ENVISIONING CAPITALISM: GEOGRAPHY AND THE RENEWAL OF MARXIAN POLITICAL-ECONOMY

by

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ABSTRACT

Vision is the art of seeing things invisible.
Jonathan Swift (1711)

... only partial perspective promises objective vision.
Donna Haraway (1991)

Not for the first time, Marxism is considered to be in a state of ‘crisis’. This thesis seeks to ‘underlabour’ on behalf of a particular version of Marxism, a version articulated with force, coherence and great originality for over two decades within human geography: what David Harvey (1985a: xii), in a paradigmatic formulation, has called ‘historical-geographical materialism’. A research programme, rather than the work of any one individual, historical-geographical materialism has in various ways and at various levels creatively extended the classical Marxist canon in a geographical direction. Yet today it is considered increasingly passé by critics on the Left as well as the Right of human geography, reflecting the wider ennui with Marxism outside the discipline. In particular, it is seen as being too ‘modern’ - too foundationalist, totalising and authoritative in its cognitive and normative claims - to contribute effectively to a critical human geography for the 1990s. Against this, this thesis seeks to develop an alternative reading of the core claims of this research programme by offering a novel reinterpretation of Marx's mature political-economy. Rewriting Marx's account of what Postone (1996: 1) calls “the fundamental core of capitalism”, the thesis puts this reinterpretation of the explanatory-diagnostic basis of Marx's critique to work on three major themes of historical-geographical materialism: the production of space, the production of nature and the production of subjectivity. It does so in order to illustrate the explanatory power, thematic reach and theoretical coherence of this reinterpretation, as well as its relevance to the late capitalist world. In closing, the normative or anticipatory-utopian basis of this reinterpreted historical-geographical materialism is considered and its political implications for today thereby scrutinised.
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If it is today considered rather unfashionable to express a continued interest in Marxian political-economy, then I have many people to thank for sustaining and encouraging my critical inquiries. Although we have rather different views on the limits and possibilities of Marxism(s), my greatest vote of thanks must go to Derek Gregory. His influence has, quite simply, been inestimable. In ways that I hope he will recognise, his own thinking and writing has palpably shaped the arguments I develop here. Additionally, the rare freedom he has granted me as a PhD student has allowed me to carve out my own intellectual path and for that I am deeply grateful. If Derek's influence has been crucial, then so too has that of Trevor Barnes. A devotee of political-economy, Trevor's published works, his continuing support - despite his preference for Sraffa over Marx (!) - and his good counsel have all contributed in important ways to the formulation of my ideas. I thank him sincerely. I cannot mention Derek and Trevor without also naming several other individuals in the Department of Geography at UBC. Only now do I realise what a special intellectual environment was to be found in the Department during my time there between 1990 and 1995. For ideas, arguments and social sustenance I want to thank several friends: Dave Demeritt, Steve Rice, Bruce Braun, Dan Clayton, Jock Wills, Ken Reid, Matts Jakob, Elizabeth Bronson, Kate Boyer, Michael Brown, Brett Christophers, Alison Blunt and the boys at the 'vortex'. If the Department sustained me academically and socially, then the University did so financially and I want to take this opportunity to express my enormous gratitude to UBC for providing me with five years of support, three years in the form of Graduate Fellowships and two years in the form of a Killam Pre-Doctoral Fellowship. The length and generosity of this funding still strikes me as remarkable, and I feel extremely privileged to have been the beneficiary of it. Finally, and more recently, I must thank the Department of Geography at the University of Liverpool. Although it has taken a little longer than we both anticipated, the Department has tried to make the completion of this thesis as painless for me as it could.
In this thesis I offer a fundamental reinterpretation of a determinate body of Marxian political-economic theory in geography. I do so in order to reclaim it for a contemporary geographical critique of capitalism. Given the current unpopularity of Marxism, both within and outside geography, this may seem an unlikely, even foolhardy endeavour. It may also appear to be a parochial one in as much as the corpus I consider has rarely penetrated to the heart of debates within the wider field of Marxism. However, since I reject both charges, I want to use these prefatory remarks as an opportunity to explain and situate my reinterpretive efforts, first in relation to Marxism, then in relation to human geography.

"Marxism", as Louis Althusser (1979: 237) correctly observed, "has in its history passed through a long series of crises and transformations". However, if it is to survive as a living intellectual and political force into the twenty first century then its practitioners must respond in particularly creative ways to the present ‘crisis of Marxism’. For the crisis is an especially acute one. I say this for two reasons. First, perhaps more than at any time during this century Marxism has been marginalised by an ebullient Right enjoying an unprecedented ideological hegemony. Second, this defeat by the Right has been exacerbated by Marxism’s current unpopularity on the Left. Regarded as foundationalist, totalising and authoritarian - in short, as too ‘modern’ for these supposedly ‘postmodern’ times - Marxism’s indifference towards and/or effacement of non-class ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’ has been meticulously exposed by postmodern, poststructural and postcolonial critics.

Thus pressed on two sides, contemporary Marxists find themselves in an acute dilemma. On the one hand, the relevance of Marx’s critique of political economy has in
many respects never been greater. The gulf between the Right's ideological obfuscations ('the end of history', the triumph of liberal democracy, the beneficence of the 'invisible hand', the sanctity of possessive individualism and so on) and the reality of spreading poverty and intensified uneven development demands an immanent critique in which an explanatory-diagnostic account of the present conjuncture is conjoined with a sober anticipatory-utopian reading of the possibilities for progressive change. On the other hand, however, if Marxists are to thereby 'reclaim reality' (to borrow Bhaskar's [1989a] felicitous phrase) then they must deploy something like the very same claims to truthfulness, comprehensiveness and certainty that the Right has so effectively used to conceal the violent realities of a capitalist world economy and to prosecute its own counter-revolutionary case. In short, Marxism (as Marx himself realised over a century ago) will simply not be able to win over the hearts and minds of ordinary people if its cognitive claims are not based on good economic and social 'science'. But the problem is that such a strategic reversion to its 'modern' architectonics threatens to reinstall all the closures and exclusions that have exposed Marxism to so much criticism from its erstwhile comrades on the Left.

Symptomatic of the difficulties of fashioning a Marxism supple enough to operate simultaneously on these two fronts is the inadequacy of many of the Marxisms presently preferred as responses to the current 'crisis'. On the one side, a number of what we might (using the simplifying language of their critics) call 'modern' Marxists working in the fields of economic theory and the history and philosophy of economic thought have bravely stuck to their guns and kept the light of classical Marxism burning through the dark days of the 1980s and 90s. Among them, one might count figures such as Chris Arthur, Alex Callinicos, Guglielmo Carchedi, Michael Eldred, Ben Fine, Norman Geras, Lawrence Harris, Ian Hunt, Joseph McCarney, Ernest Mandel, István Mészáros, Fred Moseley, Patrick Murray, Bertell Ollman, Geert Reuten, Derek Sayer, Tom Sekine, Ali Shamsavari, Murray Smith, Tony Smith, Michael Williams and Ellen Meiskins Wood.
This is, of course, a heteroclite list and I do not mean to imply any absolute identity between these authors. But what they do share, for all their differences, is a strong belief in the coherence and continued relevance of Marx's corpus in something like its original or 'classical' form. On the other side, a number of what might be called 'postmodern' Marxists have sought to open up historical materialism in the direction of otherness and difference in order to accommodate the insights of postmodern, poststructural and postcolonial critics. Most notable here has been the 'post-Marxist' work inspired by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and the 'anti-essentialist Marxism' of Resnick and Wolff (1987), both of which present historical materialism as a non-foundationalist, non-essentialist and non-totalistic critique of political-economy. The strengths of each camp are the weaknesses of the other, and the mutual suspicion between 'modern' and 'postmodern' Marxists has been manifested in a series of well known and fractitious debates in which advocates on each side have been vilified by their antagonists. Modern Marxists argue that critique must be grounded in a coherent and systematic theory of political-economy, while postmodern Marxists argue that such an orthodox approach does violence to the overdetermined complexities of any social formation. Conversely, where postmodern Marxists creatively open up the borders and soften the hard edges of Marxism, modern Marxists argue that this undermines the scientific rigour necessary for theory to function effectively as critique.

We seem here to arrive at something of an impasse or grand Either/Or. Either critique must rest on firm epistemological and ontological foundations even though such an absolute grounding is strictly impossible. Or critique must become honest about its partiality and precariousness but thereby relinquish the foundationalism that has allowed it to function so effectively in the past. These are, I think, debilitating alternatives. Indeed, to concede that they exhaust the current available options for any revivified historical materialism arguably amounts to an admission of the intractability of the contemporary crisis of Marxism. For this reason it seems to me vital to develop a 'third way' between what Richard Bernstein (1993: 8) aptly describes as"the Scylla of 'groundless critique' and
the Charybdis of rationally grounded critique that 'rests' on illusory foundations" if Marxism is to move forward creatively into the twenty-first century. If this is possible then the phrase "the crisis of Marxism" can, as Althusser (1979: 237) argued, be given "a completely different sense from collapse and death". Instead we can say: "At last the crisis of Marxism has exploded! At last it is in full view! At last something can be liberated by this crisis and in this crisis".

In the spirit of these stirring words, this work aims to advance the project of finding a 'third way' for Marxism. It seeks to develop a 'both/and' approach in which Marx's political-economic theory can be reappropriated as a coherent and powerful critique of the basic structures of contemporary capitalism without at the same time arrogating to itself exorbitant cognitive pretensions. Or, to put it another way, I try to show that it is possible to reinterpret the core categories of Marx's critique of political economy in the direction of what Bonefeld et al. (1995) call an "open Marxism" without, at the same time, losing any of the vitality, relevance and rigour of Marx's anatomisation of capitalist society. In so doing, I hope to contribute to a Marxism robust enough to cope with the legitimate criticisms of the non-Marxist Left while still being able to offer a systematic and compelling riposte to the political-economic hubris of the Right. If I were asked to give a summary description of the double-headed historical materialism I seek, I would - with deliberate reference to Fredric Jameson (1990) - call it a 'late Marxism': a Marxism neither modern nor postmodern.

In this endavour I am not alone. The arguments presented here have an elective affinity with those currently being developed by scholars of Marx in the fields of political theory (e.g. Makdisi et al.'s [1996] Marxism Beyond Marxism), philosophy (e.g. Bonefeld et al.'s three volume Open Marxism series [1992a, 1992b, 1995]) and literary theory (e.g. Parker's [forthcoming] Re-Marx: Reconstructive Readings in Marxist Theory and Criticism). These titles and others like them are hardly of a piece, but I am happy to note the resonances our efforts share because it signifies (at least to me) that the project to

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reappropriate Marxism in a way that can negotiate the polar readings offered by modern and postmodern Marxists can be accorded at least some measure of viability. Whether my own particular effort of negotiation is a success I must leave for the reader to judge.

If these comments indicate the general intent of what follows it will of course become necessary to move beyond such generalities to specify more exactly the theoretical terrain to be surveyed and reinterpreted. For clearly ‘Marxism’ does not “denote some fixed object with an essence to be captured if one has the necessary metaphysical skills” (McCarney 1990: viii), and the portmanteau terms ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ Marxism, while useful as shorthands, will hardly suffice to delineate the compass of the present work. In place of such gnomic vulgarities, then, let me offer an initial specification of the particular field to be considered.

Today, far from being a tightly and clearly defined theoretical terrain, ‘actually existing Marxism’ - as Jameson (1996) usefully calls it - is a diffuse, variegated and heterogenous body of thought and practice. There is, then, no question of discussing Marxism tout court. Rather, we need to discriminate between multiple marxisms. Any map of these marxisms will be contentious, and one does not have to search hard for quite contrasting interpretations. However, a useful first approximation is offered by Callinicos (1989a: 1) in his recent overview of the field. He distinguishes classical or Hegelian Marxism, Althusserian or structural Marxism, and analytical or rational choice Marxism, noting that historically the latter two have been ranged explicitly against their predecessor.3 Characterised by a more or less faithful adherence to the spirit and intent of Marx’s mature critique of political-economy, classical Marxism is today advocated by that relatively exclusive and beleagured coterie of authors I listed above, whom critics disparage as ‘modern’. By contrast, the structural Marxism inaugurated by Louis Althusser’s remarkable re-reading of Capital, although it enjoyed a career of only shortlived brilliance as a formal theoretical enterprise, has had an enduring and pervasive influence which cannot be underestimated. On the one hand, in complex and often subterranean ways it still informs

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the work of leading contemporary Marxists like Jameson, Perry Anderson and Terry Eagleton and even remains the subject of formal reconstructive efforts and applications by devotees, as in Robert Paul Resch's (1992) ambitious *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory*. On the other hand, because it pushed many of Marx's concepts to the absolute limit, Althusserian Marxism inadvertently contained the seeds of its own creative dissolution. I say 'creative', because its former advocates have been responsible for fashioning the two most ambitious and comprehensive contemporary alternatives to modern Marxism to which I have, of course, already referred: the 'post-Marxism' instigated by Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) and Resnick and Wolff's 'anti-essentialist Marxism', whose fullest exposition is to be found in their *Knowledge and Class* (1987). Finally, analytical or rational choice Marxism - drawing upon the resources of analytical philosophy and the methodologies of mainstream social science rather than what it sees as the double-speak of holistic continental philosophy - has emerged as a distinct attempt to salvage the supposed wreckage of classical Marxism by breaking it down into distinct propositions which are to be scrutinised ruthlessly, systematically and rigorously. In the substantial corpus of Jon Elster, John Roemer, Erik Wright and their co-workers, this analytical Marxism today constitutes a formidable and original presence in contemporary Marxian debates. Perspectivising, Callinicos rightly concedes that, in the face of these two powerful rivals, classical Marxism seems exhausted as a theoretical tradition and he concludes that the renewal of Marxism as an intellectual force seems increasingly dependent on the fortunes of the structural and analytical alternatives and their offshoots.

As I say, this tripartite schema is only a first approximation. As it stands it is both too tidy and insufficiently exhaustive. A fuller delineation of contemporary Marxism would also have to make reference to a series of what Gregory (1994: 102), in an apt neologism, calls "middling Marxisms", which combine historical materialism in novel and often productive ways with non-Marxian theories. These, at the very least, would
include what Anderson (1976) called ‘Western Marxism’ and its legatees - that incohesive and syncretic continental European tradition stretching from Lukács, Korsch and Gramsci, through Critical Theory and French existential Marxism, to the Italian Marxism of Colletti and Della Volpe and beyond⁶ - the myriad Marxist feminisms which now abound, the several extant anti-racist Marxisms (like those of Robert Miles and others), and the equally eclectic Marxisms of Habermas and fellow-travellers in the domain of contemporary social theory.⁷

And yet, if we supplement it in this way, Callinicos’s rough map at least has the virtue of marking clearly the contemporary ‘heartlands’ of Marxist theory as it were, that is, the strongest options available to Marxists in these difficult times. Moreover, for my purposes this map is in at least one respect exemplary: for it indicates that even within these heartlands, never mind outside them, there is a version of historical materialism that is widely regarded as so passé as to be worthy of little further attention: classical Marxism. I say ‘for my purposes’ because it is precisely this version of Marxism which will be the subject of my critical energies in the chapters which follow. It thus follows that I do not concur with this sombre assessment of the theoretical resources it offers us today.

It remains, of course, to say with more precision what I mean by ‘classical Marxism’, and I shall take up this question in due course. But answering that question depends in large part upon adding a further determination to the discussion. And it is here that my double authorial identity becomes vitally important: for if I regard myself in some sense a ‘Marxist’ I also most certainly consider myself a ‘geographer’. Largely initiated by David Harvey’s groundbreaking Social Justice and the City (1973), which was written in the wake of the civil unrest, ecological concern and stagflation of the early 1970s, ‘Marxist geography’ had by the mid-1980s become perhaps the best established constituent part of what we now call a ‘critical human geography’. Today, however, as the Left in human geography has expanded and diversified, it no longer enjoys the pre-eminence it once took almost for granted, and rightly so: for as feminist, anti-racist, queer and green geographers
(among others) have shown, the geographies of power and oppression are hardly exhausted by the gyrations of capitalism. I say 'it' in a strictly improper sense because to talk of 'Marxist geography' as such is almost as question begging as it is to talk of 'Marxism'. So, purposely deferring until later a discussion of the different strands of Marxist geography, let me cut to the chase. For while my object of concern is classical Marxism, it is not, in light of my disciplinary predilections, simply that. More precisely, it is that distinctive strand of Marxist geography which has extended the classical canon to tease out, coherently, consistently and with great originality, its rich but largely hidden geographical insights: what Harvey (1985a: xiv), in a memorable neologism, has called 'historical-geographical materialism'.

The term is often taken to be a synonym for Harvey's work alone, and indeed it is true that Harvey remains its best known practitioner. But I want to resist this rather unthinking equation and reduction. Historical-geographical materialism is not exhausted by Harvey's oeuvre. Accordingly, although it necessarily looms very large in what follows, this thesis is not a recuperation of his work specifically - still less a Harvey hagiography. Instead, I propose that historical-geographical materialism be regarded as a research programme - involving several individuals rather than simply one - within which Harvey is the founding and most important presence. His Limits to Capital (1982), in many ways the charter document of the movement, his subsequent books (including his latest, Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference [1996]) and his dozens of essays, constitute a formidable corpus. But in addition one must also consider the contribution of Neil Smith, whose Uneven Development (1984) was in many respects a complement to The Limits to Capital, and whose subsequent work on nature, scale and gentrification has been important and original. And, more recently, Erik Swyngedouw and Andrew Merrifield have, in different ways and at different levels, sought to bring historical-geographical materialism into the 1990s. This is not, of course, to say that these authors are all of a piece. Nor is it to suggest that their intellectual and political labours are limited to their geographical
commitment to a classical Marxist perspective. But it is to say that their works do form a
corpus, one loosely - but nonetheless identifiably - structured.

If this broader definition can be sustained, then my interest in historical-
geographical materialism will not be too difficult to fathom. Even its detractors recognise
that since its inception over two decades ago, it has been an approach to political-economy
of remarkable theoretical and critical fecundity. It has made important, sometimes
groundbreaking, contributions to our understanding of topics as seemingly different as the
production of space and nature, urban growth, land rent, residential differentiation, urban
politics, the local-global dialectic, urban consciousness, the spatial rhythms of global
finance, the spatio-temporality of economic crises and the meaning and nature of socio-
environmental justice. For this reason it seems to me to be more than worthy of sustained
consideration.

Of course, as I noted above, if one steps outside the disciplinary frame for a
moment it may seem that I risk a certain parochialism in choosing to focus on a body of
work - and of largely theoretical work to boot - specific to human geography. However, I
would dissent from this view because I believe that the work of the authors I consider
-particularly Harvey’s but increasingly Smith’s - has had an impact far beyond the
disciplinary domain. Disciplinary boundaries cannot be wished away, of course, but I think
that after a long period of ‘importing’ Marx into geography, Marxist geographers have
begun to ‘export’ their insights and show to other critical theorists that ‘geography matters’
in Marx and should, therefore, matter to contemporary Marxists too. Indeed, for this reason
I regard historical-geographical materialism not simply an adjunct to classical Marxism
but, more emphatically, a constitutive part of it. And it is for this reason too that I began
these introductory remarks with a consideration of the ‘crisis of Marxism’, not simply of
Marxist geography, as if the latter, in its various forms, is some altogether less important
and separate sphere.
And yet today, perhaps in part because of this, historical-geographical materialism is arguably seen as a degenerating research programme. The frosty reception given to Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) by several feminist critics seemed to mark something of a turning point for this version of Marxist geography within the critical geographical community. Since then, as the various ‘posts-’ have filtered into human geography during the 1990s, its fate has, not surprisingly, largely mirrored that of classical Marxism outside the discipline. For, in short, it too is seen is being too ‘modern’ - too immodest, too grand and too certain in what are, in any case, considered to be its outdated cognitive claims. Accordingly, human geography now has its own fair share of ‘postmodern Marxisms’, be they indebted to Resnick and Wolff (as, for example, in K. J. Gibson-Graham’s work) or to Laclau and Mouffe by way of Hindess and Hirst (as, for example, in Stuart Corbridge’s work). And, as a corollary, Sayer (1995) is right to note that radical political-economic theory in human geography has been attenuated, as a new generation of critical geographers choose to plough other intellectual furrows.

It seems, then, that I have chosen a subject with little in the way of a future. However, it will be my contention that the classical canon which Harvey *et al.* have extended is far from exhausted. In fact, I will argue that it is possible to reveal in Marx’s mature political-economy a problematic as captivating as any construed this century. A problematic which can help re-establish its relevance to the geographical Left; a problematic which can help reanimate historical-geographical materialism as a theoretical and critical enterprise. In other words, then, I am seeking to ‘underlabour’ on behalf of that which I assess: as a ‘Marxist’ on behalf of classical Marxism, as a ‘Marxist geographer’ on behalf of the historical-geographical materialism which has enriched Marx’s original insights so creatively. My hope - to extend my earlier terminology - is to disclose a specifically ‘late Marxist geography’ for our times.

These are ambitious claims, I realise, and I will try to make good on them. They are also claims likely to generate scepticism and hostility in equal measure. Scepticism from
those non-Marxist radicals within geography who think, with some justification it has to be said, that yet another reinterpretation of Marx can yield only diminishing theoretical returns. And hostility from those geographers on behalf of whose work I underlabour: for not only might they find my reading of Marx and their own work tendentious, but they may also find this effort of reinterpretation an unnecessary diversion. To both groups I can only ask that they suspend their disbelief until they have ventured where my arguments take them. My hope is that they find the critical tools I seek to fashion as productive as I do.

* * *

This thesis has its origins in a series of papers published in geographic and non-geographic journals in recent years. I mention this only to emphasise that what follows in not in any sense a simple stringing together and regurgitation of these earlier essays. While clearly indebted to their published forebears, the arguments presented here are substantially new and were, in many respects, only nascent within the journal papers they build upon. Aside from occasional passages which are reproduced more or less verbatim, this is, therefore, an original presentation. I should say also that, while I have tried to write in a lively and accessible manner (though in Part II I confess that things necessarily get a little heavy), a good deal of what follows assumes a basic familiarity with Marx's later works and, of course, an at least basic acquaintance with the work of Harvey et al.

NOTES

1 Of course, the modality of Marxism which, famously, lies on the cusp between what I am here calling 'modern' and 'postmodern' Marxism is that fashioned by Louis Althusser, who Crook (1991: 135) describes as 'the trojan horse of postmodernism' because he inadvertently pushed Marxism too far beyond its modern architectonics. I say more about Althusser in note 2.

2 Jameson's (1990) Late Marxism also seeks to formulate a Marxism which can move beyond some of the old orthodoxies - but it does so in a way quite different from my own. Indeed, Jameson's work takes on a wider significance in relation to the kind of Marxism I argue for in this thesis because, like Perry Anderson,
his project has been to carry forward Louis Althusser's remarkable attempt to forge a Marxism which, as I observe in note 1 above, is neither wholly 'modern' nor wholly 'postmodern'. That Althusser's substantive theses ended in ruins is well-known, but his intent - to de-rigidify Marx's analysis without evacuating its 'scientificity' and explanatory power - remains exemplary and, in spirit at least, informs my own efforts here. More the pity then that most of the most original Marxist and post-Marxist work which has been inspired by Althusser this last twenty years (e.g. Resnick and Wolff 1987; Laclau and Mouffe 1985) has, as I noted on page ix, teetered on the edge of gutting Marxism of its core arguments and analytical substance. An obvious and notable absence here is 'Second International Marxism', which posited 'laws of history', specifically of capitalism, deemed to operate with an iron logic, and which was largely associated with the former Eastern Bloc. Needless to say it represents a tendentious and vulgar rendition of Marx's critical inquiries. Callinicos rightly passes over it in silence since it can scarcely be considered a live option in any of the contemporary debates on Marxism.

Indeed, there has been a remarkable reawakening in Althusser's life and work of late. Among the more notable reassessments are Kaplan and Sprinker (1996) and Elliott (1994), building on the earlier appraisals of Benton (1984) and Elliott (1987).

For some recent critical assessments of analytical Marxism, both in relation to Marx's original work and in its own right, see Carver and Thomas (1995), Hunt (1993), Marcus (1996) and Mayer (1994).

In Anderson's definition Western Marxism includes structural Marxism too, which I have already picked out for separate attention.

In other words, we need a synoptic account of contemporary Marxisms rather in the style for which Perry Anderson has become justly noted. His recent edited collection does this for Western Europe (Anderson 1996), but we await a wider survey of Marxisms today.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In this thesis I use several terms which take on quite specific meanings within the context of the arguments I develop. For this reason, and to avoid confusing readers, I think it useful to define these terms at the outset.

**Modern Marxism:** this is a portmanteau, evaluative category which describes any modality of Marxism which critics consider to be guilty of the sins of cognitive universalism, foundationalism and authoritarianism.

