inhibitor to action was the inability to come up with an alternative to the Thatcherite doctrine that “there is no alternative” (a phrase that will echo as a recurring refrain throughout this book). The inability to find an “optimism of the intellect” with which to work through alternatives has now become one of the most serious barriers to progressive politics.

Gramsci penned those famous words while sick and close to death in an Italian prison cell under conditions that were appalling. I think we owe it to him to recognize the contingent nature of the comment. We are not in prison cells. Why, then,

might we willingly choose a metaphor drawn from incarceration as a guiding light for our own thinking? Did not Gramsci (1978, p. 213) also bitterly complain, before his incarceration, at the pessimism which produced then the same political passivity, intellectual torpor, and skepticism towards the future as it does now in ours? Do we not also owe it to him, out of respect for the kind of fortitude and political passion he exhibited, to transform that phrase in such a way as to seek an optimism of the intellect that, properly coupled with an optimism of the will, might produce a better future? And if I turn towards the end of this book towards the figure of utopia and if I parallel Raymond Williams's title *Resources of Hope* with the title *Spaces of Hope*, then it is because I believe that in this moment in our history we have something of great import to accomplish by exercising an optimism of the intellect in order to open up ways of thinking that have for too long remained foreclosed.

1998 is, it turns out, a fortuitous year to be writing about such matters. It is the thirtieth anniversary (the usual span given to a generation) of that remarkable movement that shook the world from Mexico City to Chicago, Berlin, and Paris. More locally (for me), it is thirty years now since much of central Baltimore burned in the wake of the riots that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King (I moved from Bristol to Baltimore the year after that). If only for these reasons this is, therefore, a good moment to take stock of that generational shift that I began by reflecting upon.

But 1998 is also the 150th anniversary of the publication of that most extraordinary of all documents known as *The Communist Manifesto*. And it happens to be the 50th anniversary of the signing of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* at the United Nations. Connecting these events and reflecting on their general meaning appears a worthwhile way to reflect on our contemporary condition. While Marx was deeply suspicious of all talk about rights (sensing it to be a bourgeois trap), what on earth are workers of the world supposed to unite about unless it is some sense of their fundamental rights as human beings? Connecting the sentiments of the *Manifesto* with those expressed in the *Declaration of Human Rights* provides one way to link discourses about globalization with those of the body. The overall effect, I hope, is to redefine in a more subtle way the terms and spaces of political struggle open to us in these extraordinary times.