**Postmodern Marxism:** this is also a portmanteau, evaluative category which describes any modality of Marxism which critics consider to have moved beyond, or at least sought to move beyond, universalism, foundationalism and authoritarianism. Two leading contemporary examples are the Marxisms of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Resnick and Wolff (1987). In this thesis postmodern Marxism has a pejorative connotation since I consider the work the category designates to have evacuated, in the name of moving beyond supposed orthodoxies, Marx’s project for a systematic, explanatory political-economy.

**Late Marxism:** this is a general category which describes any modality of Marxism which is neither ‘modern’ nor ‘postmodern’ i.e. a Marxism which seeks to retain the coherence and explanatory power associated with Marx’s original project for a critique of political-economy, yet which simultaneously seeks to address the aporias and rework the theoretical architectonics which makes modern Marxisms so objectionable without descending into the eclectic pluralisms of postmodern Marxisms.
**Marxism:** a portmanteau, descriptive category which, in this thesis, can only be used in a strictly improper sense since it is really a catch-all category for a series of multiple and specific *Marxisms*, in the plural.

**Classical Marxism:** this is a specific and descriptive, rather than evaluative, category. In this thesis it refers to a specific set of works by the later Marx (particularly the *Grundrisse, Capital* and *Theories of Surplus Value*) and to those epigones of Marx, including David Harvey, Neil Smith, Erik Swyngedouw and Andrew Merrified, who draw directly upon these works without seeking to blend, rework or dilute them with ideas drawn from other social and economic theories.

**Althusserian (or structural) Marxism:** this is also a specific and descriptive, rather than evaluative, category. In this thesis it refers to the middle works of Louis Althusser and to the intellectual-political project inaugurated by those works. These works, despite their claims to be revealing the 'true' Marx, nonetheless fashioned a syncretic Marxism blending insights from Marx, Canguilhem, Bachelard and Spinoza (among others). In addition, Althusserian Marxism is indelibly present in a number of the recent attempts to move beyond Marxism, including postmodern Marxisms like those of Laclau and Mouffe *(ibid.)* and Resnick and Wolff *(ibid.)*.

**Analytical (or rational choice Marxism):** this is also a specific and descriptive, rather than evaluative, category. In this thesis it refers to works by authors like Jon Elster, John Roemer and Erik Wright, which blend Marx's arguments with insights and reasoning drawn from analytical philosophy and mainstream social science.

**Western Marxism:** following Anderson (1976), this is a broad category which describes a set of post-classical continental European Marxisms - including Althusser's - which re-
read and re-fashioned Marx using the tools of continental philosophy, social theory and aesthetics. It includes the work of thinkers like Lukács and Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer, Sartre and Althusser and Colletti and Della Volpe.

**Traditional Marxism:** this is an evaluative rather than descriptive category and it refers to no one particular body of Marxian work. Rather, it designates a certain kind of *reading* of a particular body of Marxian work, a reading which is a more specific and concrete articulation of the general category ‘modern Marxism’. Specifically, in this thesis traditional Marxism refers to any modality of Marxism which can be read as *a critique of capitalism from the standpoint of labour* and which instantiates a set of specific ontological and epistemological theses associated with this (detailed in chapter 2).

**Marxist Geography:** a putative singular which describes geographical work underpinned by Marxist concepts. However, strictly speaking it is an improper category since its real referents are a set of different *Marxist geographies* in the plural, of which historical-geographical materialism (see below) is one.

**Historical-Geographical Materialism:** this term was coined by David Harvey (1985a: xii) and is routinely associated with his project to spatialise Marx's political-economy. In this thesis, however, historical-geographical materialism takes on a broader and more specialised meaning. First, it is regarded as *a research programme* rather than the work of any one individual, a programme including Harvey along with Neil Smith, Erik Swyngedouw and Andrew Merrifield. Second, it is regarded as a geographically inflected form of *classical Marxism* insofar as its authors base their ideas upon direct appropriations and reworkings of the later Marx's writings.
THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

What they had regarded as a solution, we consider ... but a problem.
David Harvey (1973: 126, emphasis added)
CHAPTER ONE

ENVISIONING CAPITALISM: MARXISM, GEOGRAPHY AND THE META-THEORETICAL IMPERATIVE

... we need be as suspicious of sheer novelty as we must be of leaden orthodoxy.
Gregor McLennan (1989: 6)

I. Introduction

These are difficult times to be a Marxist in geography. Within a decade of its inception in the early 1970s, Marxist geography had established itself as perhaps the most significant critical approach within the discipline. It subjected topics as important and diverse as uneven development, urban growth, the geographical dynamics of manufacturing change, resource over-exploitation, Third World under-development, urban politics and social segregation to new and powerful interpretations. At the same time, it rejected the empiricist and positivist mind-set of mainstream human geography to show that geographical research is necessarily both explanatory and critical, rather than simply descriptive and value-free. As such, while not quite initiating a paradigm shift within the discipline, Marxist geography certainly legitimised the now common-place notion of a 'critical human geography'. This could be seen particularly clearly in the field of economic geography, once the preserve of neo-classical location theory. By the mid-1980s, Marxist and Marxisant authors such as Michael Dear, Costas Hadjimichalis, David Harvey, Doreen Massey, Richard Meegan, Richard Peet, Andrew Sayer, Allen Scott, Neil Smith, Ed Soja, Michael Storper, Richard Walker and Michael Webber had each in various ways articulated influential anatomisations of the capitalist space economy, ensuring that economic geography became less about 'economics' and more about 'economy' as a specific domain of social and spatial relations.

A decade on, however, Marxism is no longer at the cutting edge of critical research in the discipline. For, of course, it did not take long to realise that the geographies of power
and inequality extended far beyond those generated by capital. For this reason, the late 1980s saw the rapid rise to prominence of several new critical geographies, notably those inspired by feminism and those concerned with 'race' and ethnicity. More recently, these approaches have been enriched and complicated by their engagements with post-modern, post-structural and post-colonial theories, which now enjoy considerable influence on the geographical Left.

Together, these new critical geographies today co-exist with and supplement a no longer pre-eminent Marxist geography. But they go also much further than this: for they have been articulated in large part as a critique of their predecessor, a critique which has gathered pace and momentum throughout the 1990s. This has several dimensions, but if there is one charge which has become familiar through the sheer persistency with which it has been levelled, it is that Marxism is guilty of being a 'modern meta-theory': of being too essentialist, totalising and immodest in its cognitive claims and its normative imperatives. Deriving in part from Lyotard's (1984) assault on Enlightenment 'grand récits', this criticism today stands for much of what is taken to be wrong with Marxist geography by its erstwhile allies on the Left as they seek to escape foundationism in ontology, imperious rectitude in epistemology and a 'terroristic' politics in which non-class forms of otherness and difference are rudely shunted aside. The results of this critical assault have been two-fold. On the one hand, it has decisively shifted the centre of critical research away from traditional Marxian concerns towards a preoccupation with other social identities and relations. On the other hand, where Marxism is still drawn upon, it is almost invariably within 'post-Marxist' lexicons which seek to make it more flexible, open-ended and sensitive.

These developments have, I think, been important and salutary. Because of them the geographical Left is today more ecumenical and vibrant than ever before, and new critical geographies - most recently gay and lesbian geographies - yearly enrich it. And yet, at the same time, I think something vital may have been lost here. I mean this in two
senses. Theoretically, the critique of Marxist geography is now so entrenched that we arguably risk relinquishing cognitive tools which may still, when appropriately reinterpreted, be of vital service to the contemporary geographical Left. As importantly, the broadening of the critical geographic community has been coincident with a declining thematic interest in radical political-economic analyses of what Sayer (1995: 1) calls the 'formal economy'. Accordingly, one looks in vain today for work with the ambition and imagination of - to take two excellent and well-known examples - Harvey's (1982) *The Limits to Capital* or Massey's (1984) *Spatial Divisions of Labour*.

This is both regrettable and ironic. I say regrettable, because the turn away from Marxism comes at a time when the Right is arguably enjoying an unprecedented economic and political hegemony in business and government worldwide. And I say ironic, because with the collapse of communism and the continued integration of less developed countries within an international political-economy, we can for the first time proclaim with some confidence that we now live in what Marx called a 'world market'. The geographical consequences of this have been profound. The last few years have been marked by uneven and dynamic patternings of capital investment and disinvestment resulting in the formation of a new and highly volatile mosaic of industrial activity at the regional, national and international scales. Just as new spaces of accumulation have arisen virtually overnight, so previously prosperous urban and regional production complexes have collapsed with equal rapidity, leaving a legacy of human and environmental devastation and suffering. At its most extreme, this patterning of uneven development has entailed the boycotting of certain regions altogether, most notably sub-Saharan Africa where, as Smith (1990: 165) puts it, "the holy texts of progress have wrought nothing less than a swathe of satanic geographies". Living at the end of the twentieth century, Marx and Engels' image of solidity melting into air has perhaps never seemed more appropriate.

And yet, if one is to believe the now commonplace mantras issuing from business interests and mainstream politicians, the economy is no more than a collection of monadic
individuals and communities, each sovereignly and equally responsible for their own destiny. This rhetoric, which has its origins in a resurgent neo-classical economics in many universities and government think-tanks, sits well with the neo-conservative climate of the times. But missing here are questions of class and social relations; and missing too are questions of power and inequality. In short, there is no sense here of economy as at once 'social economy' - that is, a whole "way of life, founded in production" (Peet and Thrift 1989: 3) - and 'political-economy' - that is, a way of life founded on the production and uneven distribution of an economic surplus. For this reason, it seems to me absolutely vital to 'reclaim the reality' of the space-economy in the interests of progressive change.

Put differently, I would argue that we (still) need to pursue a contemporary project of envisioning capitalism: that is, a project of making critically visible the political-economic relations we collectively constitute, are embedded in and subject to on an increasingly worldwide scale. Without such a critical project we risk allowing the Right's 'market utopians' (as Maurice Glasman [1996] calls them) to obscure the violent realities of fin-de-millenium political-economic life behind the visage of a faery-tale world of happy producers and satisfied consumers.

However, any such project immediately faces a dilemma. On the one hand, there exists a body of theory upon which we can draw which seeks to envision the space economy in exactly the way I am arguing for: Marxian political-economy. On the other hand, though, the critique of Marxism elaborated in geography these last few years means that we cannot simply 'return' to this corpus in a straightforward act of recuperation. This may seem immediately to point us in the direction of the 'postmodern' Marxist geographies to which I have referred for theoretical aid and assistance. However, I have two difficulties with such a rush to the 'post'. First, as I will explain shortly, while I fully sympathise with the intent of these attempts to move beyond perceived Marxist orthodoxies, I am not convinced they always offer a systematic and coherent alternative account of capitalist economic relations. It is if the critique of Marxism per se is more important than
developing an alternative account of capitalism. Second, while many of the criticisms levelled against Marxist geography on the geographical Left are surely on the mark, it is my belief that the critics have not always correctly identified the subject of their censure. That is, their critique of that which they seek to supercede - Marxist geography - has not always been as precise and discriminating as I think it should rightly be. As a result, they run the risk of dismissing Marxism before all the evidence is in.

In light of all this, it is my intention in this thesis to reclaim a specific body of Marxist geographical work for a contemporary project of envisioning capitalism. This cannot, as I have indicated, be in any sense a simple reclamation, that is to say, a stubborn restatement of already established Marxian geographical 'truths'. But nor, as I have also indicated, do I think it necessary or necessarily productive to take a detour through the various post-'isms' in order to read Marxism anew. Instead, I think it is possible to find a 'third way' for Marxist geography. By this I mean one which can address and move beyond some of the very real limitations identified by the critics, which can thereby remain theoretically open, modest and reflexive, but which can also retain the coherence and explanatory power necessary for Marxian theory to function effectively as a critique of the capitalist space economy. If such a 'both/and' geographical Marxism can be located then it holds out the promise of re-engaging Marxism in geography with the discipline's wider critical community and of uniting both against the free market orthodoxies that obscure the satanic geographies endemic to capitalism.

These are bold and ambitious aims and assertions, and they indicate a number of tasks to be undertaken simultaneously. They implicate me in working on behalf of Marxian political-economy in geography and yet in some respects against it; in dissenting from some of the plenary dismissals of Marxism by the wider geographical Left while concurring with its imperative to take complexity, otherness and difference seriously; and, in all cases, in working against neo-conservative representations which reduce economic life to a bloodless flow of goods and services to be measured by supply and demand.
curves. This does not, I think, make me a theoretical schizophrenic. But it does require me to show that all these roles can be occupied in a coherent and consistent manner, and I hope to do that in some considerable detail in the chapters which follow.

If these comments indicate my basic purpose, they only apparently identify the exact body of work to be returned to and reclaimed. I say this because - although the critics have not always made this explicit - 'Marxist geography' is not a singular entity, but instead a heterogenous set of overlapping discourses which put Marx's political-economy to work in different ways (Castree 1994). This is a extremely important point, because any proper consideration - sympathetic or critical - of Marxist geographical work cannot proceed on the basis of such abstractions (Watts 1988). Instead, it must be based upon a careful specification of the theoretical terrain(s) to be surveyed. There are today several extant Marxist geographies rather than simply one, which vary according to their interpretation of Marx, their explanatory reach and their influence on the wider geographical (and non-geographical) community. With this in mind, the focus of my reclamatory energies in the following pages is a modality of Marxist geography which I am not alone in regarding as distinctive, innovative and theoretically powerful: what David Harvey (1985a: xii), its chief advocate and practitioner, has famously called 'historical-geographical materialism'.

It is an indication of the misunderstandings here that this term is routinely associated with Harvey's work alone, or else is taken to be a synonym for 'Marxist geography' tout court. However, I think it is more accurate and productive to view historical-geographical materialism as a research programme, consisting of the work of several individuals - notably Neil Smith, Erik Swyngedouw and Andrew Merrifield - of which Harvey is but one. A basic, but accurate, description is that it is a research programme distinguished by an attempt to creatively extend Marx's original political-economic analyses in a geographical direction. In other words, it is not a Marxism read geographically through the texts of any of Marx's post-classical reinterpreters. It is, of
course, difficult, if not impossible, to draw any paradigmatic boundaries in these situations. To those names I have mentioned there are others I could add (for instance, Dick Walker and Richard Peet) and there are key individuals, notably Doreen Massey, whose work I do not consider in this thesis. But here the Lakatosian notion of a research programme is useful, because it suggests a field of scholarship at once internally diverse and fuzzy on the margins, yet at some level possessed of a determinate core. It will be my suggestion that the efforts of the few authors I have named possess a structured coherence that legitimately allows one to label them a research programme in just this sense.

Seen thus (and I will, of course, need to fill out this bare bones definition), it is a research programme of uncommon breadth and ambition which has made a very significant contribution to our understanding of capitalism's various geographies. In the work of David Harvey and Neil Smith, and more recently that of figures like Swyngedouw and Merrifield, historical-geographical materialism has addressed itself to such vital questions as the role of space in capital accumulation, the dynamics of nature's production, the necessity for capital to urbanise, the space-place dialectic, the nature of land rent, the spatio-temporality of economic crises and the meaning of social and environmental justice, to name but a few. Harvey, of course, has been the most significant presence here. His remarkable *The Limits to Capital* (1982), in many ways the charter document of the movement, offered no less than a wholesale, spatialised reconstruction of Marx's critique of political-economy, and has been succeeded by several important books and essays. But Neil Smith's ambitious *Uneven Development* (1984), and his subsequent work on the social production of nature, the production scale, and on rent and gentrification, the work of Swyngedouw on money, on industrial restructuring, on space as a force of production, and on the political-ecology of water, and that of Merrifield on place have all been very important and influential too. In short, then, in its distinctive adherence to and extension of the classical Marxist texts, historical-geographical materialism has established for itself a particular and important place within the wider Marxist geography movement these last
two decades. And in so doing, it has powerfully illuminated previously hidden geographies of capital and class.

If this counts as one reason why I choose to focus on it here, another is the wider influence it has exerted, firstly within geography, and secondly outside the discipline. Whether its specificity is recognised or not, it has arguably been the most influential of all existing Marxist geographies on the wider geographical community. Harvey's work, in particular, has exerted an enormous influence in urban and economic geography, and, whether in appreciation (e.g. Gregory 1991) or sharp criticism (e.g. Massey 1991), has been recognised as an corpus of signal importance within contemporary critical human geography. But in recent years, the insights of Harvey et al. have also begun to be registered outside geography too. In his history of Marxist geography and Western critical theory, Soja (1989: 56) has suggested a two-stage, two-way relation between the two fields. Where geographers imported Marxism into their discipline during the 1970s and 80s, they have since, he argues, reversed this parasitic relation in a "provocative inversion" wherein Marxist geographers are now showing other Marxists that 'geography matters' in any political-economic analysis. While I am not so sanguine as Soja, I think he does have a point, and it is pleasing to see how many other critical theorists today take a serious interest in Marxist geographical work by Harvey, Smith and others.

And yet, this double importance notwithstanding, historical-geographical materialism is generally seen as a research programme which is now in decline. As critics have assimilated its failings to those of a generalised 'Marxism' and 'Marxist geography', its influence has waned and interest in it diminished. To my mind, Harvey's recent apologia - *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996) - has exacerbated rather than ameliorated this state of affairs. His most ambitious book by far, in it he tries to defend historical-geographical materialism from its detractors by showing how it can, seemingly, extend to explaining most of the major concerns of contemporary critical theorists - including those of social difference, environmental abuse and socio-
environmental degradation. This is not the place to review the book in any detail (see Castree 1997c, 1998a; Clark 1998; Eagleton 1997), but it seems to me that Harvey has here squandered the opportunity to engage his Marxism in an exciting and progressive way with his critics. Like him, I too believe that the theoretical resources of historical-geographical materialism are far from exhausted; but unlike him, I think a substantial effort of immanent critique and reinterpretation of its most central concepts is required to renew this body of thought in a productive fashion.

In the remainder of this chapter I want to expand on these introductory comments in a step by step fashion in order to lay the groundwork for the chapters which follow. This will involve me in a qualified defense of political-economy which is both meta-theoretical and systematic, a further consideration of the importance of 'envisioning capitalism', a further specification of the field to be critically reappraised and a discussion of the stakes involved in 'reading theory' and in 'underlabouring'. But as a way into these important issues I begin by assessing the accuracy and effects of the prevailing criticisms of Marxism in human geography.

II. The new orthodoxy?

Genuine refutation must penetrate the power of the opponent and meet him (sic) on the ground of his strength; the case is not won by attacking him somewhere else and defeating him where he is not.

Theodore Adorno (1982: 5)

As I noted above, the recent blossoming of new critical geographies has been achieved in large part through a critique of the Marxist geography which preceeded them. This has several dimensions, but the most serious and persistent charge is that Marxism succumbs to 'meta-theoretical' impulses. This has three aspects which are seen to be particularly serious and intrusive:

(a) foundationalism: foundationalism designates discourses which appeal to archai or irreducible first principles of social life which can ground and explain all others. In its
moderate form foundationalism entails prioritising certain generative processes within a social formation for special attention; in its more extreme form it entails what Resnick and Wolff (1987: 2) call 'essentialism', that is the reduction of social life to all-important 'essential processes'. Betraying the Enlightenment origins of the theory upon which it builds, Marxist geography has been seen as particularly susceptible to both forms of foundationalism. Thus Julie Graham (1990), in her essay on 'Theory and essentialism in Marxist geography', has argued that Marxist geography erroneously posits 'production' or the 'economy' as ultimately determinant, be it in the first instance or the last. Likewise, drawing on Laclau and Mouffe, Stuart Corbridge (1989) has argued forcefully for a 'post-Marxist geography' which can put capital and class in their proper place. And, in a not dissimilar contribution, Trevor Barnes (1989a) has turned to Rorty's critique of the search for guarantees for knowledge in order to upset Marxist geography's essentialisation of the socio-spatial sphere. The suggestion, then, in each of these cases, is that Marxist geography urgently needs to shift into a 'post-foundationalist' register where production and economy are no longer deemed to be ontologically pre-eminent but merely one of several equally important social spheres.

(b) universalism: if Marxist geography has been accused of foundationalism, then a corollary complaint is that it has sought to apply its foundational insights to all times and all places. This universalism is not secured simply by an act of theoretical imposition, but by a presumption that "behind all our seemingly ephemeral and evanescent experiences ... [is] a hidden order" awaiting discovery (Barnes 1996: 7). In this sense Marxism is regarded as a 'totalising' theory, one in which, to use Habermas's (1991a: 332) felicitous words, "the transcendent moment of universality bursts every provinciality asunder". Accordingly, Marxist geography has been reprimanded for claiming to be the "only perspective" (Gould 1988), for claiming to take "the view from nowhere" (Deutsche 1991), and for running roughshod over the complexities which differentiate social formations (Ley 1989). In part,
this cognitive universalisation is seen as being achieved through theoretical abstraction, the generality of theory refusing to engage with and be complicated by the messy particularities of concrete conjuncture. But more pointedly, several critics have argued that universalisation is in fact implicitly masculinist and Eurocentric, deriving from an Enlightenment tradition which depended upon patriarchal authority and Western political-economic supremacy (Gregory 1991; Massey 1991; Rose 1989). It has thus become axiomatic within critical geography to argue that theory must be situated in such a way that the risks of making it 'travel' can be closely examined. As a result, meta-theory now has a bad name in leftist geographical circles, and re-assertions of it - as in Harvey's *Justice, Nature and the Politics of Difference* - not surprisingly generate intense suspicion.

**c. Authoritarianism:** A third perceived failing of Marxist geography, which follows directly from the first two, is that it is authoritarian. Apparently grounded in socio-ontological certainties, Marxist geography's exorbitant meta-theoretical claims have been articulated with a force and authority which is no longer seen as realistic or desirable. Like other modern intellectuals, Marxists, within geography and without, have routinely regarded themselves as what Bauman (1987) calls 'legislators': that is, transcending their own situated circumstances, they seek to pronounce authoritatively on the course of society in general. Against this, critics have argued that Marxists should adopt the more modest role of 'interpreters', of intellectuals who adopt a reflexive stance with regard to their own knowledge productions and who evince a modesty in their theoretical propositions. This argument has been made with particular power by Rosalyn Deutsche (1991) and Megan Morris (1992), who both rightly object to the trenchant claims Harvey makes in *The Condition of Postmodernity* about the apparently unidirectional relations between economic and cultural production. But it has since been reinforced by others, who now firmly believe that theory in a minor key is the only viable way forward for any contemporary critical geography, Marxist or otherwise (Katz 1997).
Taken together, these now familiar accusations of foundationalism, universalism and authoritarianism amount to a powerful critical armoury with which to attack Marxism's and Marxist geography's claims to know. I have little doubt that a good deal of Marxist geographical work has been arrogant and arrogating in the way the critics suggest, and that attempts to move beyond this 'modern' mode of working are appropriate and timely. Indeed, as I noted above, the two-fold effects of this assault - the creation of a space in which other forms of critical human geography can flourish and achieve legitimacy, and the reformulation of Marxist geography within various post-modern and 'post-Marxist' frameworks - have been on the whole immensely positive. And yet I want to register several reservations, because it seems to me that the critique of Marxism in geography has in some respects also been detrimental.

My first reservation relates to the supposed accuracy and exhaustiveness of the triple-headed critique of Marxist geographical theory. For what is striking about much of the criticism which I have cited is that it is directed against 'Marxist geography', a category I have already objected to as being incoherent. A peculiar thing happens here, wherein the performativity of the name calls forth the thing it ostensibly represents. For the very use of the portmanteau term 'Marxist geography', with a capital M and in the singular, actively obscures difference and brings together different Marxisms within a more general interpretive horizon where the sins of the undifferentiated parts are transferred onto the putative whole, and the whole in turn used the question the worthiness of the parts. To be sure, this synechdochal manoeuvre is often unconscious and unintended, but it nonetheless functions to hinder the kind of careful immanent critique which I think is vital if Marxist geographies are to be accurately appraised.

This is not to say that all the works listed above take issue with Marxist geographies somewhere else and defeat them where they are not. On the contrary, Deutsche's (1991) 'Boys town' is an excellent example of a critique which focusses in-depth on a particular example of Marxist work: Harvey's *The Condition*. And yet even here
I think there are problems: for if critique can be too undiscriminating it can also be too specific and single-minded. I say this because Deutsche's impassioned rejection of Harvey's meta-narrative claims focusses on one - in many respects unusual - work, without taking into account his wider theoretical corpus. Moreover, in her determination to expose Harvey's sins, her reading of his Marxism becomes as one-sided and absolute as his of postmodern culture. In this respect, Gregory's (1991; 1994 ch. 6) interventions strike me as among the few examples of a critical reading where the multiple strands of Harvey's brand of Marxism are brought out and subjected to careful comparative scrutiny.

If, then, I find the critics not altogether certain as to the object of their animus, I also worry about the exhaustiveness of their criticisms. Words can have something lethal about them, and here it is arguable that the charges of foundationalism, universalism and authoritarianism have solidified into a 'new orthodoxy' about Marxism in geography which forecloses the field of debate. Ironically, this squeezing out of other possible interpretations of Marxist geographical work sits uneasily with the spirit of the times. After all, do not so many critics of Marxism insist that our contemporary 'structure of feeling' is characterised by a respect for and sensitivity to polyphony, diversity and difference? If this is so, and if, as I believe, any substantial and varied corpus of theory invites multiple legitimate interpretations, not plenary prognostications, then surely - to play on Althusser's memorable words - the lonely hour of the last word about Marxism should never come.

These comments bring me to my second complaint: the declining interest in analyses of the capitalist space economy. Of course, Marxism was not the only brand of political-economy to undertake such an analysis in geography (see, for example, Sheppard and Barnes' [1990] excellent survey and geographical extension of analytical political-economy). And, in all other respects, the shift of geographers' research interest towards domains of social life not traditionally considered 'capitalist' or 'economic' is important and exemplary. And yet capitalist social relations and forms still persist - pervasively and intrusively - and therefore an effort of theoretical labour is still required to fashion the
concepts and explanations to disclose the logic and direction of those social ties. As I hope to show, despite existing critiques, Marxist political-economy still has a great deal to offer here. This is true in several respects, but one which I regard as particularly important is precisely the meta-theoretical impulse critics have found so objectionable. This is not as perverse as it seems, because while I concur with the view that some meta-theoretical claims to know are exorbitant I also believe that some form of meta-theoretical political-economy is still necessary, relevant and defensible.

My third, and final concern, relates to the the work of those who have sought retain some of Marxism's insights but in non-meta-theoretical ways inspired by the gamut of 'post' -isms that now pepper the intellectual landscape. Two recent and particularly accomplished examples of such work immediately come to mind, both written by authors who in the past have been sympathetic to Marxism. The first is K-J Gibson-Graham's (1996) *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*. Imaginative, ambitious and well crafted, the book's central claim is that theoretical political-economy has called forth a Leviathan - 'capitalism' - which is too big, too totalising, too disabling. By eliding their representations of the 'real' with the real itself, Gibson-Graham argues that discourses like Marxism have colonised the cognitive space which would otherwise be available to rethink 'capitalism' as incomplete, messy and fractured. Accordingly, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* seeks to bring capitalism down to size and explore the interstices where class, gender and sexuality mutually constitute one another. The second example is Trevor Barnes' (1996) *Logics of Dislocation: Models, Metaphors and Meanings of Economic Space*. Echoing Gibson-Graham’s aversion to theories which posit ontological monoliths like 'capitalism', Barnes objects to the Enlightenment narratives through which much of economic geography has prosecuted its case. Instead, he advocates 'post-prefixed' theories of the space economy which abjure absolute certainty, cognitive exhaustiveness and ontological groundedness in favour of modesty, complexity and contingency. Drawing inspiration from such diverse
post-foundational approaches as the sociology of scientific knowledge, Derridean deconstruction and Rortian pragmatism, Barnes turns to the likes of Pierro Sraffa, Harold Innis and Fred Luckerman for detailed exemplifications of the post-Enlightenment mode of theorising he seeks.

Both these books are innovative and important and will deservedly become the subject of much debate and discussion. They unravel the systematicities of geographical political-economy, not in an act of wanton destruction, but in a reconstructive attempt to reveal geographical worlds marginalised and obscured by these very systematicities. And yet, despite these attributes, two things strike me about these reconstructive endeavours. First, both leave Marxism so far behind that they arguably gut it of any coherence and explanatory power it may once have had. Second, in place of such 'old style narratives' both books offer suggestive insights for a post-prefixed political-economy, but fail to offer any compelling new theory of the capitalist space economy. I appreciate, of course, that this may be the point. But this does not sidestep the fact that some sort of explanatory account of contemporary economic life is both necessary and important. In this regard, Andrew Sayer's (1995) Radical Political Economy: A Critique - in many ways a complement to the two books cited - is to my mind a more productive attempt to think geographical political-economy anew (see Bassett 1996a).

With these three reservations in mind, I want now to offer some general comments on why I think there is still a place for a Marxian political-economy which is specifically meta-theoretical and systematic.

III. Marxism and the meta-theoretical imperative

... grand views are as necessary as ever ...
Andrew Sayer (1993: 336)

In my opinion one of the most important effects of Marxism's entry into human geography during the 1970s was its vigorous advocacy and defense of theoretical endeavour and, specifically, of critical theorising. Where spatial science rested on a positivism that
supposedly allowed the 'facts' to speak for themselves, Marxists argued for the ineluctability of theory and of explicit theory building. Though now dated in several rather obvious respects, Harvey's (1973) 'Revolutionary and counter-revolutionary theory in geography and the problem of ghetto formation' is still perhaps the most lucid account of why any critical human geography simply has to be theoretical. In the first place, Harvey argued, empiricism is simply not an option. As his critique of Alonso and Muth's urban land-use theories showed, the facts never come to us unmediated by cognitive assumptions and presuppositions. This is why Harvey insisted that theoretical categories be made explicit, rather than left implicit, so that they could be subject to debate and scrutiny. But more emphatically, Harvey also showed that theory 'matters'. He meant this not just in the simple sense that the categories we rely on make a difference to how we see the world, but in the more important sense that serious theoretical work entails the construction of an elaborated conceptual apparatus that actively tries to disclose and explain the world. In this second sense, theoretical knowledge can become 'consequential' in something like Culler's meaning of the term: "The works we allude to as 'theory' are those that have ... the power to make the strange familiar and to make readers conceive of their own thinking, behaviour and institutions in new ways" (Culler 1983: 9; see also Culler 1997). Social Justice and the City was - as Harvey intended it to be - consequential in just this way, and since its publication he and many other Marxist geographers have remained dedicated to rigorous and explicit theory construction. This legacy, happily, lives on. Despite the critique of Marxism in geography, the contemporary left of the discipline has retained, enriched and complicated this commitment to theory. Whether feminist or queer, post-modern or post-colonial, theory has become a medium to be worked with in critical human geography, openly and - as in the case of Gibson-Graham and Barnes - often very creatively. The main difference is that unlike Marxism these other critical geographers abjure meta-theory and prefer, instead, to openly and honestly 'situate' their claims and voice them with care and reflexivity.
So far so good. Except that to my mind meta-theory does not necessarily equate with stern foundationalism, arrogant universalism and unthinking authoritarianism. In other words, it seems to me that there are other possibilities for Marxian meta-theoretical inquiry. I quite agree that theory must be situated. But I dissent from the vulgar version of this argument in which theory can never exceed the horizons of its own particular site of production. Instead, handled sensitively, what I would call the meta-theoretical imperative is cognitively and politically vital in three respects that define its field of operation. In the first place, by showing how particular and local are often constitutively tied to general or even global processes and relations it transcends the ineluctably specific conditions of its construction to actively reveal worlds we otherwise could not see. Second, as a corollary of this cognitive mapping it makes claims on both ourselves and those "distant strangers" (Corbridge 1993) to whom we are related by virtue of these general processes. But for meta-theory to become truly 'meta' - and this is the third facet defining its field of operation - it must also escape its sites of production and be put in motion as a global formulation. This is far from easy, because in practice it requires enormous efforts of communication and translation between different actors in different locations - not the compulsive imposition of supposedly singular truths.

When these points are added together it seems possible to draw two conclusions. First, meta-theory has a disclosive capacity which is relinquished only at a considerable cost. But, second, it is a capacity which must necessarily be handled sensitively and responsibly. This, I hope to show in due course, must be possible, since the alternative is precisely the kind of 'bad' meta-theoretical practices for which some Marxists have been rightly reprimanded.

If I thus think it necessary to retain meta-theory in some form, I also think it equally important to do so systematically. I have alluded to this already. What I mean here is the development of political-economic theory which combines coherence with genuine explanatory power. As I said, I think that some of the 'post-Marxist' writing in human
geography has perhaps attenuated some of the better insights of Marxist geographical work in the process of criticising some of its less desirable elements. But more emphatically, the arguments of Gibson-Graham, Barnes and others also indicate a certain aversion to systematic political-economy because systematicity is equated with closure and inflexibility. As Bruce Roberts (1996: 193) puts it, "Systematicity in theory has come to be perceived ... as a flaw in itself". However, again I would resist such an equation and reduction because I will show that systematic Marxist political-economic theory can remain open-ended and flexible. Indeed, it must be if it is to combine a commitment to explaining the world with an equally important commitment to recognising the limits of its own categorial claims.

IV. Envisioning the economy

The incapacity to envision the economy can play into the hands of a reactionary ... [particularism] that thrives precisely on the condition of blindness to the determinates of contemporary social life. 

Susan Buck-Morss (1995: 466)

The meaning and pertinence of these reflections on systematic meta-theoretical political-economy (a phraseological mouthful if ever there was one!) can be rendered clearer and given a sharper edge if I elaborate further on the project of 'envisioning capitalism'.

According to the capsule description I offered above, this is a project of making critically visible the political-economic relations we collectively constitute, are embedded in and subject to on an increasingly worldwide scale. I want to stress the words 'critically visible' here because the term envisioning captures this sense of making seen the economic connections which might otherwise remain opaque. This is not quite as banal as it might appear. The faculty of vision within theory has become fiercely contested of late. On the one side, as part of the general assault on Marxism a number of critics have demonstrated the complicity between meta-theory and certain modalities of vision. Within geography it is Harvey (1989a), once again, who has come under particular fire here. His assertive ocularcentrism in The Condition, so Rose (1989) and Morris (1992) claim, becomes a
faculty of cognitive exclusion in which Marxism adopts the Archimedean conceit of the perfect, total view of Society. However, on the other side, as this critique has proceeded the discursive space vacated by an embattled Marxism, within geography and without, has been increasingly occupied by neo-classical and liberal economic theories which, as I have said, refuse to focalise capitalism's relations of power and inequality. In light of this, I think that critical theorists simply must deploy the connective imperative between theory and seeing if they are to reclaim political-economic reality from the Right. But in light of the critique of vision, the key point is to do so in a way that undoes the Archimedean conceits of 'modern' theory (cf. Rose 1997: 308-12).

A lucid account of the stakes involved in envisioning the economy and the form such an envisioning might today take has recently been offered by political theorist Susan Buck-Morss. In 'Envisioning capital: political-economy on display' (1995), she examines the way discourses of political-economy since the eighteenth century have made the economy visible, particularly those presently ascendent versions of what she calls "market theory". Her critical point is that their "minimalist vision" consigns to invisibility "the web of social interdependence produced by economic activity". Indeed, by passing off the apparently atomic activities of seemingly asocial individuals as the 'truth' of economic life, market theory encourages a reactionary localism to re-enchant the 'empty' space of society, a localism presently seen in parts of Eastern Europe newly won to capital. In its place, therefore, she recommends a "philosophical, critical vision of the social body as it is produced by the global economy ..." to fulfill a "visionary need" to see "the social whole" (ibid. 465-66).

Despite its political urgency, this plea appears at first blush to repeat the rather unreflexive ocularcentrism critics detect in the work of Harvey and other Marxist political-economists. But Buck-Morss's argument turns out to be more subtle than this. To begin with, 'the economy' of which she speaks does not pre-exist political-economy and thus await 'discovery'. Rather, "the discovery of the economy (during the eighteenth century)
was also its invention" (ibid. 439, 440). The economy, in other words, emerges as what John Rajchman (1991: 81) calls a "space of constructed visibility". Explaining this, Buck-Morss continues

because the economy is not found as an empirical object among other worldly things, in order for it to be "seen" by the human perceptual apparatus it has to undergo a process, crucial for science, of representational mapping. This is a doubling, but with a difference; the map shifts the point of view so that viewers can see the whole as if from the outside, in a way that allows them, from the inside, to find their bearings (ibid. emphasis added).

Here, then, 'the economy', as Louis Althusser (Althusser & Balibar 1970: 101) once said in his theorisation of a decentred totality, "is precisely not expressed at all", for the concept "like every concept, is never immediately 'given', never legible in visible reality: like every concept this concept must be produced, constructed by the analyst". This is a vital point which is easily misunderstood. The suggestion is not that 'the economy' is simply a theoretical construct: for Buck-Morss capitalist relations are quite real and global in reach. Rather, her claim is that the theoretical labour involved in envisioning these relations has an essential world-disclosing function in which theory's performativity and consequentiality becomes plainly evident. To be sure, there is always the risk that political-economy can conjure up a representational monster - hence, for example, Gibson-Graham's concern. But without the kind of cognitive mapping Buck-Morss argues for there is equally the risk of abrogating altogether the responsibility to represent wider sets of social relations within which the theorist and his/her audience are mutually embedded.

In this light, Buck-Morss's concluding call for a renewal of theoretical attempts to 'see' economy as "a social whole" thus becomes a subtle strategic and ironic intervention in the ongoing struggle to alter the workings of world-changing social systems such as that Marx called 'capitalism': we see 'the whole' as if from the 'outside', in a way that allows us, from the 'inside', to find our bearings. Derek Gregory (1994: 345) suggests the possible productivity of this reflexive strategy when he insists that, "there is no need to convert the
critique of the gaze into a recoil from vision". In this regard, Buck-Morss's most original point can be rendered thus: the struggle to conceptually 'envision' the economy is necessary to lay claim to that 'reality' even though it can never offer an entirely adequate, decided vision of that 'reality'. Aware of the dangers of disclaiming a view from somewhere, Buck-Morss nonetheless wishes to strategically reappropriate vision for political-economic critique. Theory here dares to make meta-theoretical propositions; but at the same time it never loses sight of the particularity and partiality of its vision. In Haraway's (1992: 295) words, it becomes "a little si(gh)ting device in a long line of such craft tools" - but a potentially powerful one nonetheless.

V. Historical-geographical materialism and immanent critique

A criticism that still struggles with its object remains dogmatic. Karl Marx (1975: 158)

It remains, of course, to show how in practice Marxist geographical work can be reclaimed for such a reflexive project of envisioning the space economy. But this depends upon the prior task of identifying clearly the modality of Marxist geography to be reclaimed. And it is here that I want to take further my concerns about the critics' imprecision and my claim that 'historical-geographical materialism' be regarded as a distinct research programme.

If critique is to be effective it must be immanent to its object. Yet, as I suggested, there has often been a striking lack of precision in the current critique of Marxist geography. This continues a pattern laid down by Duncan and Ley (1982), in what was the first major critical salvo against Marxism in the discipline. In 'Structural Marxism and human geography: a critique', Duncan and Ley managed to conflate the work of a whole raft of Marxist geographers - Harvey included - with the then fashionable Althusserian Marxism dominant in Anglophone circles. This is not to say that their critique was wholly inaccurate - on the contrary, several important points were made - but that much of it stuck only be default. Likewise, it seems to me that the current critique of Marxism has often been on the mark in a similarly indiscriminate way.
As a way, then, of approaching and situating the object of my reclamatory efforts - 'historical-geographical materialism' - let me offer a rough sketch of extant Marxist geographies (see also Castree 1994 and Reynolds 1994). I can do this in both a 'negative' and a 'positive' sense. The former entails indicating which Marxisms have not impacted upon human geography, even though some believe they have. Of these two stand out: Althusserian Marxism and the broader movement Anderson (1976) calls 'Western Marxism'. Contra Duncan and Ley, Althusserian Marxism - that novel blend of Marx, Spinoza, Canguilhem and Bachelard - has had virtually no substantive and systematic impact upon Marxist geography (unless sociologist Manuel Castells' *The Urban Question* [1977] is included). Instead, as I will suggest momentarily, Althusserian Marxism has had a less explicit and much more subterranean effect. Likewise, Western Marxism - that heterogenous continental reworking of Marx from Lukács in the 1920s to Colletti in the 1970s - has, contrary to Soja's (1989) over-blown claims, barely insinuated itself into geographical research. Perhaps the only (and signal) exception here is work of Henri Lefebvre (see Gregory 1995: ch. 6).

The Marxisms which *have* insinuated themselves fall under five, by no means exclusive, categories (in no particular order):

(a) *world systems* Marxism: drawing upon Wallerstein's magisterial reworking of Marx's corpus, Peter Taylor is perhaps the most forceful proponent of 'world systems theory' as an approach to economic and political geography.

(b) *regulationist Marxisms*: the 'regulation theory' proposed by Aligietta, Lipietz and others has had an enormous impact on human geography, particularly in terms of the Fordism/post-Fordism debate. Developed very much in the shadow of Althusser's thinking, it is today a far from unified post-Althusserian approach blended with other intellectual influences. However, several Marxists in geography - including John Lovering as well as
Harvey and Swyngedouw - have drawn upon it and brought out its implicit geographical dimensions.

(c) **realist Marxisms**: at an altogether more abstract level, several geographers have approached Marxism through the lenses of Bhaskar's critical realist philosophy (and here once again we see the subterranean influence of Althusser, from whom Bhaskar has drawn so much). Seeking to move beyond what are perceived to be the limitations of orthodox Marxism, these authors - including Dick Walker and Andrew Sayer - expound a more open Marxism in which capital is merely one set of 'structures' and 'mechanisms'. Although it is difficult to categorise her Marxism, Doreen Massey's middle work to a considerable extent fits into the realist Marxist mode.¹⁰

(d) **cultural Marxisms**: this is a broad and thematic category which is associated with no one particular brand of Marxist geography but which includes those geographical Marxisms inspired less by Marxian social science and more by the humanities and more culturalist Marxisms. Both Denis Cosgrove and Derek Gregory (in some of his earlier work: e.g. Gregory 1982) fit into this broad category, with the work of Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson, respectively, influencing the work of each author.

(e) **analytical Marxism**: this approach, the newest in Marxist geography, has been advocated by Barnes (1989b), among others, as a possible route beyond the limitations of older forms of Marxist geographical work. Drawing upon Elster, Roemer and other rational choice thinkers, it is committed to reworking Marxism with the tools of analytical logic.

There are other more middling Marxist geographies I could mention, but the point of this rough map is not that it is exhaustive but that it throws into relief the *specificity* of historical-geographical materialism. For, in relation to these other Marxist geographies,
what is notable is that it is a fundamentally classical version of Marxism. In other words, it is a Marxism based on a direct reading and appropriation of Marx's original critique of political-economy rather than a 'reconstructed' Marxism read through the eyes of any of Marx's twentieth century post-classical epigones. This is not to say that other influences are altogether absent - on the contrary, Harvey, Smith, Swyngedouw and Merrifield have all drawn in different ways upon the work of Bertell Ollman and Henri Lefebvre among others. But it is to say that these other influences are used to enable and extend - not deconstruct - what is taken to be a more or less 'faithful' reading of Marx. This is highly unusual and not only, as I indicated in the Preface, within geography. For this reason, Harvey (1987: 369; 1986) has explicitly contrasted historical-geographical materialism with the Althusserian, realist and analytical paradigms, each of which he regards as fundamental departures from the Marxian canon.\footnote{11}

And it is here that I think it possible to conceive of historical-geographical materialism as a research programme rather than the work of any one individual.\footnote{12} For what is so striking about the writings of Harvey et al. - for all their other differences - is that they have been based on a broad acceptance of the basic categories of Marx's mature political-economy: namely, the commodity, use-value, exchange-value, concrete-labour, abstract-labour, socially necessary labour time, value, money and capital and the relations between them. These Marxian categories, which capture what Postone (1996: 3) calls "the fundamental core of capitalism", remain central to their various analyses and are the basis upon which each of them has extended Marx's political-economy geographically. To be sure, there are differences of interpretation of these categories here and there, and Neil Smith in particular has developed perhaps the keenest sense of how they are necessarily complicated by the insights of feminists and other critical theorists (see, for example, Smith 1991). But I think it is the broad acceptance of these central categories that allows one to think of the work of these authors as a research programme with a structured coherence.

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I say 'structured coherence' because these basic categories arguably form the 'core' of this research programme, or the set of basic propositions upon which it rests. But beyond this core the authors I have mentioned have each crafted distinctive and original analyses in which the various geographies of capital accumulation are elaborated in different ways and at different levels. I am not, in other words, positing any mechanical homogeneity here, and the Lakatosian notion of a research programme usefully serves to capture this sense of variety within similarity, a similarity and variety I hope to bring out in equal measure.

VI. Reading theory

There is no road for reading, no path or method; simply the effort and the fatigue of the difficult chance.

Thomas Keenan (1993: 156)

These comments about immanent critique and the importance of grasping the specificity of Marxist geographies may seem to indicate one of two things. The sceptic might suggest that, even when clearly identified, the subject of my critical inquiries is still irredeemable since it is, after all, the most 'unreconstructed' of all Marxist geographies. Alternatively, the over-enthusiastic sympathiser might suggest that once the theoretical terrain to be considered has been 'properly' delimited the 'true' nature of historical-geographical materialism can be revealed and the critics rebuffed. However, I think neither claim follows. While I certainly do not think the work I consider congenitally flawed, my intention is not to recover a 'correct' interpretation in order to counterpose it to that of the critics. I say this for two reasons. Firstly, as already indicated, I think many of the criticisms voiced against the likes of Harvey - though one-sided - have a textual grounding in theoretical claims he and his fellow-travellers have made. But more importantly, I also think such a naive supposition underestimates the importance and the difficulty of 'reading theory'.

I use the textual metaphor deliberately. In one of the most celebrated discussions of the difficulty and the challenge of 'reading' any body of theoretical work, Althusser
(Althusser & Balibar 1970) demonstrated that reading is not only an active process - the texts never simply speak for themselves - but one of enormous consequentiality for the corpus considered. In particular, his notions of a 'symptomatic reading' and 'problematic' showed with tremendous élán that texts - in this case those of the late Marx - which others had interpreted in this way could be subjected to a reading which disclosed an entirely other theoretical apparatus. This insight still strikes me as exemplary - notwithstanding Althusser's declension into assertions that his reading of Marx was 'authentic' where others were demotic. It will have a particular relevance to everything that follows, because I will argue that it is possible to develop a reading of historical-geographical materialism as a problematic quite different to that identified by the critics.

This is a bold claim and as likely to arouse suspicion among those already critical of Marxist geography/ies as it is possible hostility among the authors whose work I consider: for both groups might find my reading tendentious. There are no cast-iron guarantees against this. But, then again, there are also limits to what can be retrieved defensibly from the texts considered. Accordingly, to the extent that I depart from the former's critical reading and risk interpreting the latter against the grain, I try to do so responsibly and always immanently. That is, I believe the problematic I disclose lies genuinely latent within the work I consider, and I tease it out, not through any daring generalisations, but through close and careful analysis. Furthermore, to the extent that I also disclaim the notion of a 'proper' reading, I see no reason why the one I propose be regarded as necessarily ersatz, illegitimate or implausible.

VII. Underlabouring

... it is ambition enough to be employed as an under-labourer in clearing the ground a little ...
John Locke (1959: 14)

If these comments clarify and qualify the sense in which this thesis is a 'reinterpretation' of historical-geographical materialism, they do little to address another issue which arises.
For this reinterpretation is evidently a dependent one. What I mean by this is that it relies on the existence of a given body of theoretical work - historical-geographical materialism - which it then reassesses. It thus makes no 'first-order' knowledge claims of its own, but rather 'second-order' claims based upon and about the epistemological practices, ontological insights and explanatory theses offered by the theoretical corpus it reconsiders. This raises several concerns, among them that my efforts are derivative, that their second-order nature debars them from making any claims about contemporary capitalism and that, in any case, their reliance on the works of others is both unjustified and arbitrary.

These are all serious issues, but not intractable ones. I can approach them by refining and extending my comments on 'reading theory' to say that my reinterpretation of historical-geographical materialism can be seen as a form of 'underlabouring' on its behalf. I borrow this Lockean metaphor from philosopher of science Roy Bhaskar (1989a), who uses it in the strong sense of "clarifying and explicating what it is the sciences do and how they do it, as well as, on occasion, criticising existing scientific practices for failing to meet the standards of scientificity they set themselves" (Sprinker 1991: 123). This is 'strong' insofar as Bhaskar (op. cit. vii) is seeking a "kind of 'clearing' of the ideological ground" for the social (and natural sciences) in order to elaborate 'transcendental' claims about what the world must be like if scientific practice is to make sense. While I sympathise with the intent of Bhaskar's labours, I remain sceptical of the absolutism of transcendental argumentation, for it seemingly mimics in a different register the Althusserian distinction between an ideological and a non-ideological reading of social scientific practice, a distinction to which I just objected.

However, that said, Bhaskar's Lockean self-description is in at least one respect instructive and illuminating in relation to the reading I pursue here. I mean this in the sense that Bhaskar rejects the notion of a 'first' or a priori mode of philosophical reasoning about the world. He does so because such reasoning is, on its very own terms, dogmatic and circular - Althusser's 'theory of theoretical practice' perhaps being the most notorious
Marxist example. For this reason, Bhaskar argues that the only sensible and defensible alternative is an *a posteriori* mode of inquiry in which philosophical claims about social and natural reality are pursued through an analysis of the practices of actually existing social and natural sciences. As Jeanne Schuler (1996: 184) puts it, "philosophy - like swimming - is best learned from inside the activity, not from preambles". This strategy, it seems to me, cleverly highlights the legitimacy and necessity, but also the insufficiency, of underlabouring on behalf of extant social and natural sciences. It is necessary in that social scientific practitioners - as well as their critics - may not always see clearly, or may see only one-sidedly, the epistemological nature and ontological implications of their knowledge claims. But it is at the same time insufficient in that it is *no substitute for* first-order theoretical and empirical inquiry.\(^{13}\)

**VIII. The plan of this thesis**

I had thought to give a map ... Not for me to deny the pain and pleasure of the journey to other muleteers.

R. S. Neale (1985: xii)

My re-reading and reinterpretation of historical-geographical materialism proceeds in four distinct but related stages. However, since the logic of this four-fold argumentative progression is by no means straightforward I need to spell out its nature and rationale.

In the next chapter I round off this first Part with a more in-depth explication of the reading of historical-geographical materialism I am arguing *against*. I do so for several reasons: first, to present the best possible case for the critics' complaints; second, to give those complaints a more secure textual grounding than I think they presently have; and third, and most importantly, to specify precisely the claims against which my own reinterpretation is ranged. However, the way I set about the task may seem unusual: for rather than examine further the arguments of particular critics I choose instead to assume the role of critic myself. Specifically, I examine David Harvey's most accomplished theoretical treatise, *The Limits to Capital*, with a view to teasing out and scrutinising its
modern - or what I call 'traditional' - architectonics. I do so because, as I noted earlier, it seems to me that few critics have grounded their objections in a truly immanent reading of their targets. Admittedly, my assumption of the role of critic may seem counter-intuitive, given my declared intentions in this work to underlabour on behalf of historical-geographical materialism. But the point is to specify as precisely as possible the problems to be addressed if a more positive reading of historical-geographical materialism is to be persuasively put forward. In a sense, then, chapter 2 serves as the straw man (sic) for the remainder of the thesis. But the analogy is imperfect, because the modern/'traditional' modality of Marxism I detect in Harvey's work is no mere caricature but, rather, an accurate reflection of particular features, or 'moments' of his work. However, that these moments do not exhaust his work - or that of the other authors I consider - is, of course, a vital pre-condition for the development of the alternative reading I propose.

In Part II I then move to the first stage of my reinterpretation by re-examining what I identified earlier as the 'core' of historical-geographical materialism as a research programme. This core is drawn directly from Marx's political-economy and is constituted by a set of well-known, key theoretical concepts. Accordingly, Part II necessarily 'returns' to Marx as part and parcel of the re-appraisal of historical-geographical materialism's core. My aims are two-fold. First, I re-examine the nature and practice of theory, in other words the epistemological status of these concepts. Second, I also re-examine the ontological claims about capitalism which follow from these concepts. In short, then, I re-appraise both the basic ontological forms of capitalism as posited by historical-geographical materialists and the epistemological/theoretical practices through which the latter grasp those forms.

At least two possible objections suggest themselves here. The first is that all this talk of epistemology and ontology is overly 'philosophical' and thus tangential to the real issues. However, I hope to persuade the reader otherwise. For Part II amounts to nothing less than a reinterpretation of the fundamental features of the capitalist system in which we
still live today and of how we might responsibly grasp those features theoretically. The second objection is that a return to Marx is both diversionary and redundant in relation to such a reinterpretive exercise. Again, however, I beg to differ. For, as I have said, not only is Marx’s basic political-economic model of capitalism still absolutely central to historical-geographical materialism; additionally, it is remarkable how few recent critics of Marxism in geography - and even historical-geographical materialists themselves - have appreciated the rich epistemological and ontological insights Marx’s work possesses for the development of a distinctively non-modern, non-traditional political-economy relevant to the late twentieth century.

My re-assessment of historical-geographical materialism’s core begins, in chapter 3, with a consideration of both the power of and the limits to theory with what I regard as a long overdue study of epistemology and its specific relation to the protean notions of ‘science’ and ‘dialectics’. The neglect of these topics by geographical critics - and indeed the failure of even advocates to draw out their implications - has arguably obscured vital areas of theoretical practice. Reconstructing Marx’s epistemological protocols, his notion of social ‘science’ and his ‘dialectical’ method as articulated in David Harvey’s work, I show that Harvey’s political-economy can be defensibly read as embodying a highly sophisticated procedure with which to examine capitalism’s core, one which refuses the identity of thought and the real even as it insists on the explanatory power and world-disclosive capacity of the categories it unfolds. This is not to say that Harvey presents this procedure in quite the way I present it - if he did, there would be no need for me to tease it out. Indeed, I arguably take Harvey in directions he only tentatively seeks to venture. But, the arguments I present can, I think, nonetheless be coherently drawn out of his writings. I should also say, by way of a warning, that the triple-headed discussion of epistemology, science and dialectics which comprises chapter 3 is long and demanding. However, I believe this is unavoidable if its value is to be fully appreciated.
In chapter 4 I move away from epistemological considerations to those of social ontology. I say ‘social ontology’ because my concern is not with timeless truths about the nature of reality but, rather, with the historically specific core features that constitute capitalist societies as capitalist. Through a reconsideration of both Harvey's and Neil Smith's understanding of value relations I propose a fundamental reinterpretation of these basic features. An unfavourable reading suggests that both authors instantiate capitalism as a 'closed totality' of fetishised social forms underlain by unobservable processes ultimately generated by a 'meta-subject' (the working class) located in production. Against this modern/traditional view of system and subject, I propose an alternative reading which posits capitalist social relations as distinctive, structured but fundamentally open rather than closed and not grounded in the activities of a singular meta-class agent. This reading is only seemingly paradoxical, and I pursue it through a careful reconsideration of the categories of concrete- and abstract-labour, which both critics and advocates of historical-geographical materialism have for too long either ignored or taken for granted. The view of capitalism which emerges is, I think, as eye-opening as it is undogmatic, and as arresting as it is unexpected.

It may be thought that to move away from modern/traditional notions of capitalism as a self-contained, all-encompassing totality grounded in class exploitation robs Marx's political-economy - and by implication that of Harvey et al. - of its essential theoretical identity. However, what makes my argument distinctive is that I seek to retain its venerable explanatory categories but also to reconfigure their cognitive meaning. In particular, while I insist that capitalism still depends upon the exploitation of living labour, I abjure older notions of class. Rather than seeing class as a singular and essential identity, I prefer to see it as a certain positionality in relation to processes of capital circulation and accumulation. 'Class' thus becomes radically heterogenous - an unparalleled field of difference - or what Byrne (1995: 127) usefully calls the "social proletariat" - in which diverse workers are conjoined. At the same time, while exploitation of this heterogeneity
provides the source of labour value, I also insist that capitalism's systemic qualities make it *dominative* as well as exploitative. In other words, the 'moments' of capital circulation *outside* the workplace are just as important as exploitation in the workplace. The upshot is that capitalism emerges as a 'system' irreducible to class and exploitative production as traditionally conceived. Instead, it can be seen as a dominative and exploitative system each of whose several moments are important and which, because it is predicated on the exploitation and domination of a plurality rather than a singularity is, *inter alia*, permeated by its putative 'exteriors' and by 'difference'. Even more than with chapter 3, the arguments I develop in chapter 4 can hardly be said to apply in any *straightforward* sense to the work of Harvey and Smith. Again, my intention is not to claim that either author secretly holds to the claims I make about capitalism. Rather, I merely aim to identify non-modern/non-traditional moments in their work and then to develop them into an explicit and worked-up account - an account neither author ventures to make more than implicit and latent.

Together, then, chapters 3 and 4 deliberately reread the 'core' of historical-geographical materialism as a research programme and in so doing they reappraise the very nature of capitalism's fundamental forms - which is why I title Part II 'Reclaiming Capitalism'. These two interventions, the one epistemological/theoretical, the other ontological, are intended to complement one another and to generate a mutually reinforcing interpretive weight. The effect, I hope, is to reveal the first level of a problematic which can make critically visible global economic relations, but in a way that their ontological forms and the theoretical means of disclosing them are anything but self-sufficient and decided.14

In Part III I then move to a second stage of my reinterpretation. Specifically, I explore how the re-reading of both the 'core' of historical-geographical materialism and of the capitalism it studies put forward in Part II can animate some of the major theoretical innovations that have marked historical-geographical materialism out as a distinctive and developing research programme. Here, then, I at last come to the 'geography' in historical-
geographical materialism. Given the range of these theoretical innovations this exploration is necessarily partial. It revolves around three themes: the 'production of space', the 'production of nature' and, less familiarly, the 'production of subjectivity'. These themes, though they hardly exhaust the field of historical-geographical materialist inquiry, are each significant and intrinsically interrelated. In each case I try to show how my reinterpretation reconfigures Harvey et al.'s approach in a way that retains its explanatory power but circumvents 'bad' meta-narrative practice. I begin with a deliberately familiar and venerable theme - the production of space (ch. 5) - but then move on to more recent concerns - the production (and destruction) of nature (ch. 6) - and finally less familiar ones - the production of 'the subject of capital' (ch. 7). I do so in order to demonstrate the thematic reach of historical-geographical materialism but also the coherence of the reinterpretation I offer - a reach and coherence commensurate to a constellation of specific social relations which today are pervasive and global in reach.

Whereas Part II is densely argued and its two chapters directly complementary, Part III is deliberately looser and more reader-friendly. Rather than constantly refer back to the earlier chapters, the three chapters that comprise Part III are each relatively free standing. This does not, of course, mean they bear no relation to what has gone before: on the contrary. But their relation to Part II involves the picking up and amplification of its arguments in the very specific contexts of the debates on space, nature and the subject respectively. For this reason the chapters of Part III are written in languages and idioms reflective of those specific debates. At times, this may make them seem to the reader to depart from my earlier concerns. But their relation to those concerns is never far away and is, I hope, readily apparent throughout.

Together, Parts II and III reintepret what can be called the 'explanatory-diagnostic' moment of historical-geographical materialism: that is, its anatomisation of capitalism and its geographies. In Part IV I turn away from such explanatory-diagnostic concerns to examine the 'anticipatory-utopian' dimension of historical-geographical materialism. I
borrow this distinction from Seyla Benhabib (1986), who argues that any theory which claims to be 'critical' necessarily embodies both moments. Yet the authors whose work I examine have been strangely silent on this second issue, reflecting the wider reluctance within political-economic geography to reflect on the question of what Sayer (1995: 33) calls "normative standpoints". This is regrettable, as any project of envisioning capitalism must, surely, not only make capitalist relations critically visible but contest them too. I thus take this opportunity to tease out, in the final chapter, the normative dimensions of historical-geographical materialism, and try to show how my earlier reinterpretation of its explanatory-diagnostic basis can render those dimensions in a sober, relevant and realistic fashion for the 1990s.

IX. Serried Pre-Cautions

Thought must be divided against itself before it can come to any knowledge of itself
Aldous Huxley (1929: 11)

This is a summary statement of intent, but it is specific enough to alert the reader to several issues which require precautionary qualification. The first relates to presentation. A research programme begins and ends with the efforts of its practitioners. Accordingly, rather than staking out a set of 'essential' features which paradigmatically describe historical-geographical materialism and then showing how each of its advocates 'live up' to this description I prefer, instead, to let historical-geographical materialism emerge through a consideration of the work of different authors. Each chapter thus interprets the work of one or several of the authors named and, in this specific way, seeks to develop an alternative reading of historical-geographical materialist inquiry.

The second issue, following on from the first, relates to thematic and authorial coverage. The reader expecting an exhaustive survey of all the themes touched upon by Harvey et al. and of more or less all of their respective works is clearly expecting too much, and I am happy to disappoint them on this score. As I have said, my focus on the
three themes of space, nature and the subject is a fairly synoptic one in itself, and certainly a broad enough canvas upon which to illustrate the reinterpretation I propose.

The final issue relates to what can reasonably be expected of a theoretical work of this kind. I am under no illusions here. Notwithstanding my comments on the value of re-reading theory and of ‘underlabouring’ on behalf of it, this is clearly a limited endeavour, intellectually and practically. Intellectually in that more meso-level theoretical work and concrete empirical inquiry are also vital (if not more so) to move historical-geographical materialism forward as a research programme. And practically in that their are clearly limits to the 'effects' of work of this kind, limits I will make much of in chapter 8 and in the Coda.

NOTES

1Ellen Meiskens Wood (1995: ch. 2) has offered an explanation for this apparent severing of the ‘economic’ and the ‘political’ within capitalist societies.

2I borrow the phrase ‘reclaiming reality’ from Roy Bhaskar’s (1989) book of the same name. Christopher Norris (1996) has used the same motif to structure his most recent collection of essays.

3Including Consciousness and the Urban Experience (1985a), The Urbanisation of Capital (1985b), The Condition of Postmodernity (1989a), The Urban Experience (1989b) and, most recently, Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference (1996). There is also the co-edited The Factory and the City (Hayter and Harvey 1993).


5I discuss Deutche’s critique further in chapter 3.

6Important here, I think, have been those recent attempts to widen and complicate what economic geographers, Marxists included, have traditionally considered to 'count' as economic research topics. This has entailed both an en-culturation and em-bedding of 'the economy' (see, for example, Thrift and Olds 1996; Lee and Wills 1997).

7This calls to mind Bowles' and Gintis' (1985: 41) laconic observation that those "who would save Marxism from economism have mistakenly attempted to save Marxism from economics".

8From time to time in this thesis I use the collective 'we'. It is a word I use with caution and it is not invoked unthinkingly. As becomes especially apparent in chapter 4, the term is catachrestic, at once lacking a signified and yet at the same time naming a common 'constituency'.

9The irony of Duncan and Ley's critique was that almost all the Marxist geographical work they castigated for being Althusserian was not at all indebted to Althusser! Doreen Massey's early engagement with
structural Marxism is perhaps the one notable exception.

10 Although, as we shall see, Harvey distinguishes historical-geographical materialism from Critical realism, I think much of his own thinking is, in effect, realist. In an indirect way, chapters 3 and 4 seek to show this.

11 Of course, one of the problems with the kind of 'mapping' of Marxist geographies I am doing here is that Marxism is a much more diffuse presence in the work of several geographers who, strictly speaking, would not consider themselves Marxist or even post-Marxist. An excellent example is Nigel Thrift, much of whose writing is coloured by his engagement with, rather than adherence to, certain Marxian arguments.

12 I borrow the Lakatosian notion of a research programme in only the loosest sense. My use of the term does not, therefore, imply any commitment on my part to Lakatos's substantive theses about the nature and progress of research communities. However, what I do find congenial about the Lakatos's terminology is the suggestion that while ostensibly different research communities do interact and, at the margins, interface, the existence of a modus tollens - a set of core beliefs - means that it is still ultimately possible to group researchers within relatively distinct research programmes. Thus, while I do concede that my decision only to include four authors within the historical-geographical materialist fold may at first sight seem arbitrary, I think it is a defensible choice since to my knowledge no other significant Marxists in the discipline today hold to the core propositions and core concepts one finds in the work of Harvey et al., the most central of which is the labour theory of value.

13 This qualified defense of underlabouring usefully addresses the concerns raised above. It means that my reinterpretation of historical-geographical materialism is dependent, yes, but not derivative, since it seeks to actively disclose a different problematic to that detected by critics and advocated by practitioners. It means that my reinterpretation is second-order, yes, but that since it considers a first-order body of theory it is not debarred from making claims about contemporary capitalism based on the reinterpretation of that corpus. And finally, it means that my reinterpretation is tethered to a determinate body of existing theory, yes, but that short of rejecting out of hand all the claims that this (or any other) theoretical field makes about the world this tethering is neither unjustified nor arbitrary.

14 In some senses, Part II stands in relation to the rest of this thesis as Bertell Ollman's (1971) 'Philosophical Introduction' stood in relation to the rest of his seminal book on Marx Alienation. The difference, of course, is that Ollman's understanding of the 'core' of capitalism and of Marx's political-economy is ostensibly 'modern' and 'traditional'.
CHAPTER TWO

EXPLANATORY AND NORMATIVE PRESUPPOSITIONS:
HARVEY AND THE CRISIS OF 'TRADITIONAL MARXISM'

... it is clear that traditional Marxism as a critical social theory with emancipatory intent is inadequate.
David McLellan (1993: 1009)

I. Introduction

I have argued that while the criticisms of Marxism in geography are by no means ill-founded they nonetheless frequently under-specify their target. In this chapter I therefore want to pursue further the argument that Marxism is a 'modern meta-theory', but I want to do so specifically in relation to historical-geographical materialism. In other words, I aim to deliberately draw out the 'modern' elements of this particular modality of Marxist inquiry in some detail and thus play the role of critic of these elements and this modality. Although this may seem to contradict my declared intentions in this work, it will in fact usefully serve several purposes at once. It will further concretise the triple headed critique of 'modern theory'; it will, as importantly, ground the critics' charges in a clearly specified and close reading of a specific kind of Marxist geographical work; as such, it will make a sort of 'best case' for those charges; but finally, most importantly of all, it will spell out very clearly the reading of Marxian political-economy against which my interpretation in Parts II, III and IV is ranged, and so help to identify what makes that interpretation distinctive and original.

In order to move beyond the level of generalities and achieve these several aims, I intend to focus on a particular author - David Harvey - and a specific text - his *The Limits to Capital*. I make these choices with good reason. Harvey was, of course, the effective instigator of historical-geographical materialist inquiry and remains its most determined and important expositor. More particularly, his work has of late become emblematic of all that is worst about and all that is wrong with modern Marxian theory in human geography. The key text here, as I have already noted, is his *The Condition of Postmodernity* which
came in for considerable flak for its cognitive exorbitancy. And yet this is arguably to scrutinise historical-geographical materialism at its most idiosyncratic, not to mention weakest, point. *The Condition* is (with the signal exception of his most recent book) perhaps the most speculative and least rigorous of all Harvey's writings. It is not, like most of his other works, an exercise in careful political-economic theory building in the tradition of the late Marx. Rather, Harvey chooses to make grandiose and manifestly under-theorised links between the 'basal' structures of 'the economy' and the 'superstructures' of the contemporary postmodern culture he finds so objectionable. This makes the book a terrific read - indeed Harvey (unpublished) has described it as an "entertainment" - and doubtless accounts for its extremely high sales. But it also makes it a very easy target, which is why several feminist critics, in particular, have had a justifiable field-day upbraiding its meta-narrative excesses.

Given this idiosyncrasy and these obvious theoretical weaknesses, *The Condition* is not perhaps the best place to prosecute a case against modern meta-theoretical practices. This is why I want to focus on Harvey's *The Limits to Capital*. Few geographical critics of Marxism in general, or Harvey in particular, have offered an analysis of this remarkable exercise in geographical political-economy. And yet *The Limits* is perhaps the most accomplished piece of theoretical writing in Marxist geography these last twenty years. More specifically, to repeat my earlier claim, it also stands as the charter document of historical-geographical materialism as a distinct form of Marxian inquiry. In it one finds Harvey closest to Marx, trawling his way through the *Grundrisse, Theories of Surplus Value* and, pre-eminently, *Capital* in order to restate and then extend nothing less than the whole sweep of his political-economy in a geographical direction. One commentator has rightly described it as a "complete ... exegesis, critique, and extension of Marx's mature political-economy" and it remains to this day a work of unparalleled scope and ambition within historical-geographical materialism.
For these reasons, this chapter focuses on *The Limits* with a view to reading it as a text in 'modern' Marxian meta-theory in the pejorative sense meant by the critics. As we shall see, there are considerable grounds for such a reading. But if these grounds can be pinpointed they do not, I think, amount to a *fait accompli* - exposing historical-geographical materialism *irredeemably* at one of its strongest points. Instead, more positively, I think they indicate the specific problems to be addressed and overcome if a coherent and plausible alternative problematic is to be revealed and put to work. The argument proceeds in five stages. I begin by presenting a critical interpretation of the 'mature' Marx developed by several contemporary scholars - notably Seyla Benhabib (1986) and Moishe Postone (1996) - possessed of a detailed and sophisticated knowledge of his political-economic writings. I use their work because, while these writers are extremely sympathetic to Marx's project, they nevertheless find it cognitively and normatively flawed on meta-theoretical grounds. This detour into an account of Marx is only seemingly diversionary because I then trace it through to Harvey's arguments in *The Limits*. Insofar as Harvey's is an avowedly 'faithful' continuation and extension of Marx, I further argue that *The Limits* can be plausibly seen to repeat the meta-theoretical flaws Benhabib, Postone and others expose. Seeking to construct a genealogy of these flaws, I then suggest they may be traced back to Marx's appropriation of Hegel. However, having thus presented an internal critique of the 'modern' moments of *The Limits*, I end on a positive, rather than a negative note, by arguing that such a critique clears the ground for a more productive reading of historical-geographical materialist work.

**II. The Marxian legacy? 'Traditional Marxism'**

Marx was, of course, a child of his time ...

Roman Rosdolsky (1977: 56)

Despite the forcefulness of their arguments, it is remarkable how few geographical critics of Marxism have said anything of substance about Marx himself. In mitigation, it must
also be admitted that these days few Marxist geographers bother, at least in print, to undertake extended considerations of the thinker from whom their work draws inspiration, perhaps because they now take Marx's basic claims for granted or else are more concerned with drawing out their implicit geographical dimensions. And yet, notwithstanding the wider 'crisis of Marxism', the last twenty years has seen a remarkable outpouring of new work on the nature and intent of Marx's original corpus. As I noted in the Preface, this has its 'structural' and 'analytical' components, but the work that interests me here is that undertaken by that relatively small group of political-economists outside geography who, like Harvey, regard themselves as 'classical' Marxists, or at least seek a 'classical' interpretation of Marx.

For all their very real differences, these authors make a number of important basic claims about Marx's corpus. First, they suggest that although during his lifetime Marx proposed, variously, a theory of history, a political philosophy, a fragmentary theory of the state and so on, he must be seen first and foremost as a political-economist (Carchedi 1991). More precisely, they suggest that Marx must be seen as a political-economist of just one, quite specific form of society: capitalism. Second, although they reject Althusser's notion of an 'epistemological break', many argue that Marx's most coherent and systematic political-economic work is to be found in his later texts (Moseley 1993). This is not to devalue his earlier, more philosophical writings, but it is to say that Marx's concrete theory of capitalist production is only worked out in post-1855 texts like the *Grundrisse, Theories of Surplus Value* and, of course, the three volumes of *Capital*. Third, these authors take seriously Marx's claim to be a social scientist, and argue that the categories of his political-economy are unfolded as an extremely careful attempt to grasp the specificity of capitalist social forms (Murray 1988). Finally, many of these authors agree that in his 'scientific' endeavours, Marx was not an 'economist' in the conventional sense we know it today, but a theorist of social relations and social forms. To cite Carchedi (1991: ix), "economics is first and foremost a social science, a science which studies historically specific social
phenomena", and an even casual acquaintance with Marx's later writings quickly indicates that he was not concerned with algebra or economic modelling. As Marx (1973: 106) himself said, the basic categories of his critique of political-economy "express the forms of being, the determinations of existence ... of this specific [capitalist] society". This is vitally important. While it does not sidestep the need for quantitative political-economy (indeed, debates over the 'transformation problem', the operationalisation of value-magnitudes etc. still proceed apace), it does mean that Marx's work should be seen primarily as what Postone (1996: 18) calls "a critical ethnography of capitalist society".

Some of these points will be familiar and uncontentious, others less so. However, they usefully contextualise a reading of Marx's political-economy as what I will call 'traditional Marxism', that is, as a 'modern' discourse in something like the sense of that term proposed by geographical critics. It is a reading I can pursue through the critical analyses of Postone (1996) and Benhabib (1986) - two authors who thematise Marx's work in the four ways described - and through a consideration of the pre-eminent Marxian text, Capital, especially volume 1. This claim to pre-eminence is, I think, quite justified because in it Marx's lays out the most fundamental categories of his political-economic critique - and it is for this reason that subsequent Marxists have devoted so much attention to it. Volume 1 is also distinctive in that, unlike the Grundrisse, for example, Marx's account is structured in a tightly logical and exacting manner. And it is the place where, more than any of his other published writings, Marx makes great play about seeking the "luminous summits of science".

**Traditional Marxism: the explanatory-diagnostic moment**

In his magisterial Time, Labor and Social Domination, Moishe Postone adumbrates an interpretation of Capital as a form of what he terms 'traditional Marxism'. It is a reading of Marx's core political-economic arguments which, he argues, is widespread among classical Marxists and to be found in texts as diverse as Lukács' History and Class Consciousness
It is, furthermore, a reading which enjoys enormous textual warrant in Marx's political-economic writings. And it is is a reading now so familiar that it has almost come to stand for what the late Marx 'really' said. It goes something like this.

Marx begins *Capital* with the category of the commodity, the simplest and most pervasive phenomenal form in which social wealth appears within capitalist societies. He then shows that commodities have both a use-value and an exchange-value and, corresponding to this, that the labour required to produce commodities must also have a two-fold aspect. However, this still raises the question of how commodity exchange can take place. Through an analysis of the 'elementary', 'expanded' and 'general' forms of exchange, Marx shows that commodities possess a dimension common to but distinct from their use-value form: that is, they possess value. Because of this, value is the general form of social wealth in commodity producing societies. However, this value dimension only remains latent unless it can be actualised by a commodity which can serve as its general measure. Hence, Marx derives the 'necessity' for money, which serves as a universal measure against which commodities can be valued and exchanged. Effectively, then, money facilitates relations between things - commodities - which are in fact relations between people, since commodities are embodiments of 'abstract labour', which is the 'measure' of value. So it is that at the end of chapter 1 of *Capital* Marx presents his famous discussion of the 'fetishism of commodities', where he shows that social relations take on the dissembling empirical appearance of thingly relations.

However, Marx's categorial account has much further to go than this because the hidden abode of relations are not merely exchange relations between people. Instead, certain agents - namely, capitalists - enter into exchange as a means of receiving at the end of the transaction the *same* commodity they put forward at the start: money. The only conceivable reason for doing so is to receive *more* of this commodity than was put forward at the beginning of the transaction. Since this commodity is the general form of value this
is the same as saying that *more value* is sought after. In its several forms, money thus becomes much more than the medium of commodity circulation, C-M-C. Marx's 'general formula for capital' specifies a form of circulation M-C-M' where an extra increment of money - or profit - is accrued by the seller. Money which circulates in this way is what Marx calls *capital*. And yet this form of circulation seems impossible because the exchange of commodities assumes an *equality*. The only way an *inequality* could be derived from such a transaction is through robbery, deception, buying cheap and selling dear and the like, since no party would willingly exchange for less than they have put forward. So where, then, does profit come from?

To answer this key question Marx shifts his attention from the realm of exchange to that of *production*. In capitalist societies, he argues, we know that there are at least two major classes involved in commodity production: capitalists and workers. Capitalist relations of production entail the buying of labour-power by the capitalist as part of the production process, along with raw materials, machinery and the like. And it is here, in chapter 6 of *Capital*, that Marx specifies the origin of profit: *living labour*. At first sight this seems contradictory. After all, since labourers sell their labour-power for a wage and since the exchange bargain is based on an equality then this surely cannot be true. However, Marx argues that labour-power is unique among commodities in that its *use-value* aspect enables it to create more value than it consumes, that is, *surplus value*.

This is a complex claim which Marx seeks to make good on in several ways. Most important is his argument that when set in motion it is labour-power which is productive of both the concrete- and abstract-labour attached to commodities. What this in fact means is that labour-power is the source of value, since value is nothing but materialised abstract-labour. But this claim in turn requires explanation, since, apparently, abstract labour has no measure to actualise it. Until, that is, Marx introduces the notion of 'socially necessary labour time'. Clock time, an historical invention closely associated with capitalism's rise, is the real measure which renders concrete labours effectively commensurable and which
brings into being the dimension of 'abstract labour'. Marx's notion of 'social necessity' is vital here because it indicates the tendential formation of a socially average production period against which dispersed concrete labour-processes can actually be compared and brought into relation.

This has several important implications. It means that capitalists have an incentive to employ labourers for a period exceeding that socially necessary for the latter to reproduce themselves. It also means that in socially necessary labour time capitalists face a real social average against which their own productive activities must compare if a profit is to be made. Finally, and most importantly, both points mean that while capitalists only pay labourers an amount necessary for their social reproduction, they employ them for an additional period effectively given \textit{gratis} in which surplus value is created. Moreover, because the the wage payment is seemingly fair and occurs in exchange, this extraction of surplus labour is achieved only in production. So it is that labour-power, because of its unique commodity status, is for Marx \textit{exploited}. And so it is too that Marx introduces the concepts of 'absolute' and 'relative surplus value', and devotes considerable historiographic attention in volume 1 to the intense struggle over the length of the working day.

These core categorial claims - otherwise known as Marx's 'labour theory of value' - have long been the subject of tremendous interpretive controversy, both within Marxism and without (see, for example Fine [1986] and Steedman and Sweezy [1981]). But as Postone notes, Marx's political-economy does not, of course, end with these fundamental claims. On the contrary, for all its importance volume 1 cannot be considered without volumes 2 and 3 of \textit{Capital}, where Marx builds towards a theory of economic crisis, focussing particularly on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and on the related contradiction between the forces and relations of production. The 'law of value', as Marx calls it, is an historical - not general - one relating specifically to the capitalist system. What is remarkable about it is that it is generated by capitalism \textit{itself}, through its internal contradictions and disequilibrating tendencies. The result is a series of acute economic
crises, which generate not only capital devaluation but also job loss and social misery on a very large scale. In this sense, as is well-known, Marx believed that capitalism, paradoxically, had the capacity to sow the seeds of its very own dissolution and thus create the conditions for genuine working class emancipation. And in this sense too *Capital* can be seen as elaborating a 'crisis theory' whose purpose is to disclose the historical limits to capitalist social organisation.

This unrefined summary of Marx's basic arguments will be very familiar to most readers. In what sense, then, is it a 'traditional' reading of Marx? Postone (1996: 8) offers an answer: "Within this general framework ... Marx's critical analysis of capitalism is primarily a critique of exploitation from the standpoint of labour: it demystifies labour in capitalist society ... by revealing labour to be the true source of social wealth, and ... by demonstrating that that society rests upon a system of exploitation". According to Postone, then, 'traditional Marxism' is characterised by four specific features. First, it is a critique on behalf of a singular subject - the working class. Second, it is a demystifying critique of capitalism which shows how the 'truth' of social relations are hidden behind 'surface appearances'. Third, it therefore prioritises the sphere of production: to the extent that surface appearances are delusive they are ultimately subordinate - in both explanatory and ontological terms - to the exploitative production 'essence' behind them. Finally, insofar as traditional Marxism is able to make these plenary claims it forgoes epistemological modesty in order to posit its theoretical representations as real-istic representations, which accurately and exhaustively capture their socio-ontological objects.

*Traditional Marxism: 'critique' and the anticipatory-utopian moment*

If Postone's summation gives a clear (if rather blunt) sense of the explanatory-diagnostic side of 'traditional Marxism', Seyla Benhabib (1986) has offered an equally lucid account of its anticipatory-utopian dimensions. These dimensions will be less familiar to readers than those detailed by Postone, so I will dwell on them at somewhat greater length. In her
genealogy of critical theory, *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, Benhabib convenes her discussion of Marx's project around the concept of 'critique'. Marx's later work is a political-economy, true, but as Benhabib rightly observes it is always explicitly described by him as a *critique of* political-economy. Thus McCarney (1990: 96) is correct to argue that the term "has a strong claim to represent the favoured and, as it were, official self-description of his work", such that "its significance ... can scarcely be exaggerated". As one of the few in-depth accounts of Marxian 'critique', Behabib's analysis is thus particularly useful.

For Benhabib, Marx's notion of critique is both specific and highly evolved. It is directed against two targets - namely "the social reality articulated by the discourse of [classical] political-economy, as well as ... this discourse itself" (1986: 107) - and it operates on three levels. To begin with, Marx unfolds an *immanent critique* of capitalism. This has two aspects: *categorial* and *normative critique*. In the former, Marx proceeds from the accepted designations of the categories of classical political-economy (à la Ricardo, Smith etc.) and shows how those designations in fact turn into their opposites when closely analysed. Thus, for example, where the classical lexicon posits that only labour provides title to property, Marx shows that capitalism depends upon the radical *separation* of labour-power from the ownership of means of production. Under capitalism the only title labour provides is thus to itself, in the form of wages. This kind of categorial critique is immanent in the sense that Marx does not introduce external criteria, but, in Benhabib's words, "confronts the claims of this science [political-economy] with the thought-out consequences of its own categories and assumptions" (ibid. 106). But Marx's immanent critique is also normative. What Benhabib means here is that Marx also compares the *norms* of bourgeois society to the *actuality* of the social relations in which they are embodied, revealing an unmistakable discrepancy between the two. Capitalist society is the first in which transcendent norms are swapped for immanent ones with a claim to universality: namely, the Enlightenment norms of freedom, equality and
autonomy thematised by political philosophers from Kant to Mill. However, in capitalist society Marx argues these norms are realised in only a limited form: namely, in the sphere of exchange. Exchange seems, as Marx (cited in Benhabib *ibid.* 107) put it in a famous statement in volume 1, "... a very Eden of the innate rights of Man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham ...". But by then shifting his attention to the realm of production, Marx is able to juxtapose these norms to the reality of inequality, coercion and exploitation faced by the working classes.

In this sense Marx's normative critique is not only immanent but what Benhabib calls *defetishising*, and this is the second level on which his critique of political-economy operates. For Marx the category mistakes of classical political-economy are not accidental but reflective of the fetishistic forms in which capitalist social relations actually appear. As Benhabib (*ibid.* 108) puts it, "The categories of political-economy, and specifically the category of value, present economic reality as if it were an objective, law-governed reality encompassing various abstract quantities and entities. In this presentation, the social process of production which lies behind the product, and the social relations among humans that assume an objective, mystified quality in their eyes, are not analysed. Political economy proceeds from social givens, as if they were natural ones, and cannot uncover the social constitution of its own object domain".

Together, then, the procedures of immanent and defetishising critique allow Marx to sidestep the perils of moral criticism or the imposition of arbitrary values in order to confront bourgeois society with what are in some sense its own standards. However, thirdly, Benhabib argues that what truly marks out the originality of Marx's critique is that it is able to point beyond the existent situation toward a future actuality. This is what Benhaib calls *critique as crisis theory*. What Marx seeks to show, through his diagnosis of capitalism's contradictions, is that moments of economic crises reveal both the potential and the *transitoriness* of capitalist social relations. By systematically explaining why capitalism depends upon exploitation, poverty, structural unemployment and the like,
Marx aims to contribute to what Benhabib (*ibid.* 103) calls "crisis diagnosis", rather than "crisis integration", in order to encourage the working class to reappropriate the social wealth it produces on a post-capitalist - or 'socialist' - basis.

This crisis diagnosis is more complex than it seems when stated in this bald way. Benhabib suggests that in Marx's estimation capitalism is historically unique in that it is a form of social life which takes on the appearance of a 'self-moving' totality. Although made by workers, capitalism confronts these individuals as a force seemingly external to them, in the form (for example) of sectoral employment shifts, business cycles and the like. For this reason, Benhabib continues, Marx adopts an extremely clever textual strategy in *Capital*. It comprises two epistemic perspectives, what she calls "transsubjectivity" and "intersubjectivity". In the former, Marx deliberately assumes the role of the "thinker-observer" (*ibid.* 123) in order to reconstruct in thought the 'logic' of the systematic qualities capitalism possesses. This third-person perspective allows Marx to 'show' the working class the broader relations 'it' constitutes and is subject to on an international scale. However, at the same time Marx also adopts the first-person perspective of individuals-in-social-relations in order to show how those relations articulate with and confront working people on the ground. This explains Marx's empirical focus on the working day in volume 1 of *Capital* and its relation to the apparently impersonal and systematic unfolding of political-economic categories that characterises the early chapters of that volume. More than mere *illustrations* of Marx's systemic analysis, Benhabib suggests that they are a different, but equally important *window* through which to view capitalism's contradictions.

In specific relation to critique as crisis theory, the two perspectives of trans- and intersubjectivity thus, Benhabib continues, correspond to two conjoint notions of crisis: *functional crises*, arising from failures of capitalism's logic (as in, for example, a falling profit rate, bankruptcies, capital concentration etc.), and *lived crises*, as experienced in the misery and suffering of working people and their concrete struggles with their employers. What, Benhabib goes on, allows Marx to *mediate* between these two perspectives and
these two notions of crisis is the category of labour-power and its two-fold nature. Unlike other commodities, labour-power is embodied and sentient, not reproducible at will and requires its owner's consent to be deployed; and yet in its 'abstract' aspect this corporeal particularity is also constitutive of the whole system of value relations which give capitalism its systemic and alienating qualities. As a crisis theory, Capital, on Benhabib's account, is thus designed to show to workers that they are capitalism's life-blood but also its gravedigger if they can use moments of crisis to seek the true realm of freedom: a post-capitalist order in which social wealth is no longer measured by labour value and labour time.

Benhabib's elaborate exposition of Marxian 'critique' complements Postone's 'traditional' reading of Marx very well. As both an immanent and defetishising critique of capitalism, Benhabib shows how Marx's political-economy works on behalf of the working class at several related levels. In particular, what she adds to the discussion is the argument that for Marx capitalism is a form of social life whose inner core is manifested as a structured and impersonal system logic (of which commodity exchange is but one part) and thus remains obscure - this despite the ontological priority of this core over this dissembling manifestation. And finally, in her disquisition on 'crisis theory' especially, Benhabib shows that 'scientific critique' cannot rest on cognitive timidity and uncertainty, but must instead take the theoretical high-ground. There may be no royal road to science, but a road there is, and in this sense Benhabib shows that Marx regarded his theory as "a form of social change, rather than merely the basis for ratiocination about the desirability for such change" (McCarney 1990: 127). In other words, her reading demonstrates that if Marx is to make non-arbitrary claims about what should be - socialism - he must needs make apodeictic claims about what is.

It goes without saying that there are many other possible interpretations of Marx - and I will, of course, be putting forward an alternative interpretation in what follows. But Postone and Benhabib's reading of what is here being called 'traditional Marxism' is a
plausible one with a strong textual grounding in Marx's later writings. Moreover, as Postone notes, it is a form of classical Marxism which lives on in to present. And it is in relation to these atavistic traits of traditional Marxism that I now want to turn to Harvey's *The Limits to Capital*.

**III. Marx and *The Limits to Capital***

*The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living*

Karl Marx (1984: 10)

It is a measure of the difficulty and the challenge of *The Limits* that, while it is arguably Harvey's most accomplished theoretical work, it also the least discussed and cited. The reasons are not hard to fathom. For those not possessed of a basic familiarity with Marx's political-economy it is all but impenetrable; and even for those who regard themselves as Marxists it presents tremendous, although rewarding, conceptual and narrative difficulties. This is not, it should be said, due to deliberate obscurity on Harvey's part. It is, rather, the consequence of a manifestly complex subject matter: that of the nature and functioning of the capitalist mode of production. These difficulties cannot be under-estimated. Because of them what follows is not a blow-by-blow recapitulation of the book's many complicated arguments. Instead, it is the book's core claims and, as it were, its argumentative architectonics that will be the subject of scrutiny.

**Purpose and nature**

To begin, it is necessary to say something about the intent and the nature of this, Harvey's first book-length treatise as a 'Marxist', rather than merely a 'Marxist of sorts' (the self-description he used in *Social Justice and the City*). The title of the book, of course, is strongly indicative here. As Derek Gregory (1989: 73) is right to note, "*The Limits to Capital* must ... be read in a double sense, marking both the bounding contours of capitalist development and an important silence in Marx's master work". The three 'cuts' at 'crisis
theory' that structure the book are a sure indication of the former claim, and depend upon a reconstruction and extension of Marx's arguments in the three volumes of *Capital* (but also the *Grundrisse* and *Theories of Surplus Value*). In saying 'reconstruction' I am not contradicting my earlier claim that historical-geographical materialism is a modality of Marxist geography which purports to remain close to the spirit of the Marxian texts. On the contrary, the 'reconstructive' aspects of *The Limits* are very much attempts to render Marx consistent with his own analysis in those places where that analysis seems to Harvey to be insufficiently developed or to have been waylayed. On this basis of these reconstructive endeavours, *The Limits* then seeks to take Marx onto new theoretical terrain, namely that of exploring how space and spatial configurations are absolutely vital to the dynamics of capital accumulation. By thus correcting Marx's largely aspatial political-economic account, Harvey's intention is to show that capitalism is necessarily a *space-economy*, whose geographical constitution makes the world of difference not only to its 'normal' functioning but also to the form and nature of those periodic (often cataclysmic) moments of system disintegration, economic crises.

Most commentators have had little difficulty recognising these general aims and intentions. But far less has been said about Harvey's general approach to fulfilling them. And it is here that I can return to the four basic claims about Marx's *oeuvre* (which I stated earlier) that a number of other contemporary classically minded Marxist have made. The first two of these claims - that Marx should first and foremost be regarded as a political-economist and that it is his later works that are the most fecund theoretically - *The Limits* obviously takes to heart. But what, ironically, has been less commented on is that Harvey makes great play in *The Limits* about the 'scientificity' of his theory, quoting on the first page Marx's famous statement (from volume 1) about the 'fatiguing climb' to the 'luminous summits'. This is ironic because 'science' has become something of a dirty word these days, and is routinely associated with the cognitive decidedness postmodern/structural/colonial critics deride. This, then, makes a critical focus on *The Limits* particularly apposite.
But such a focus must also recognise that *The Limits* is also a scientific analysis of *social relations and social forms*. What I mean here is that the book is not an 'economics', still less a quantitative economics, and Harvey is at pains throughout the book to say so. This is particularly clear in the Appendix to chapter 1, entitled 'The Theory of Value'. Here, having unfolded the basic categories of Marx's critique, Harvey pauses in order to situate his own interpretation in relation to the wider 'value controversy' (Steedman and Sweezy 1981). While conceding the importance of a quantitative analysis of value magnitudes and the like, he rejects an overly "narrow conception" (1982: 36) in which value is treated as a mere "accounting concept" designed to explain commodity prices etc. Instead, quoting Simon Clarke (1980: 4), Harvey argues that "value is ... invested with 'more than strictly economic significance' - it expresses 'not merely the material foundation of capitalist exploitation but also, and inseparably, its social form'" (ibid.). Here, then, value is clearly seen as "definite social mode of existence of human activity" (Marx, quoted in Harvey, ibid. 37) or a social relation, a position which, in abjuring mathematical economics, pushes "Marxian theory towards a more trenchant critique of political-economy" (ibid.). Specifically, Harvey (ibid.) describes his approach with reference to Diane Elson's (1979) seminal notion of the 'value theory of labour' - as opposed to the 'labour theory of value' - which sees Marx's real question as being "why labour is represented by the value of its product and labour time by the magnitude of that value" (Marx, quoted in Harvey, ibid. 37). But note that for Harvey this focus on social relations - rather than numbers and value magnitudes - does not evacuate Marx's analysis of its scientificity. Although there is the danger that value can appear as a merely "metaphysical conception" (ibid.), which loses in scientific cogency what it gains in moral outrage, Harvey argues that this need not be so. Instead, careful concept building in the spirit of Marx, he suggests, allows value to be treated as a representation of a "real phenomena with concrete effects" (ibid.), whose validity should be assessed in terms of how far it allows us to cogently interpret and explain those effects.
In sum, then, for Harvey *The Limits to Capital* is a social scientific exercise in political-economy in the tradition of the late Marx devoted to developing an explicitly geographical account of capitalism's constitution. Before I present the book's core theses though, I need to add one other element to this general characterisation of Harvey's efforts: namely, that *The Limits* is also clearly an exercise in *theoretical* political economy. Harvey is quite upfront about this. He describes *The Limits* in the 'Introduction' as a "general theory" or "abstract conception", one deliberately stripped of "any direct historical content" (*ibid.* xiv). Unlike volume 1 of *Capital*, therefore, *The Limits* does not make reference to historiographic or empirical material. It is, as Harvey notes, an analysis of *mode of production* not *social formation*. To be sure, "the interplay between the two seemingly disparate conceptual systems - the historical and the theoretical - is crucial", but, Harvey admits, "time and space force me to write down the theory ... without reference to history" (*ibid.* 27, xv). What this in effect means is that *The Limits to Capital* is (to borrow Benhabib's terminology) written from the third-person perspective of the thinker-observer, or - to use the terminology of modern social theory - is an analysis of 'system integration', rather than of 'social integration' (the first person perspective of individuals-in-social-relations).7

**The argument**

With these contextual comments in mind, let me then turn to Harvey's argument with a view to reading it as a form of 'traditional Marxism'. I approach *The Limits* in two stages: first I dwell on Harvey's exposition of Marx's fundamental political-economic categories, then I move on to his reconstruction and extension of Marx.

(i) Restatement

*The Limits* begins, not surprisingly, with a restatement of Marx's most basic concepts (chapter 1). In twenty-four dense pages we are introduced to the concepts of the commodity, use-value and exchange-value, concrete- and abstract-labour, value, socially
necessary labour time, money and capital, culminating in a condensed exposition of the
theory of surplus value as Harvey, following Marx in volume 1, switches windows from
exchange to production. Although Harvey does not entirely follow the order in which
Marx presents his arguments in volume 1, there is little in his account that dissents from
Marx's basic claim that while the wealth of capitalist societies appears as an immense
accumulation of commodities, it is in fact measured in labour value terms and generated
through an exploitative production logic. The chapter, which is designed to reveal the
origins of social wealth as measured in capitalist (i.e. labour value) terms, ends by
identifying the "fundamental conclusion" of Marx's value theory: namely that "value
theory is an expression of th(e) ... class relation" between workers and capitalists (ibid. 24).
Harvey then offers an initial specification of this class relation and of the implications for
capitalist and workers of the capitalist principle of accumulation. While noting that class
categories are in reality exceedingly complex and layered, Harvey follows Marx's formal
treatment in the early sections of volume 1 where capitalists are 'capital personified' and
workers undifferentiated bearers of labour power. Though crude, this allows him to specify
the class positions of each. In the case of the former, the capitalist form of circulation and
the principle of competition (which Marx does not treat in full until volume 3), both unite
and divide capitalists according to the imperative to accumulate value. For workers, these
competitive and accumulative pressures are felt as attempts to extract relative and absolute
surplus value. But most important, Harvey argues, are the contradictions instantiated by
the class relation between the two groups. As capitalists are compelled willy-nilly to try to
displace and devalue labour-power, they not only create the conditions for working class
immiseration and opposition, but ultimately undermine the conditions for stable
accumulation, a theme Harvey will return to in his 'first cut' theory of crisis.

It is worth pausing here to make a number of observations about the significance
and expository style of this rendition of value theory in relation to the overall argument of
The Limits. Harvey (ibid. 2) emphatically rejects the "building-block" approach to Marx
that would have us believe that value theory is a fixed and firm foundation on which the edifice of his theory is built. Instead, he is insistent that the core concepts of value theory are altered and enriched as each aspect of Marx's analysis is unfolded. And yet, at the same time, value theory is clearly formally discrete from the rest of *The Limits* in one vitally important sense: it specifies the source of new value, the origin of profit and thus what Harvey (*ibid.* 35) calls "the inner logic of capitalism". This is why, as Harvey avers in his consideration of value distribution (chapter 2) and other places, "the theory of ... value ... stands on its own independently of any theory of distribution apart from that most fundamental of all distributional arrangements, [that] which separates labour from capital" (*ibid.* 68-9). In turn, this means that while the other moments of capitalist circulation are vital, it is production which is "the fundamental moment in the process" (*ibid.* 84) and "the value productivity of labour which ... in the end ... matters" (*ibid.* 133, emphasis added).

In the second place, the tropics of chapter 1 also firmly and deliberately set the tone for the rest of the book. I mean this in two closely related senses. First, Harvey's elaboration of value theory is couched very much in the language of 'science'. Although one might expect it, Harvey (like Marx\(^8\)) chooses *not* to make any grand pronouncements about the 'proper' scientific method nor are we offered any explanation of what Harvey understands Marx's sense of 'science' to be. Instead, he lets the meaning of the term emerge through his value analytics. And this brings us to the second dominant trope of chapter 1: Harvey's constant invocation of the language of 'appearance' and 'essence'. Harvey, like Marx, explores these terms most fully in relation to 'commodity fetishism' (*ibid.* 17), whereafter they become closely associated with what is distinctively 'scientific' about Marx's political-economy. As he puts in his concluding words to the chapter, "the task ... is ... 'to appprpropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connexion' with all of the integrity and uncompromising respect for the 'real relations' that characterise[s] the materialist form ... of science" (*ibid.* 38, quoting Marx, emphasis added). Science, then, rigorously penetrates surface forms in order to
fashion the concepts necessary to grasp the inner relations at the heart of capitalism. It is thus, it seems, a mode of knowledge enunciative of the 'truths' behind the chiasms of empirical forms. Moreover, as such it works on two fronts simultaneously: against the fetishistic concepts of mainstream political-economy (throughout chapter 1 Harvey shows how Marx inverts the value categories of the classical school's 'best representative' David Ricardo), and against the real, dissembling appearances of capitalist social relations.

(ii) Reconstruction

With the theory of surplus value in place, the six subsequent chapters take Harvey up to what he calls Marx's 'first cut theory of crisis'. Although fundamental, the value categories of chapter 1 can hardly stand as a theory of capitalism in all its moments and so, in a step by step fashion, Harvey unfolds the different aspects of capitalist circulation as Marx saw them in the first three volumes of Capital. His aim, quoting Marx, is to show that "production, distribution, exchange and consumption ... all form members of a totality, distinctions within a unity" (ibid. 96). In chapter 2 he begins by exploring the relations between production and distribution. What emerges, against classical political-economy, is that while the class basis of the former directly influences the nature of distribution, the latter is vital if production is to be sustainable in the first place. He then takes on two specific and well-known problems in Marx's distribution theory - the 'reduction problem' (concerning how wages are divided among the working class) and the 'transformation problem' (concerning the value-production price relation and how surplus value is divided among capitalists) - in both cases emphasising that it is the relations which matter in the fundamental distributional conflicts between workers and capitalists, and in both cases clearing the theoretical ground for subsequent chapters. Chapter 3 then takes up the question of consumption and the realisation of surplus value. Since realisation is not an automatic process, Harvey offers a basic elaboration of the structural problems which arise in trying to sell commodities. A balanced economy depends upon the sale of that which is

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produced, but Harvey identifies basic forces driving capitalism away from such an equilibrium, in particular the contradiction between capitalism's expansionary dynamic and the need to generate sufficient effective demand for the commodities produced. Having examined distribution and consumption, Harvey moves on to consider further the dynamics of production and competition relations by considering the crucial question of technological change and its impacts on the labour process (chapter 4). Entering into hoary debates on Marx and technology, Harvey locates capitalism's extraordinary propensity for technological innovation in the competition and capitalist-worker relations that structure production and the purpose of such innovation in increasing the value productivity of labour power. Chapter 5 then introduces the topic of the organisation of capitalist production and shows how different organisational arrangements - competitive, monopoly, state-monopoly etc. - arise as responses to accumulation imperatives, only to need altering as they become obselete.

By chapter 6, then, 'The dynamics of accumulation', Harvey is in a position to approach the question of capitalism's inherent disequilibrating, or crisis, tendencies. Marx unfolds his account of crises in three stages. *Capital* volume 1 presents a first model of accumulation based in production, which brackets questions of consumption, distribution, technological and organisational change etc., except the distribution of values as between capitalists and workers. Volume 2 focusses on the circulation of capital through all its phases and, in a more imaginative, less rigorous way than volume 1, considers the problems of value realisation. Volume 3 is intended to synthesise the findings of the first two volumes, integrating production-distribution with production-realisation requirements and doing so around the theme of 'the falling rate of profit'. However, Harvey (*ibid.* 157) detects two problems here. First, the three crisis models are not properly integrated. Second, in what is one of his most original 'reconstructive' insights, he argues that 'falling rate of profit' argument actually obscures a more fundamental and well-founded crisis
tendency within capitalism. For this reason he proposes to retrace Marx's path in order to render it both consistent and clear.

The 'general law of capitalist accumulation' arising from the simplified economy of the first volume yields three pivotal conclusions (ibid. 161): first, that accumulation is structurally tied to the production of working class unemployment; second, that wage rates are structurally depressed below levels necessary to achieve balanced growth; and third, that capitalist control of production tips the balance of power in its favour viz. the labour process and change within it. Harvey then turns from production to consider accumulation as viewed from the realm of exchange, discussing Marx's famous 'reproduction schemas' in relation to an economy disaggregated into 'departments'. Although conceding that they are flawed in many of their details, their meaning, he argues, can only be understood in relation to Marx's overall project. In particular, they demonstrate that the contradictions of the first accumulation model are merely displaced onto the realm of exchange since "balanced accumulation through exchange is indeed possible in perpetuity, [but only] provided that technological change is confined within strict limits, provided that there is an infinite supply of labour power which always trades at its value, and provided that there is no competition between capitalists and no equalisation in the rate of profit". As chapters 2-5 showed, this is not the case, and so the stage is set for Harvey to consider Marx's synthesis in volume 3.

He does this in two stages. First (pp. 177-89), he puts Marx's falling rate of profit argument in its rightful place. Considering its inherent logic and its consistency with the insights of volumes 1 and 2, he finds it wanting on both counts. Instead, he argues, it has served to obscure "the fundamental contradiction", which is that "between the forces of production and the social relations of production" and its expression "in terms of the technological and organisational characteristics that capitalism must necessarily adhere to if it is to achieve balanced equilibrium growth" (ibid. 189). Second, he then turns, in the
pivotal chapter 7 (‘Overaccumulation, devaluation and the ’first cut’ theory of crisis’), to consider this contradiction and its expression.

The key thematic of this chapter is the notion of capital 'overaccumulation'. Capital, recall, is value in motion and thus a process rather than a thing. This process definition, grounded in the reality of accumulation for accumulation's sake, means, Harvey insists, that surpluses of value and goods that cannot be productively employed relative to existing demand are ‘devalued', that is, they must be eliminated from the circulation process. The fundamental contradiction of capitalism, he goes on, means that capitalism systematically - rather than accidentally - generates such surpluses on a periodic basis, since the evolution of the productive forces always eventually faces a barrier posed by the social relations of production. This does not reduce crises to this contradiction though, since Harvey argues that Marx's point, in tracing the problems of distribution and realisation in volumes 2, is that this contradiction appears, displaced, in several quite real forms, namely: the overproduction of commodities; surplus inventories of constant capital; idle fixed capital within production; surplus money capital; surplus labour power (under- and unemployment); and falling returns on capital advanced. In effect, then, what these 'surface manifestations' of crisis show, is that both workers and capitalists are locked in a system whose very logic is instability and chaos. Pointing to the "irrationality" of such a system and its agonising human consequences, Harvey closes his 'first cut' theory with one of Marx's revolutionary suggestions from the Grundrisse:

The violent destruction of capital not by relations external to it, but rather as a condition of its self-preservation, is the most striking form in which advice is given it to be gone and to [make way] for a higher state of social production (ibid. 203).

(iii) Extension

If these first seven chapters summarise, and in places clarify and reconstruct, Marx's basic argument, the remainder of The Limits is devoted to extending Marx's theory in directions which lay quite undeveloped in his work or were only hinted at. Adding more detail to his
anatomisation of capitalism, Harvey seeks to deepen and extend the concepts and arguments put forward in his 'first cut' theory. I do not want to dwell on these extensions, not because they are unimportant (quite the contrary), but because I have said enough, as I hope to show, to indicate what makes Harvey's basic approach a seemingly 'traditional' one. However, some basic comments are relevant to the subsequent discussion. To summarise, what Harvey achieves in his 'second' and particularly 'third cut' crisis theory is a remarkable theoretical exposition of the full logic of capitalism's crisis tendencies. Where the first cut theory - while insightful and fundamental - leaves out far too many considerations (e.g. of credit, fixed capital formation, the state and so on), the second and third cuts systematically introduce the topics relevant to a fuller - and therefore more complex - theory of crisis. Harvey begins by asking how the formation of fixed capital and a consumption fund can solve capitalism's crisis tendencies, and then turns to the crucial topic of credit and the financial system and their role in stabilising capital's disequilibrating logic through, in a sense, the production of time. With the 'second cut' theory thus in place, Harvey argues that there is still one vital dimension missing from this anatomisation of capitalism: geography and the production of space. Consequently, chapter 11 onwards is the place where Harvey's insistence that historical materialism be properly considered as historical-geographical materialism hits home with particular force. In three brilliant and highly original chapters, Harvey constructs a theory of rent and an account of why the material production of space is vital to capital's survival, ending with an exploration of tensions in the space economy which indicate that crises can only be displaced, never solved. The 'third cut' theory of crisis shows that crises are necessarily geographical and spatially uneven, and - picking up where Marx left off - concludes with an apocalyptic vision of 'global crises' whose bluntest expression is war, the most decisive form of devaluation imaginable.
This long summary of *The Limits* is, of course, exceedingly simplified. But it is specific enough, I think, to suggest some very direct links between Postone and Benhabib's readings of Marx and Harvey's own. For as I have presented it, Harvey's understanding and exposition seems to correspond remarkably closely to 'traditional Marxism'. At a general level, it certainly appears to be an explanatory-diagnostic dissection of capitalism 'from the standpoint of labour' as identified by Postone. At the same time, as an anticipatory-utopian 'critique' of political-economy, it works immanently as a categorial critique (e.g. Harvey's disclosure of Ricardo's category mistakes), as a normative critique (e.g. the universal freedoms of exchange are compared to their ground in exploitative production) and especially as a defetishising critique of surface forms, all as identified by Benhabib. But, in anticipatory-utopian terms, *The Limits* is, pre-eminently, an exercise in critique as crisis theory, since the text is entirely structured around the theme of 'crisis diagnosis'. Here Postone and Benhabib's readings come together, for *The Limits* appears to be a crisis critique on behalf of the working class. The model of emancipation implicit in this critique, it appears, is that of individual workers reappropriating what currently faces them as the law of value in order to make it serve their ends. Accordingly, *The Limits* can be seen as a form of 'revolutionary theory' for revolutionary practice, where crises become potentially transformative moments of action in which 'class in itself' can become 'class for itself' and workers can recognise their collective subjection to value relations.

If *The Limits to Capital* thus seems emblematic of 'traditional Marxism' in these general ways, then it also does in more specific senses too, both ontological and epistemological. As a critique from the standpoint of labour, *The Limits* clearly seems to posit capitalism as a structured and relatively discrete system or 'totality' - within which production is the most important social sphere (notwithstanding the crucial importance of the other 'moments' of capital circulation) - and to posit the working class as the most important social agent in capitalist societies. As a demystifying critique, *The Limits* clearly seems to install a related ontological hierarchy between 'appearances' and 'essences',
wherein the former are both inadequate and subordinate in relation to the latter. And finally, insofar as Harvey appears to make great play about how Marx's 'scientific' categories are able, precisely, to disclose essential processes, then *The Limits* clearly seems to install powerful epistemological claims about the *identity* of concepts and the reality they represent once those concepts are 'properly' constituted and unfolded.

**IV. The limits to *The Limits***

If there is a meta-theory which can embrace all these gyrations ... then why should we not deploy it?

David Harvey (1989a: 337)

An even cursory glance at these aspects of Harvey's account will immediately suggest both the strengths and (especially) the limitations of 'traditional Marxism'. Let me spell them out in turn.⁹

*Envisioning the capitalist space economy*

As a crisis critique on behalf of 'the' working class, *The Limits* can be seen as a remarkably accomplished demonstration of the necessity and value of a project of envisioning capitalism. Necessity, because what *The Limits* shows is the stunning fact that the underlying social relations of capitalism are *ontologically real but really invisible*. And value because, through the *labour of theory construction*, Harvey is able to actively reveal this otherwise obscure world - its production based 'logic' but also its potential mutability - to the class constituency which both sustains and is subject to it. A thus otherwise socially and spatially *separated* working class can therefore come to see its *common* production of and subjection to value relations, relations which bare little resemblance to a supposedly beneficient 'invisible hand'. Crucially, *The Limits* is able to show this precisely by virtue of the third-person, or system-integration, perspective from which it is written. To reiterate Althusser's insightful admonition: 'the economy' cannot represent itself so it must be represented. And it is, therefore, this representational mapping which also allows *The Limits* to make cognitive and political claims on those socially and spatially separate
working people and communities who together constitute capitalism as an increasingly
global system.

And yet it is here - at the point of its strength - that we come to the manifest
limitations of *The Limits* if it is interpreted as a form of traditional Marxism. For it is the
very epistemological self-confidence seemingly vouchsafed by the notion of 'science',
when coupled with the ontological suppositions about capitalism characteristic of the
traditional reading of Marx, which means that Harvey apparently *fails* to escape the
closures and conceits of Archimedean vision in order to achieve the kind of subtle and
reflexive envisioning of capitalism advocated by Buck-Morss. This applies at two related
levels: that of social formation and that of social subjectivity. Let me take each in turn,
then consider a possible rebuttal from Harvey's perspective, following which I suggest how
*The Limits* can be seen to inadvertently generalise these shortcomings onto a wider
gEOHISTORICAL canvas.

*Pure capitalism*

Citing the *Grundrisse*, I noted earlier that Harvey sees production, exchange, distribution
and consumption as 'distinctions within a unity' or 'moments' of the *totality* that is the
'capitalist mode of production'. Indeed, drawing upon Bertell Ollman's (1971) seminal
argument that Marx's political-economy is predicated upon a 'philosophy of internal
relations', *The Limits* shows that the apparently unrelated are in fact organic components of
a ramified social system in which 'production' is the originary and most important moment.
While any notion of totality seems to be ruled out of court these days by critics of
Marxism, it does usefully allow one to see how the seemingly unconnected are in fact
especially - rather than contingently - related. The problem, however, is that on the
traditional reading I have elaborated, *The Limits* seems to instantiate a remarkably
restrictive or *closed* notion of 'totality'.
It is not so much that Harvey believes that capitalism as an economic system is really, when all is said and done, all there is to social life. He does not, although I will suggest shortly that when read 'traditionally' The Limits ultimately seems to approach this position by default. But because it takes the capitalist economy as an analytically distinguishable object (Harvey discusses nothing else except 'the capitalist mode of production'), and because at the same time Harvey's 'scientific' epistemology leads him to make seemingly confident cognitive claims about the real, in effect capitalism becomes really distinguishable in his account. This is problematic because it abandons the challenge of making sense of social formations characteristically 'overdetermined' in principle (as Althusser famously put it). Put differently, Harvey's value relations are 'internal' because for him they belong to, indeed constitute, what he implies is a bounded entity or "pure capitalism" as Robert Albritton disdainfully terms it (1993: 25; see also Diskin and Sandler 1993). As such, 'the economy' becomes falsely disembedded from social formations in which it is inextricably linked with a multiplicity of other practices and relations, apparently leading Harvey into what Andrew Collier dubs the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" (1989: 27-8). In this sense, The Limits thus fails to pay sufficient heed to the other side of Althusser's admonition: that while the economy is not 'expressed' and must be re-presented, any representation of it can never be sufficient and exhaustive since 'the economy does not exist as a discrete social-relational sphere as such.10

(Dis)cerning the subject

If, when seen as a traditional expositor of Marx, Harvey's declension theoretically into a regional conception of a 'closed totality' (the term is Henri Lefebvre's 1955) is questionable, so too is the conception of social agency to which it is directly linked. To be sure, he is alive to the differentiation of that social actor who has a 'vested interest' in dismantling the system it sustains: 'the working class'. For instance, he discusses in several places labour market segmentation, working class fragmentation and national and
international spatial divisions within class consciousness, not to mention the complexities of working class reproduction. However, what seems to remain throughout the entirety of *The Limits* is a commitment to a *singular* working class actor and an ontological affirmation that class-in-itself transcends - or should transcend - these internal differences.

As with his account of 'the economy', Harvey's conception of the subject is apparently that of an unsullied or 'pure' subject. The problem here, once again, is not so much that the working class is taken to be the only insurgent social actor. Instead, it is that by cordoning off that actor in its own ontological space Harvey, it seems, studiously avoids the dimension of *plurality* that constitutes subjective being and social agency. This I take to be the meaning of Jacques Derrida's (1993: 204) argument that one "cannot construct finished or plausible sentences using the expression 'social class'". In other words, Harvey's is a version of what Benhabib (op. cit. 132) calls the "philosophy of the subject", that is a "collective singular subject (that) does not behave as a *collectivity* that has decided to act together, but as a *singularity* that reappropriates what is legitimately its own". Indeed, it seems that this must follow if the notion of critique as crisis theory is to make any sense at all, otherwise that critique founders on the indeterminate actions and consciousness of an *inchoate* constituency. In this sense, then, *The Limits* is arguably unable to register, let alone do justice to, the *constellation of subject-positions* into which social subjects are multifariously called within both production and everyday life. Moreover - and this is my second point here - it also prioritises what Benhabib (*ibid.*) calls a "work model of action" in which social action and interaction pivot on the objectifications and externalisations of the labouring subject whose normative role it is to reappropriate these alienated exertions. The upshot is that other, highly important modes of social interaction (e.g. linguistic communication, symbolic interaction, non-work relations) are implicitly marginalised.

Here Harvey's seemingly restrictive conception of internal relations and of the singular subject come together, and his reading of value theory seems to reflect this limiting conjunction particularly well. Throughout the key chapter 1 of *The Limits*, Harvey
borrows the metaphor of 'substance' from Marx in order to characterise value. He is, quite rightly, at pains to show that the metaphor is not connected to a naturalistic pre-social conception of labour nor to a related ahistorical conception of labour 'embodied'. But, even freed from these conceptions, Harvey's substance metaphor is arguably intended to posit a ramified, if highly mediated, series of connections beginning with a single subject (living labour) at the (single) point of production, wherein those connections (abstract labour and value etc. as social relations) return iteratively in an internally related system ('pure capitalism') where causes become effects and effects causes in synchronic and diachronic interplay.\textsuperscript{12} Value, then, here becomes the key mediating moment in the chiasmatic chain of connections from production to exchange to distribution and consumption, the metaphorphosing social substance which, like a golden thread, weaves its way from content(s) to form(s) and so shows that what appears as a multiplicity of different elements is really an integral, bounded, discrete totality.\textsuperscript{13} As such, the value categories seemingly function to close the circle of both economy and subject in Harvey's account through the coup-de-grace of 'internal relations' which unify the particular and the general. And the price is that putatively 'non-capitalist' difference and heterogeneity are ultimately subsumed by the identity and unity supposedly intrinsic to value.

\textit{Real abstractions}

Harvey, of course, might reasonably counter these objections by arguing that one of the striking facts about capitalism is precisely that it is able, \textit{in practice}, to abstract away all these differences. Hence, he might claim, the brilliance of Marx's insight that "individual labour powers are equalised ... precisely because they are treated as abstract or separate from the real empirical individuals to whom they belong" (Colletti quoted in Smith 1994: 127, emphasis added). Capitalism, then, emerges as a form of social life one of whose distinctive features is that it appears as an impersonal 'self-activating' domain of so-called
'concrete abstractions'. But there are two problems here, one epistemological, the other ontological and to do with Harvey's apparent understanding of difference and particularity.

Regarding the first, Benhabib offers an interesting interpretation of any appeal to real abstraction as a ground on which to contest the objections I have made to Harvey's account. She concedes that Marx avoids reifying the logic of transsubjectivity in his account by showing that it is the very logic of capitalism itself. Nonetheless, she insists that there is still the need for both the perspectives of system- and social-integration in any proper political-economic account. After all, labour-power is both abstract and concrete at the same time. However, assessing Marx's empirical references to the working day in volume 1, Benhabib concludes (op. cit. 132-33) that Marx's attempted integration of the two perspectives ultimately founders because it is the impersonal and legislative system-perspective which inadvertently wins out, thus displacing the difficult question of how social relational complexity affects the clean lines of Marx's dialectical presentation.

Arguably, this one-sidedness applies even more emphatically to The Limits since, unlike Marx, no attempt is even made to adopt the position of intersubjectivity. Seen like this the text surreptitiously silences the domain of lived social relations and of subjective differences by an equally surreptitious failure to make clear that it is a claim launched from a particular epistemic perspective. Harvey thus threatens to dissimulate as simply a question of being what is necessarily also a question of knowledge and the positionality of the theorist. While, as I have noted, this usefully enables Harvey to offer a representational map of the sort Buck-Morss insists is necessary for any economic theory, it should also necessarily temper the certainty of his presentation by situating it epistemically as one embodied attempt by him to 'see' the economy 'as a whole'. But Harvey risks abjuring moderation by suggesting that capitalism just is a system of violent abstractions and that Marx's categories - its 'conceptual reflections' - just do, in all their 'tough rigour' and 'scientificity', rightly represent them. In turn, this threatens to lead Harvey into a dogmatic monistic epistemological position in which thought perfectly grasps 'the' totality.
and thereby sacrifices its specificity to become effectively at one with its putative object, which it 'mirrors'. In this way - to reverse a well-known formulation of Marx's - he can be read as falling into the illusion of conceiving thought as the product of the real concentrating itself and probing its own depths. What might otherwise be considered a strategically necessary visual conceit - making 'capitalism' visible - thus risks becoming a plenary opticality in which Seeing is Knowing, and in which Harvey ultimately claims to discover a reality that stands outside theory.

Secondly, even if one could make a straightforward appeal to real abstraction as a demonstration of capitalism's effacement of difference, ontologically speaking the sense of 'difference' in *The Limits* is seemingly quite limited. For the key 'differences' that interest Harvey are, apparently, those of 'concrete individuals' in production. But he fails to give much sense - except briefly in his 'Afterword' - that these different individuals, aside from being class subjects, are also ethnicised, gendered, sexed and 'raced' in complex, overlapping and important ways, both within and outside production, which crucially affect their sense of themselves as actors and agents in history. In the absence of any consideration of these dimensions, Harvey's rather anemic 'concrete individuals' threaten to become empty markers which serve largely as a baseline against which to compare the abstract compulsion of value relations.

**Totality and historical humanity**

Earlier, I mentioned that *The Limits* ultimately risks implying by default that 'capitalism' dominates, or becomes synonymous with, social life as such. Let me now conclude this 'traditional' and critical reading of Harvey's analysis by explaining how his regional conception of a closed totality ('pure capitalism') and of a singular subject ('the working class') together grounded in production threaten to become exorbitant.

Aside from the numerous references to 'the' working class, there is a second subject inhabiting the pages of *The Limits* but which is really the same subject. That subject is
'humanity': Consider, for example, the following claim, where Harvey laments the constraints enforced by the law of value:

This discipline contrasts with the activity of living labour as 'the living form-giving fire', as the 'transitoriness of things, their temporality', and as the free expression of human creativity (ibid. 37).

Here Harvey is obviously pointing to the way that capitalism, by virtue of its generality and globality, has brought much of the world's population under its sway. Indeed, this explains Harvey's occasional use throughout The Limits of the collective singular "we", when addressing his readership. However, if this use of the term seems reasonable enough as a shorthand, in the second place Harvey seems also to give it an altogether deeper meaning. While it is unwise to place too much emphasis on one passage, this is very clear in the citation above. For there is evidently a strong sense therein of 'humanity' as an energetic, self-activating species whose essence is work and whose freedom and potential c/should be realised if only capitalism could be dismantled.

Harvey is not, to be sure, here abandoning Marx's oft-repeated claim that people are the historically specific product and producers of social relations for a transcendental conception of some pre-social ur-subject. Instead, for Harvey I take 'humanity' to be the real result, once again, of capitalism's real abstractions. But it is precisely here that this 'historical humanity', as it might be called, risks losing its useful meaning as a social abstraction which does not efface axes of social difference and identity among living labourers (such as gender, nationality, 'race' and so on) but which gathers them together in a homogenesing way. Instead, because Harvey gives such priority to production, and because he apparently closes off the space of capitalism, 'living labor' becomes 'the working class' which, in turn, becomes a disciplined 'humanity' in a series of substitutions which inadvertently also threaten to make the latter a singular subject in whose name critique is undertaken. As a corollary of this metaphysicalization of the subject, 'pure capitalism' and value are thereby implicitly raised to the rank of system among systems and relation among social relations respectively, which through their intrusive generality...
and despotic force crush all differences and are thus ontologically of greatest power and import. To the extent that various 'non-capitalist' relations even enter into things (which in *The Limits* they essentially do not), then they can only figure as 'exteriors' to the internal space of the economy or, worse, 'interiors' which are absolutely subordinate (to the point of invisibility) to the abstractions which force them and the subjects they mark willy-nilly within capital's stern embrace.\(^{16}\)

V. The shadow of Hegel

When the power of synthesis vanishes from the lives of men (sic.) and when the antitheses have lost their vital relation and their power of interaction and gain independence, it is then that philosophy becomes a felt need.

Georg W F Hegel (1977: 91)

Although I have pursued this 'traditional' reading of *The Limits to Capital* with perhaps too much gusto and too little refinement, I think it nonetheless articulates a very real strain of Harvey's Marxism. And it is here that the discerning critic might point to the long intellectual shadow cast by that most celebrated and most vilified of Enlightenment philosophers: G. W. F. Hegel. For 'traditional' Marxism might be seen as a materialist working out of some enduring and very deep seated Hegelian themes. This is not the place to present a detailed examination of Hegel's influence on Marx. Nor can I offer an exhaustive textual demonstration of how Harvey has inherited and perpetuated these Hegelian thematics.\(^{17}\) However, I think it is undeniable that Hegel's influence on Marx's political-economy was an enormous one. This may sound strange, since Marx's engagement with Hegel is generally seen to have been greatest in his early 'philosophical' texts, like the *1844 Manuscripts, Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* and *The Poverty of Philosophy*. However, contra Althusser, Hegel's influence did not end with Marx's philosophical 'settling of accounts' but is strongly evident in the later 'scientific' writings too.\(^{18}\) Marx was a close and a life-long student of Hegel's philosophy and continued, quite explicitly, to critically draw upon it during the 1860s and 70s. Indeed, in *Capital* Marx
(1976: 102-3) openly avowed himself a "pupil of that mighty thinker", and in recent years several authors have shown convincingly the several forms of this Hegelian legacy as they appear in his political-economy (Arthur 1986; McCarney 1990; Moseley 1993; Murray 1988).

I say several forms because it would be crass - not to say the most reductive form of intellectual history - to suggest that Hegel's influence on the late Marx was either one-dimensional or uniformly negative. Though the very mention of Hegel's name in the same breath as that of Marx has, on occasion, seemed sufficient to condemn the latter (witness Popper's [1945] 'open society' thesis or, in human geography, Duncan and Ley's [1982] evisceration of 'Marxist geography's' Hegelian origins), Hegel's influence is much too complex and varied to be so summarily criticised (Wood 1993). And yet, it is arguable that if Marx's political-economy is read in the 'traditional' way Postone, Benhabib and others propose, then many of its central aspects are clearly Hegelian in provenance.

I mean this - to deliberately simplify - in both an epistemological and an ontological sense. It may seem strange to talk of epistemology in relation to Hegel since he was, of course, an idealist philosopher and, moreover, a holistic or relational philosopher too who rejected the bifurcations of which the knowledge-reality distinction is but one. However, as Patrick Murray (1988: ch. 9) and others have shown, Marx's political-economy reinstated epistemology and in so doing refused to collapse the theoretical endeavour into the reality it seeks to comprehend. And yet, this notwithstanding, even sympathetic critics of Marx have worried that while he rejected Hegel's idealism he inadvertently reinstalled its cognitive certainties but now in a 'materialist' register. Specifically, since Lenin's (1929) (in)famous claim that one cannot understand Capital without first understanding Hegel's Science of Logic, critics have noted the smatterings of what Joan Robinson (1953: 23) disparagingly called "Hegelian stuff and nonsense" that mark volume 1. These smatterings, it has been suggested, are far from incidental because the logical organisation of Capital has been seen to mimic structurally The Logic almost
point for point (see, for example, Arthur's [1993] erudite comparison of the two texts). This would not necessarily be a problem, except that Capital risks suffering from too a close an association with its idealist forebear. In The Logic, Hegel seeks to locate a 'presuppositionless beginning' in order to adumbrate a systematic philosophy which can avoid reliance on take-for-granted assumptions or unexamined foundations. Likewise, Capital - in beginning with the commodity - has been seen as a materialist mirror image of this immodest strategy, as Marx systematically unfolds the categories he believes will offer a 'total' view of capitalism, albeit one grounded in its object not in itself. Indeed, Marx (quoted in Mattick 1993: 117) himself had cause to worry about "the idealist manner of the presentation" in volume 1's early chapters, "which makes it seem as if were merely a manner of conceptual determinations and of the dialectic of these concepts" and, accordingly, critics have found good reason to worry that Capital's cognitive architectonics are congenitally flawed by association.

While this epistemological inheritance may be unfamiliar to many readers, the ontological filiations will be more obvious. Again, Benhabib and Postone are of assistance here. If The Science of Logic was Hegel's definitive statement of 'proper' philosophical method, then the equally famous Phenomenology of Spirit is often taken to be its substantive counterpart. The Phenomenology has generated the most diverse interpretations among Hegel scholars. Cutting through this diversiety, Benhabib (op. cit. chs. 2 & 3) proposes that it is best seen as an exercise in the "education of consciousness" as to the true nature of the conscious world. Behind the bifurcations of everyday existence, Spirit (or Geist) asserts itself through the formative activity of human labour. As Hegel (1955: 67) said in his Lectures on the Philosophy of History, "Spirit essentially acts, it makes itself into what it is; an act, its own work; so it becomes its own object, so it has itself an existence before itself". But, Benhabib notes, for Hegel it does so duplicitously. The education of consciousness is thus intended to lead to the recognition of this truth. Benhabib argues that through the discovery of the concept of 'labour' in his so-called 'Jena
period', Hegel finds an anthropological mechanism through which Spirit is actualised in the world. But it is a dissembling actualisation insofar as the standpoint of everyday consciousness must be overcome if knowledge of Spirit's externalised forms is to be recognised as such. This is why Benhabib credits Hegel with the innovation of positing "transsubjectivity" as a viewpoint from which to 'see' the unseen, for *The Phenomenology*, on her reading, shows a phenomenological "we" that the given is nothing other than itself, i.e. Spirit, actualising itself.

It is common to argue that *The Phenomenology* influenced the ontological sensibilities of the early Marx, particularly in the *1844 Manuscripts*. Indeed, Benhabib does just this, showing how Marx transforms Hegel's argument (and that of Feuerbach) materialistically, replacing the categories of Spirit and labour (trans-historically understood) with that of "ensemble of social relations" and the category of "externalisation" with that of "alienation". However, this ontological inversion of Hegelian themes also arguably continued into Marx's later works. This is why, in some considerable detail, Benhabib shows that the mature categories of the 'working class' and 'totality' become structural substitutes for those of 'labour' and *Geist* as they appear in the *Phenomenology*. And like the latter, therefore, she argues that *Capital* ultimately exacts what Adorno once called an "extorted reconciliation", in which the 'overcoming' promised by crisis theory rests on an illusory quest for immediate, transparent and harmonious social existence by a self-activating meta-agent.

This is not as crude or simplisitic a charge as it may seem, for, as I have already suggested, Marx's notion of totality is not a reified one. Indeed, Postone argues that one of Marx's major innovations in his later writings is precisely this recognition that in capitalist societies there is a larger force which, like Spirit, takes on the form of a self-moving substance: a force and substance he describes with the category of 'capital'. As a structure of social relations, capitalism thus faces individuals as a really existing force standing over against them, meaning that Marx's is a profound, rather than naive, transposition of Hegel's
ideas. However, where Postone concurs with Benhabib is in his belief that in focussing so squarely on the working class as a sort of master-subject whose externalisations capitalism is, Marx still ultimately succumbs to the elegant but flawed logic of Hegel's reappropriation model.

Schematic as these comments on Hegel and Marx, they far exceed in detail those offered by Harvey on the Marx-Hegel relation. Virtually nowhere in *The Limits* does Harvey mention Hegel's name and it is only invoked sporadically in his other writings.\(^{20}\) This may immediately to rule out of court any suggestion of a link here, but a lack of citation does not mean a lack of relation. Indeed, if one reads *The Limits* as an exercise in traditional Marxism as I have done, then by implication the Hegelian thematics Benhabib and Postone point too can be seen plausibly to animate its structure and claims. Additionally, in more general terms I have little doubt that Harvey's Marxism owes much to Marx's Hegelian heritage - though in the next Part I shall show that that legacy is far less negative than I have indicated so far - and it is, of course, the case that for many commentators classical Marxism is otherwise known as Hegelian Marxism.\(^{21}\) What this means - crudely - is that, unless another, more positive reading of the Hegelian influence can be put forward, Harvey's Marxism repeats in a late twentieth century register the very same aspirations to omniscience, perspicacity and rational reconciliation which characterised the Enlightenment project of which Hegel was so much a part.

VI. Apologias and Fresh Starts

The view from any one window is flat and lacks perspective. When we move to another window we can see things formerly hidden from view.

David Harvey (1982: 2)

I have put forward a coherent and I think defensible reading of historical-geographical materialism's charter document as a form of 'traditional Marxism'. Deliberately assuming the role of Marxist geography's Left critics, I have offered an internal critique of *The Limits* so interpreted. What is striking is how, in its details, traditional Marxism falls prey
to the various objections critics have raised under the broader banner of 'modern meta-
theory' (and I trust the similarities are by now obvious enough not to need spelling out
further). What this in turn means is that the critique I have offered sustains the critics'
complaints at one of historical-geographical materialism's most accomplished points.
Grounding these complaints in a determinate text, and relating them directly to both Marx
and ultimately Hegel, I have presented a damning case against *The Limits* and one which
seems hard to refute in any straightforward way.

In light of this, three possible reactive strategies suggest themselves. One is to
accept that the 'traditional' reading proposed is broadly correct and to dismiss *The Limits -
and by implication the wider field of historical-geographical materialist inquiry - on this
basis. A second is also to accept the traditional reading, but to defend Harvey precisely on
the grounds to which the critics object. However, a third option - to my mind more
productive than those of outright rejection and blithe acceptance - is to pursue another
reading, not on the understanding that the traditional one is 'wrong', but with the
conviction that it is partial and certainly far from exhaustive. I am, in fact, convinced that
this is the case. While it articulates a very real strand of Harvey's Marxism, when taken in
isolation a traditional reading of *The Limits* arguably obscures as much, if not more, than it
reveals. This is why it must at the least be supplemented by an alternative reading. That
alternative reading, of course, can only be sustained if another problematic lies genuinely
latent in *The Limits* - and indeed the other texts of historical-geographical materialism - to
be teased out and explicated. That such a problematic exists and can be disclosed will be
the burden of the remainder of this thesis.

Markers down this third road have already been layed down by Harvey himself,
though in relation to *The Condition of Postmodernity* rather than *The Limits to Capital.* In
'Postmodern morality plays', Harvey (1992) replies to critics of the book and marshalls a
defense of both his Marxism in general and the specific theses of *The Condition* (see also
Harvey 1993). The essay is significant in that it is, in the classical sense, an *apologia.*
Where, during the 1970s and 80s, Harvey's advocacy of Marxism was confident and offensive, in 'Postmodern morality plays' he is on the defensive, seeking to justify his own critical project. Rather than recapitulate the essay's several arguments, I simply want to draw attention to one of its central themes. Admitting his critics' charges that theory needs to be both situated and alive to non-class and non-capitalist difference and 'otherness', Harvey maintains that one of his main theoretical points in *The Condition* was to show that difference and otherness can only be understood *in relation to the general processes of capital circulation*. Thus, rather than obliterating difference, Harvey (ibid. 310) argues that Marxism elucidates the common frame that "helps identify potential alliances between [otherwise] differentiated social groups". I regard this as a serious and important point. I suggest an understanding of Marxian political-economy less as a critique on behalf of one or other social actor and more as a critique of the processes which *willy-nilly bring those diverse actors into relation* within a common social-systemic frame.

And yet what is interesting about 'Postmodern morality plays' is that these glimpses of genuine insight are compromised by Harvey's reversion to both a rhetoric and substantive claims redolent of an unreconstructed modern Marxism. Thus, at several points, clearly exasperated by his critics, Harvey lapses into coruscating caricature. For instance, exaggerating considerably, he claims that "It is a symptom of the times that resort to the mere phrase 'the world is manifestly more complicated than that' is often treated as a sufficient counter-argument to *any* theoretical proposal ..." (ibid. 311). To these defensive outbursts are also added substantive arguments suggestive of inveterate orthodoxy. For instance, at one point, describing his own work he characterises it as "an alternative subaltern and subversive science situated from the perspective of the proletariat". This is fine, except that nowhere in the essay is there a discussion of how such a science is complicated by *other* subaltern subject-positions and the wider, non-capitalist social relations attached to them. Together, these features install a problematic ambivalence into the heart of the essay which, one suspects, has led critics to feel they are simply being fed
more of the same old, bad old Marxist wine they reject but in a new (even larger) bottle. Alas, this suspicion has arguably been fuelled by Harvey's most recent book which, as I noted in chapter 1, is nothing less than epic in the range of topics it seeks to embrace (see Castree 1997c, 1998b).

How, then, can we build on the non-modern, non-traditional moments of historical-geographical materialism to bring out another problematic, one as powerful, coherent and relevant as it is open-ended and reflexive? It is to this difficult question that I now want to turn.

NOTES

1I borrow this term from Postone (1996: ch. 1) but use it in a more restricted way than him.
2He does so, as I do, in order to contrast his own interpretation of Marx with this 'traditional' reading.
3Or what modern social theory would describe as the perspectives of 'system-' and 'social-integration'.
4In other words, it is what Storper and Walker (1989) call a ‘pseudo-commodity’.
5This 'faithfulness' is even reflected in the prose style of The Limits, which is that of periodic or classical English, and deliberately redolent of Marx's own idiom.
6Though to be fair, this absence of a critical focus on Harvey's invocation of 'science' is due in part to his conspicuous failure to say much of substance about what for him the term actually means. I say much more about this in the next chapter.
7As found, for example, in Harvey's two Paris essays in Consciousness and the Urban Experience.
8In relation to his overall written output Marx wrote surprisingly little on method. Patrick Murray (1988: ch. 8) has suggested why.
9Elsewhere I have also questioned the cognitive and normative dimensions of 'traditional Marxism' as they appear in sociologist Murray Smith's (1994) recent restatement of value theory, Invisible Leviathan - see Castree (1997a) pp. 58-65. What follows repeats many of the points made in this critique of Smith. See also Smith's (1998) reply.
10This, I take it, is one of the things Althusser was really getting at in his infamous claim that the lonely hour of the last instance never comes. As he put it,

"the economic dialectic is never active in the pure state; in History, these instances, the superstructures, etc. - are never seen to step respectfully aside when their work is done or, when the Time comes, as his pure phenomena, to scatter before His Majesty the Economy as he strides along the royal road of the Dialectic. From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes" (1969: 113).

I will say more about this below. For more on the problem of 'disembedding' see Granovetter's (1985) classic paper and the recent reflections by Massey (1997) and Thrift and Olds (1996).
Paul Smith (1988: ch. 1) offers a lucid critique of this limiting of the subject in Marxist theory.

Incidentally, in this Harvey might be said to be impeccably true to some of Marx's own beliefs: favouring neither 'structure' nor 'agency' his overall position amounts to an effective endorsement of Marx's famous claim that people make history but never under conditions of their own choosing; see also Harvey (1987); cf Williams (1988).

This claim has obvious affinities with Mirowski's (1989) brilliant excavation of the metaphorical constitution of substance theories of value, of which he argues Marx's was a late and great example. However, one need not agree with Mirowski that in Marx value is the substance 'conserved', to make the claim that it relies on and articulates a metaphysics of the producing subject, as well as a restrictive conception of 'totality' in which everything seems to be a further form of a prior content.

Just as Marx, in Capital volume 1, offered from the rarefied and desperately particular site of the British Library, a remarkable map of the 'laws of motion' of the entire capitalist mode of production, a system he could not possibly as a single individual 'see', but which he strategically insisted one had to envision as if it could be seen.

Likewise, both Tony Smith (1991) and Chris Arthur (1991), for example, suggest that the dialectic of the value-form in Marx mimics conceptually a capitalist reality in which universal forms do dominate sensuous particulars. In both cases the epistemological moment is effaced and the certainty of the concrete-in-thought affirmed. Aglietta inadvertently captures this position rather well when he claims "in economics, the task of abstraction is possible because a process of homogenisation exists in the reality to be studied" (1979: 38, emphasis added).

For more on the perils of the notion of 'totality' see Martin Jay (1984).

Though in this chapter and the next I will try to make some substantive points about the Hegel-Marx-Harvey connection.

This claim was most famously articulated by V. I. Lenin (1972) when he suggested that one cannot understand Capital without first understanding the whole of Hegel's Science of Logic (1929/1816).

As with The Logic, there has been more than a century of debate over the place of The Phenomenology within the Hegelian system. For a sense of the complexities here see Toews (1993).

The notable exception is Harvey's (1985) 'The spatial fix: Hegel, von Thunen and Marx'.

Perhaps the most outspoken, celebrated and disparaged adumbration of Hegelian Marxism courtesy of Marx's later writings is Lukács' (1971) History and Class Consciousness.

This, of course, because The Condition came in for sustained criticism for its theoretical and argumentative architectonics where The Limits never really did. The reason for this asymmetrical treatment by critics is in part explained by the difficulty and relative inaccessibility of The Limits (usually considered a 'difficult' book in 'economic theory where The Condition was a breezy bestseller in the domain of cultural and economic theory) and by the fact that the intellectual environment prevailing in 1989 (when The Condition was published) was more anti-Marxist than in 1982 (when The Limits was published).
RECLAIMING CAPITALISM

Understanding capitalism has always been a project of the Left, especially within the Marxian tradition.

J-K Gibson-Graham (1996: 1)
INTRODUCTION

... philosophy is conceived, in Lockean fashion, as an underlabourer for science and projects of human emancipation and, in Leibnizian mode, as an analyst and potential critic of conceptual systems and the forms of social life in which they are embedded - as part of the longer-term project of capturing the intellectual high-ground.

Roy Bhaskar (1989a: 2)

My reinterpretation of historical-geographical materialism begins with two chapters of a largely philosophical nature. I mean this in the sense that they are concerned directly with questions of epistemology and ontology. These chapters are absolutely vital to everything which follows, and so I want to explain their place and purpose within the overall design of the argument I present.

To confess an interest in matters 'philosophical' will, no doubt, set off alarm bells in the heads of many geographical readers. For 'philosophy' (usually written with a capital P) is the one discipline whose historic place within the post-Enlightenment academic division of labour has been to pronounce authoritatively on fundamental questions of being and knowing. In other words, epistemological and/or ontological inquiry has traditionally taken the form of what Richard Rorty (1979) has called 'First Philosophy'. As such, philosophical discourse has long been associated with a priori forms of reasoning, with the search for first principles, with the quest for Truth and Certainty, and with the belief that there is an order underlying all the variety and froth of everyday social (and natural) life. It is with good reason, therefore, that such grand philosophising has - both within the discipline of philosophy and without - come in for considerable criticism over the last two decades or so. And it is with good reason too that the arguments of this Part will not be prosecuted in a grand philosophical manner.

Fortunately, the critique of First Philosophy has not evacuated the philosophical enterprise altogether. Instead, it has led to its redefinition. In recent years, two very different redefinitions have stood out with particular prominence. The first is Rorty's (1979) controversial case for an 'edifying philosophy' which, rather than pronouncing on
the nature of being and the foundations of knowledge, merely seeks to "keep the
conversation going". Beginning with his seminal *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*,
Rorty's subsequent books on American pragmatism have both legitimised and fed into a
wider stream of 'conventionalist' philosophy which is today as radically anti-
foundationalist as it is fashionable. The second redefinition is Bhaskar's (1989) powerful
insistence that philosophy is a form of 'underlabouring' on behalf of the existing social
(and natural) sciences. While sharing Rorty's post-foundationalist sensibilities, Bhaskar's
work is emblematic of an anti-conventionalist stream which still seeks to retain a vigorous
and consequential role for philosophical inquiry. While I do not propose to adjudicate
between these two conceptions of philosophy here, it is worth pointing out that for all its
creativity and insight, many commentators have objected to the playfulness and incipient
relativism of Rorty's version of pragmatism. By contrast, Bhaskar's strategy of
circumventing the pitfalls of apodictic and *a priori* reasoning seems to me to be both
defensible and sober insofar as it links itself to those disciplines whose function it is to
make first-order cognitive claims about the world. I have already made mention of this
*a posteriori* mode of philosophising in chapter 1. As I noted there, while I hold no special
brief for Bhaskar's particular version of critical realism,¹ in my opinion his notion of
'underlabouring' brings philosophy down from the heavens and gives it a distinctive and
important role in relation to the contemporary social sciences.²

This distinctiveness and importance is captured well in Bhaskar's (1989a) claim in
*Reclaiming Reality* that his is both a philosophy of and a philosophy for the social
sciences. It is a philosophy of science in the sense that it studies what the social sciences
do and how they do it. But, crucially, it is also a philosophy for social science in the sense
that it may occasionally show scientists that the claims they make about reality and the
ways they study it are not quite what they think they are. Although (to reiterate my earlier
objection) I find Bhaskar's penchant for transcendental argumentation rather too redolent
of the certainties of the First Philosophy he otherwise rejects,³ this dual of/for

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characterisation of underlabouring is an apt one for my purposes. I say this because the two chapters which follow set out to clarify a set of epistemological practices and ontological claims that are for the most part hidden, or lie only implicit, in key texts of historical-geographical materialist inquiry. As such, they constitute an effort of clarification directed at both the advocates of historical-geographical materialism and the critics of Marxism and Marxist geography. And they are thus in some senses an elaboration and/or critique of the self-understanding of certain historical-geographical materialists and of the reading of Marxist geography proffered by their detractors.

All this said, the relevance of epistemological excavations and ontological explorations may not be immediately obvious in a work devoted to reappraising a specific body of political-economic theory concerned with an equally specific social-relational sphere, capitalism. However, it is my belief that an elucidation and reinterpretation of these epistemological and ontological facets is fundamental to generating a radically alternative reading of both the cognitive claims of historical-geographical materialism and the basic nature of capitalism to that suggested by either the general critique of 'modern' Marxist theory or the specific critique of 'traditional Marxism'. As we will see in this and the following Part, it is fundamental to reinterpreting the explanatory-diagnostic side of historical-geographical materialism. And, as we will see in Part III, it is fundamental to reinterpreting its anticipatory-utopian dimensions too.

I begin, in chapter 3, with the theory of knowledge - its limits and possibilities - to be found in David Harvey's work. At first sight this may seem an obscure concern. However, I fully agree with Andrew Sayer (1992: 3) that "thinking about thinking" is an activity routinely neglected in social scientific inquiry and yet one which is vital if such inquiry is to proceed on a fruitful basis. As if to confirm the former claim, neither Harvey nor Smith (nor Swyngedouw nor Merrifield) have devoted much explicit attention to epistemological issues. Instead, the epistemological protocols they draw upon remain largely implicit in their substantive analyses. This, I think, is regrettable, since a more
overt consideration might yield some valuable insights into a set of theoretical practices which combine a deep commitment to critical social explanation with an equally strong commitment to theoretical self-awareness and modesty.

I choose to focus on Harvey's work again for four reasons. First, despite the relative paucity of historical-geographical materialist discussions of epistemology, Harvey has offered the most explicit and sustained comments on such matters. Second, though, because these comments are both allusive and elusive an effort of interpretation is required to render them coherent and clear. Third, Harvey's substantive accounts - especially *The Limits to Capital* - offer a powerful illustration of these knowledge practices in action, as it were. Finally, in focussing on Harvey and *The Limits*, a direct point of comparison can be drawn against the epistemological practices apparently central to 'modern' and 'traditional' Marxism.

To these four general reasons I can add a crucial - and specific - fifth. For it will be my suggestion that more than any other geographer drawing upon the classical Marxist canon, Harvey's political-economy can be read as embodying a productive tension between the twin aspirations of *social scientific accuracy* and *epistemological reflexivity and modesty*. In other words, it occupies a fertile middle ground between the opposed positions of cognitive realism and conventionalism. Moreover, it will my further contention that the middle term which enables this tension to be productive and this middle ground to be fertile is that of *dialectical method*. As I noted earlier, the notion of social 'science' is contentious and has become something of a dirty word in these 'post-prefixed' intellectual times. Likewise, the protean concept of 'dialectics' has long been associated with questionable Marxian practices of the teleological, historicist or determinist variety. However, these facts notwithstanding, I argue that Harvey's persistent and often outspoken articulation of both 'science' and 'dialectics' bespeaks a mode of theoretical practice with serious and sophisticated explanatory-diagnostic pretensions yet which at the same time acts as what Murray (1988: xx) calls "a propadeutic to [knowledge] ..., not its guaranteee".

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This may all sound very arcane, but once the terms 'science' and 'dialectics' are freed of their negative connotations they become visible as disciplined knowledge practices with positive and eminently useful possibilities. In particular, by focussing on the specificity of Harvey's *systematic dialectics*, as I call them, I try to elucidate epistemological protocols worthy of being taken seriously at a time when the cognitive 'power' of critical theory needs defending just as its limits need to be scrupulously detailed. I realise that this argument may seem fit only for the credulous, so associated has Harvey become with theoretical *in*-sensitivity. However, to my mind, neither Harvey nor his critics have spelled out the two-sided epistemology implicit in his work particularly well and so it is my intention to draw out its value and implications as clearly as possible. What emerges is a mode of theoretical practice with meta-theoretical ambition but with little of the unthinking foundationalism, universalism and authoritarianism with which Marxism, classical or otherwise, has become associated.

In chapter 4 I move on from these epistemological concerns to those of social ontology. The order is very important. Usually, ontological considerations precede those of epistemology, reflecting the *a priori* nature of much philosophical exposition. However, following Bhaskar I deal with ontological questions secondly because I seek to establish what capitalism *must* be like if a coherent alternative reading of the core concepts of historical-geographical materialism is to be sustained. In other words, I am taking historical-geographical materialism's status as a first-order theory seriously and attempting to formulate a defensible and different interpretation of the social relations of capitalism to that proposed by the 'modern' or 'traditional' readings.

Following the sequential strategy I proposed in chapter 1, my re-reading of social ontology focusses on the fundamental core of capitalism, namely those social relations and forms captured by the basic categories of the commodity, use-value and exchange-value, concrete- and abstract-labour, value, socially necessary labour time, money and capital. There is nothing especially geographical in this analysis. Rather, this chapter comprises a
reinterpretation of Marx's largely aspatial political-economic account of capitalism as it appears in the work of historical-geographical materialists. However, since this account and its categories are absolutely pivotal to the work of Harvey et al. I think this interpretive effort necessary if that work is to be renewed and reclaimed for a contemporary project of envisioning capitalism. Accordingly, in Part III I will show how this ontological reinterpretation can animate anew the three thematics of the capitalist production of space, nature and the subject.

This reinterpretation focuses on an analysis of the two most full-blooded reconstructions and extensions of Marx's political-economy within the historical-geographical materialist canon, namely The Limits (yet again) and Neil Smith's Uneven Development. Against the conceptions of system (closed totality) and subject (the working class, located in production) that animate traditional Marxism, I suggest that both Harvey's and Smith's readings of Marx contain latent within them a radically different conception of capitalism. I stress 'latent' because this alternative conception can only be teased out with a considerable effort of theoretical labour. In particular, I suggest that a reconsideration of the seemingly innocuous categories of abstract-labour and concrete-labour respectively hold the key to undoing the notions of social-systemic discreteness and of the singular subject. What emerges is what I term an 'ontology of openness' in which capitalism is seen to possess the peculiar qualities of being both structured and yet not sutured, determinate and yet infused by its 'exteriors'.

I have titled this Part 'Reclaiming capitalism' because together chapters 3 and 4 are designed to generate a mutually reinforcing interpretive weight in which capitalism can be reclaimed from the political-economic legerdermain of the Right and also from those critics on the Left who view it restrictively through lenses grounded in a modern reading of Marxism and Marxist geography. As such, the two chapters are also clearly the first stage in my attempt to reclaim historical-geographical materialism.
Before I begin this two-fold reclamation in earnest, I should briefly address a couple of related concerns which arise here. One is that what follows is merely an exercise in Marxology. The second is that a reconsideration of capitalism's core features through a re-reading of Marx's basic categories is irrelevant to contemporary conditions. The first accusation only sticks if the second is true. Capitalism today exists in several modalities, and a good deal of meso-level theory - particularly that of the 'Regulation School' - has been developed to grasp these historically and geographically specific forms. This middle-range scholarship is essential, but it arguably makes little sense if it is uninformed by a more basic understanding of the fundamental relations of capitalism. In this regard, I would suggest that these basic relations remain today much as they have for over a century. This is why abstract political-economic analysis of the sort I engage in here is still relevant and necessary - though, crucially, never sufficient. And this is why creative contemporary appropriations of Marx can avoid the precious or arcane eleucbrations of 'Marxology'.

NOTES
1This is the sometime name of Bhaskar's philosophy of the social, as opposed to natural, sciences. See Collier (1994).
2Although I do not have the space to explore it here, I also think that Habermas's redefinition of philosophy achieves something rather similar.
3Matthew Hannah (unpublished) describes this as Bhaskar's "Ptolemaic streak".
4And I note the similarities here with Etienne Balibar's (1995) recent attempt to philosophise on behalf of Marx's social theory against its detractors and its devotees.
5This even applies to Harvey's most recent book where he attempts - for the first time since Social Justice and the City (1973: 'Conclusions and Reflections') - to explain his epistemology and his ontology through an exposition of dialectics (see Harvey 1996: ch. 2). To my mind this recent attempt at self-explanation suffers from three weaknesses. First, it is pitched at a level of abstraction that makes it appear as if Harvey is engaging in First Philosophy. Second, Harvey manages not to focus on what I regard at his most grounded and sophisticated dialectical/theoretical practices: those in The Limits to Capital. Thirdly, he does not, in my opinion, distinguish clearly enough between epistemological dialectics and ontological dialectics. Of this latter issue more anon.
Abstract- and concrete-labour have long been the subject of debates within Marxian circles, but have received little sustained attention by geographers, Marxist or otherwise.

This claim is, I realise, contentious. However, I do not utter it as an article of faith. It is based, rather, on the judgement that historical-geographical materialism and other contemporary Marxist scholarship in the classical tradition deploys basic concepts which are of a demonstrable explanatory power in making sense of key aspects of our current political-economic existence.

In this regard, it is interesting to note how few contemporary critics of Marxism in all its forms are actually close students of Marx. Moreover, even those who are often regard Marx's work as being only of historical interest. Witness, for example, the following comment by Robert Tucker which he felt at ease making even three decades ago (1967: 235): "Capital ... is an intellectual museum-piece for us now ...".
CHAPTER THREE

THE LIMITS TO THEORY: EPISTEMOLOGY, SCIENCE AND THE DIALECTICAL IMAGINATION

Knowledge, not being separate and independent from reality, can never presume to seek an identity with it. This obsession with certainty fails to understand precisely what such a desire for identity constitutes.


I. Introduction

It matters little whether it is by accident or design. The fact remains that, like Marx himself, those writing within the historical-geographical materialist tradition have devoted very little explicit attention to questions of theoretical method. This applies even to that tradition's most vocal exponent, Harvey. Just as Marx's comments on his mature theoretical practices were confined to a few short pages - namely the famous section on 'method' in the Grundrisse and the tantalising comments on 'science' in the Preface and Afterword to successive German editions of Capital, volume 1 - so Harvey's forays into methodological self-explanation have been few and far between. Aside from some terse comments in the Preface, first chapter and Afterword of The Limits, a short reflection on models and Marx (1989c), and a revealing essay co-authored with Allen Scott (Harvey and Scott [1989]), Harvey's most sustained ruminations on theory, knowledge and epistemology are to be found in the Introduction to The Urban Experience (1989b), an elaboration on Harvey's two shorter Prefaces to his studies in the history and theory of urbanisation (1985a, 1985b).

This Introduction remains an important and ambiguous reference point for comprehending Harvey's mode of theoretical practice. Indeed, in her stinging critique of a text which engages in substantive analysis rather than discussions of method - The Condition of Postmodernity - Rosalyn Deutsche (1991) draws heavily upon Harvey's comments in the Introduction in order to condemn the horse with its own mouth, as it were. The Introduction begins with Harvey describing theoretical work of the kind he has
engaged in these last two decades as a specific 'way of seeing'. Indeed, visual metaphors permeate his discussion and, drawing upon de Certeau (1984), he likens the theoretical way of seeing to that achieved upon ascending to the highest point in a city, contrasting it with the less panoramic perspective to be had in the everyday realm of street-life. "Both perspectives", Harvey (1989b: 1) avers, "are real enough", though he also insists that "there is bound to be a tension between the encompassing vision that meta-theory entails and the rich diversity of urban experience". For Deutsche, however, this tension is maintained unsuccessfully because she argues that it is the 'encompassing vision' of the former which ultimately subsumes the quotidian vision latter. Criticising Harvey's preference for a 'God-like' and 'voyeuristic' view, she sees his meta-theoretical dispositions as a typically masculine search for cognitive mastery supposedly grounded in the reality theory purports to re-present. By thus disavowing the situated and embodied nature of this theoretical practices, Deutsche sees Harvey as falling prey to "imaginary totalisation" and what Guiliana Bruno (1987) calls a cognitive "dream of unity":

Harvey's preferred way of seeing of seeing is not an essential vision possessed by autonomous viewers - there are no such things - but a modernist model of vision, a social visuality, with a function: establishing a binary opposition between subject and object, it renders the subject transcendental, the object inert, and so underpins an entire regime of knowledge as mastery (Deutsche, ibid. 10)

Deutsche's analysis is persuasive and powerful and she succeeds very well in drawing out the 'modernist' (to use her own term), as well as masculinist, thematics of Harvey's self-explanation. But she arguably succeeds too well. So relentless is her search for Harvey's professions of authority, universality and foundationalism, that she arguably misses a series of non-modern thematics also present in the Introduction to The Urban Experience. And this search is made all the more easy when those professions can be hung on the most outspoken and least modest of all Harvey's theoretical writings, The Condition. These non-modern thematics appear in the Introduction at two levels: in Harvey's general
opening remarks on the theoretical endeavour (pp. 1-4, 7-8), and in his specific comments on the Marxist mode of theorising as he understands it (pp. 8-12).

As Deutsche rightly observes, Harvey's general attachment to meta-theoretical inquiry is based on its capacity to act as "a cognitive map ... for finding our way in a complex and changeable environment" (1989b: 2). She is right too that for Harvey theoretical work is all about the search for the logics which order and structure political-economic life. As he (ibid.) says, "Purposeful theory construction ... seeks an ordered and consistent ... map, to improve our understanding and command of daily practices". But if, on their own, these commitments seem too suggestive of modern meta-theory in the pejorative sense Deutsche and others mean, they look rather different when laid alongside Harvey's other general comments on the theoretical endeavour. To begin, Harvey is clear that the theoretical view from on high is informed by but distinct from the equally valid perspective of everyday life. The two perspectives are not the same, which is why theory can never in and of itself offer more than "an interpretive frame" (ibid. 1) within which to locate the flux and complexities of lived existence. But it is for this reason too that theory building - in its distinctiveness as a social practice - for Harvey matters: "[The] ... struggle to make concepts and ways of seeing both plain and hegemonic ... [is] as important as political and social engagement on the barricades. That is why Marx wrote Capital. And that is why the Marxist tradition is so rich in its attachment to writing, theorising and analysing" (ibid. 3).

In the second place, Harvey is also adamant that meta-theoretical inquiry is never innocent nor a simple act of epistemological mimesis. Quoting Bourdieu (1977), he insists that "Knowledge ... does not merely depend 'on the particular standpoint of an observer situated in space and time takes up on the object', but entails a 'much more pernicious alteration'. In withdrawing from action to 'observe it above and from a distance', we constitute 'practical activity as an object of observation and analysis, a representation'" (ibid. 7). The act of 'withdrawal', then, is double-edged, since in allowing us to 'see'
processes and relations otherwise invisible to everyday consciousness, theory is also a re-
presentation, replete with all the risks of misapprehension and distortion that necessarily
attach to such a specific, embodied knowledge practice. Thirdly, notwithstanding Harvey's
concern that theory disclose the logics that give political-economic life its relative
coherence, he is also at pains to note that this cognitive map cannot ever be "entirely
closed". Such finality, he implies, would not only cut theory off from the empirical events
which inform its construction, but would also fail to recollect theory's specificity as but
one - albeit important - knowledge practice and but one cognitive perspective.

Harvey expands on and complicates these general comments with a set of more
specific considerations on the particularity of Marxist theorising as he sees it -
considerations which barely rate a mention in Deutsche's critique. These considerations
revolve around two themes, one subterranean, the other quite explicit: science and
dialectics. The former theme is subterranean because while Harvey quite deliberately uses
the term at several points, nowhere is it explicitly defined. Instead, its meaning emerges
through his description of the Marxist process of theory construction. That process, he
argues, begins with the real, phenomenal forms of daily life, such as commodities. Asking
what makes commodity exchange possible, theory posits a set of non-observable concepts
which step by step explain how those surface forms come to be. In this, theory initially
traces a "path of descent from the complexity of everyday life to a simple set of concrete
representations of the way material life is reproduced" (ibid. 9). However, once these non-
observable concepts are concatenated into an elaborate conceptual apparatus, a path of
ascent is traced "to the point where they can, in Marx's words, come to 'reflect daily life as
in a mirror' (ibid. 10). 'Science', then, is all about a careful process of concept construction
which can grasp (i) real political-economic processes and, particularly, (ii) real but non-
apparent underlying processes. However, precisely because these latter processes are not
phenomenal, traditional empirical 'verification' will hardly do to establish their existence
and effectivity. This is why, thirdly, "proof of the conceptual apparatus lies in the using ..."
and why "explanatory power becomes the central criterion of acceptability" (ibid.) and 'scientific' rectitude.

At first blush, these comments on 'science' seem merely to add weight to Deutsche's suspicions. Science, after all, is routinely associated with exactitude, certainty and all the other baggage of the Enlightenment quest for mastery through knowing. This judgement is, moreover, seemingly confirmed by Harvey's comments on the protean and contested notion of 'dialectics'. For Harvey, dialectics is a "special ... method" (ibid.) and one which bares an essential relation to Marx's and his own aspirations to a scientific political-economy. It consists of a mode of presentation or argumentation in which the contradictions of social forms and relations - like the commodity or class - are exposed and unfolded step by step so that eventually a full picture of the workings of the capitalist mode of production can be achieved. By revealing systematically concepts which makes sense of these contradictions, earlier concepts come to be seen as inadequate and one-sided unless related to the concepts and explanations which succeed them. As such, the dialectic method may indeed be 'special'. However, it seems, nonetheless, to be bound to the quest for correct vision of the 'totality' to which Deutsche objects - and the ill-considered mirror metaphor Harvey borrows from Marx seems merely to substantiate this.¹

And yet, if we look a little closer we see a tantalising set of other comments on 'science' and 'dialectics' which back up and extend the reflexive general comments on theory I introduced above. On the former issue, Harvey seems clear that the concepts he and Marx deploy - whatever their cognitive 'power' - are still "theoretical-abstraction[s]". This recognition appears to instantiate a knowledge-reality distinction which by definition places limits on the capacities of Marxian theory in relation to the political-economic 'reality' it represents. On the latter issue, Harvey also emphasizes that the dialectical mode of argumentation is by its nature "open-ended", perpetually "spinning out new lines of argument" (ibid. 11). It thus acts, as it were, as a theoretical self-regulatory mechanism against premature closure.
If we add together these summary statements of Harvey's about theory, science and dialectics what do they signify? How, if at all, do they reconfigure the modality of theoretical envisioning to which Deutsche objects? How, if at all, do they call into question the foundationalism, universalism and authoritarianism of modern Marxist theory? And how, if at all, do they undo the cognitive immodesty and un reflexivity of traditional Marxism? In the rest of this chapter I propose to answer these questions. And I propose to do so, not through further textual examinations of Harvey's methodological self-explanations, but through a scrutiny and re-reading of his substantive theoretical practice. That practice, I will argue, embodies a three-fold nexus of science, dialectics and epistemological reflexivity which constitutes a highly sophisticated approach to comprehending and envisioning capitalism. I say nexus, because it is the relationality of these three features which in my view is the key; taken in isolation the productive tension between them is simply lost, resulting in one-sided evaluations of Harvey's theoretical endeavour. To my knowledge, no geographer - friendly or hostile - has undertaken such a close reading and exposition of this nexus and its importance. But, then again, neither has Harvey himself. Looking once again at The Limits to Capital, it will be my suggestion that that text most completely exemplifies this triptych at work. In addition, by focussing on this text a second time I can also draw a series of direct contrasts to the epistemological aspects of the traditional reading of the book I proposed in chapter 2.

I begin, however, as I did in the last chapter, with a return to Marx. Again, I do so not merely for the sake of genealogical or biographical interest, but for rather more vital reasons. Over the last decade or so, a number of classically-minded political-economists and philosophers outside geography (to whom I referred briefly in the last chapter) have undertaken a close and sympathetic re-reading of Marx's theoretical method. That method is understood by them as a three-fold nexus of epistemological, scientific and dialectical practices to which I just referred. Collectively, their reinterpretive efforts have demonstrated the remarkable methodological sophistication of Marx's political-economic
writings - a sophistication at odds with the theoretical practices characteristic of traditional Marxism. What is more, these authors have also shown that, far from being responsible for all the ills of traditional Marxism, the influence of Hegel on Marx was arguably a positive one with enduring lessons for Marxian theoretical practice today. This new scholarship, which has barely been registered by both Marxists and non-Marxists in geography, seems to me to be directly relevant to my concerns here: for it will be my contention that the positive reading of Marx's method it offers can help us understand and tease out an equally positive interpretation of Harvey's theoretical practices.

Before I turn to this new scholarship on Marx and then re-read Harvey's mode of theoretical practice in *The Limits* I should say that what follows is dense and demanding. There is, I hope, no deliberate obscurity here on my part. Rather, the arguments possess a complexity which any act of daring simplification on my part would, I think, render null. However, if that complexity can be grasped then what, I hope, emerges is a positive and productive view of Marx's and Harvey's mode of examining capitalist formations.

II. Marx: epistemology, science and dialectics

Marx did not 'say everything' ... because to 'say everything' makes no sense for a scientist. On the contrary, a scientific theory, by definition, always has something else to say ...

Louis Althusser (cited in Resch [1992: i])

The recent work upon which I want to draw in this long section is too vast to be reviewed in any comprehensive way. My intention, therefore, is to examine it selectively in order to bring out the major lines of interpretation. This work is, moreover, hardly of a piece, notwithstanding its common, and largely sympathetic, focus on Marx's political-economy and its largely positive assessment of Hegel's influence. Thus, where some commentators have devoted considerable attention to Marx's epistemology (e.g. Fracchia 1991), others focus more on Marx's notion of science (e.g. Murray 1988), while still others are concerned with Marx's dialectical method (e.g. T. Smith 1990). Few, in other words, convene a discussion of all three issues simultaneously - although Murray and Wilson (1991) come
close. In this respect, while what follows is far from exhaustive, it does at least have the virtue of bringing together these several related reinterpretations of Marx's method in its three-fold aspect.

**Epistemology**

Marx's most famous and explicit comments about his theory of knowledge are to be found in the introductory section to his unpublished preparatory study for *Capital*, the *Grundrisse*. The single section there on 'The method of political economy' contains a wealth of insights into Marx's conception of the possibilities and limits of theory and consequently has been the subject of enormous interpretive controversy ever since the *Grundrisse*'s (belated) publication.4 Putting this controversy to one-side here, I simply want to spell out the logic and appeal of the more recent analyses of these remarkable epistemological ruminations.

(i) *Between idealism and empiricism*

As its title indicates, the method section is ranged against the main body of social inquiry which in Marx's day claimed the mantle of 'science', classical political-economy. But, as an even cursory reading of the section shows, it was also ranged against Hegel and German speculative philosophy. Working on these two fronts simultaneously, it arguably constitutes a profound critique of the *empiricism* of the former and the *idealism* of the latter in order to fashion an original position on the possibilities and limits of knowledge (Wilson 1991: ch. 3). As I indicated in the last chapter, Marx's critique of German - especially Hegelian - idealism was a life-long preoccupation, one quite explicit in his early writings and somewhat less so after the publication of *The German Ideology*. Hegel's philosophical project - conducted in large part as a critique of Kant's - depended on *overcoming* epistemology and the knowledge-reality distinction upon which it rested. As Patrick Murray (1998: 118) argues, this overcoming was achieved by an argument as profound as
it is dubious: "Hegel observes that epistemology rests on a distinction between the way things are in themselves and the way things are for us. He then notes that this distinction is made by thought itself and therefore falls wholly within thought" (final emphasis added).⁵ Against this, Marx makes two points in the Grundrisse. The first is that Hegel conflates thought and the real. In other words, he installs an illicit identity between concepts and objects, mistakes thought abstractions for actualities, and therefore assumes a disembodied position outside and above the social world he studies. As Marx (1973: 101) famously put it, "In this way Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself ... ". Marx's second point against Hegel is that in order to avoid this 'epistemic fallacy', as Bhaskar (1989: 157) calls it, a distinction between thought and real must be reinstated. As he (op. cit.) argues, "The totality as it appears in the head, as a totality of thoughts, is a product of a thinking head, which appropriates the world in the only way it can ... The real subject [though] retains its autonomous existence outside the head just as before ... ". This, as I noted in the last chapter, constitutes Marx's post-Hegelian return to epistemology.

This return brings us to the other subject of Marx's methodological animus: classical political-economy. The works of Smith, Ricardo et al. were among the leading examples of social 'science' in Marx's time and rested on precisely the knowledge-reality distinction he sought to reinstall. His critique, therefore, is not of this distinction per se. On the contrary, the separation of thought and the real means that political-economy's categories are produced in rather than above the social world, a position of which Marx approves. But what Marx does object to is the modality of epistemology that political-economy employs: that of empiricism. In a remarkable indictment of what seems "obviously the scientifically correct method", Marx (ibid.) notes that

It seems correct to begin with the real and the concrete ... thus to begin, in economics, with e.g. the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production. However, on closer examination this proves false. The population is an abstraction if, for example, I leave out
the classes of which it is composed. ... Thus if I were to begin with population this would be a chaotic conception ... the imagined concrete ...

As Wilson (1991: 4) argues, Marx here seems to be criticising political-economy for paying insufficient attention to the difference between thought and the real. By mistaking an 'imagined concrete' for the real itself, political-economy draws conclusions too hastily and neglects the active role of conceptualisation in disclosing reality. Or, to use Bhaskar's (op. cit.) terminology, classical political-economy seems guilty of the 'ontic fallacy', that is, the compulsive determination of thought by a seemingly self-evident reality. In this, at least, Marx agrees with Hegel, for Murray (1988: 113-5) argues that Marx's critique of sense-data empiricism is drawn from Hegel's similar critique as found throughout the virtual entirety of his philosophical writings. As Murray (ibid. 114) puts it, for Hegel "empiricism becomes its own opponent - dogmatic metaphysics. While rushing to the facts, ... empiricism thoughtlessly treads on the categories it uses to 'scientifically' appropriate the[m] ...".

And yet, despite this Hegelian insight, it is here that Marx's critique of both idealism and empiricism come together: for there is clearly an elective affinity between the two approaches. As Resnick and Wolff (1987: 44) put it, "empiricism, when pushed to defend itself, can and often does collapse into [idealism] ... and vice versa". In both cases, the distinction between knowledge and reality is undermined and the specificity of the former in relation to the latter underplayed. Against this, it is arguable that in his Grundrisse comments, Marx is seeking a subtle middle position that can address both the epistemic and ontic fallacies. The implication of his critical points is that knowledge - what Bhaskar (op. cit. 127) calls the 'transitive dimension' - is and should be about a social world with an existence and relative permanence distinct from and irreducible to the thinking subject - what Bhaskar (ibid.) calls the 'intransitive dimension' - even as that subject and their knowledge is part of the reality studied but by definition non-identical with it.
This position amounts to a sophisticated reconfiguration of idealism and empiricism through which Marx redefines the possibilities and limits of thought and theory. It also contests the traditional reading of Marx in which he simply turns Hegel 'right side up' while still remaining stuck within the metaphysical enclosures of the latter's transcendental search for absolute knowledge. On the contrary, Marx's critique of Hegel and idealism constitutes what Fracchia (1991: 163) calls a "reduction in the power of thought". But on the other hand, Marx's anti-empiricism draws attention to the distinctiveness and cognitive importance of careful and self-conscious conceptualisation. The resulting epistemological position is well captured in Wilson's (op. cit. 27) re-reading of Marx's methodological dispositions:

The question of thought's authority therefore compels us to come to terms with what it must be relative to reality, once we have acknowledged that it is not and can never be coterminous with reality. Its authority must lie in what it can achieve when it sees its task as one which includes constituting the object of disciplined ... study in the interests of practice, but without any capacity independent of itself to intervene in events.

(ii) Abstraction, knowledge and concretion

This reflexive and both/and epistemology is further concretised by Marx in the Grundrisse method section in his preoccupation with the specific question of abstraction. This question of thought-abstraction must, I hasten to add, be distinguished from that of real-abstraction to which I referred towards the end of the previous chapter and which I will make much more of in chapter 4. As I think Bertell Ollman (1993: ch. 2) is right to argue, all of Marx's late political-economic writings reveal an extraordinary attention to the nature and logic of thought-abstractions in relation to their subject matter, capitalism. As Marx (1973: 101) put it in the Grundrisse:

The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as ... a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for
observation [Anschauung] and conception. Along the first path the full conception was evaporated to yield an abstract determination; along the second, the abstract determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought.

This complex passage contains several important claims. First, Marx recognises that social reality - the 'concrete' - is synthetic and complex, consisting of multiple, intertwined elements and relations. Second, following from Marx's specific reinstatement of epistemology, he indicates that the analyst cannot grasp that concrete reality as such. In Oilman's (op. cit. 24) words, "Our minds can no more swallow the world whole at one sitting than can our stomachs." This, in the third place, is why abstraction is both necessary and unavoidable. The term 'abstract' comes from the Latin abstrahere, meaning 'to pull from'. As Marx later famously put it in the first German Preface to Capital, "In the analysis of economic forms ... neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both". As the tool of thought, abstraction is thus vital in grasping social life, both its logics and its complexities: for any form of inquiry simply must cut into social reality in some way or other in order to isolate and then relate its constituent parts. In this light, Marx's objections to Hegelian idealism and classical political-economy are not that the one is too abstract and the other too concrete, but that both imposed erroneous and ill-considered abstractions onto their subject matter. In other words, far from being an enemy of abstraction and a friend of empirical facts (presumed not be abstractions), Marx is arguably implying that abstractions "must take shape according to the specificity of th[eir] ... object[s] ..." (Murray 1988: 113).

This commitment to abstraction may seem strange. After all, Marx's well known claims that 'being determines consciousness' and that historical-materialism begins with the 'real premises', those of 'living individuals', seem to indicate an aversion to abstraction. But this only applies if abstraction is understood in the conventional sense as meaning the non-specific, general, and non-empirical. However, in the passage quoted above Marx seems to give the lie to this belief by distinguishing two senses of 'concrete'. The first, the concrete-
real, is, as he says, 'the point of departure in reality' for disciplined inquiry. But we can only understand this concrete-real, he continues, after a 'process of thinking' which 'reproduces the concrete by way of thought'. True to his epistemological protocols, then, this 'thought-concrete' becomes the specific goal of inquiry and the medium through which the real is necessarily comprehended. It shows how the various elements of a specific domain of social reality - such as the domain of relations Marx named 'capitalism' - come together in practice to constitute that domain as a structured and relatively enduring entity. And it means that not only is abstraction ineffable, but that it is the concatenation of abstractions which matter if the concrete-real is to be properly apprehended.

Some commentators have taken these two definitions of the concrete to mean that because it is not the same as the concrete-real, Marx's theory - the concrete-in-thought - is necessarily a self-enclosed cognitive system incapable of 'verification'. Thus, for example, we see Resnick and Wolff (1987: 6) pushing this argument to almost ludicrous limits in their claim that "For Marxian theory, validations occur within theories as they subject various statements to their differing criteria of truth" (emphasis added). I say ludicrous because while at one level correct, this argument threatens to make Marx's political-economy a mere conventionalism, as divorced from social reality as the Hegelian idealism Marx so strongly dissented from. Yet one does not have to believe in the naive idea that theories can be tested against an 'external' reality, and nor does one have to give up the argument that different theories - like Marx's and those of the classical economists - see the same social world very differently, to agree with Bhaskar's (1989: 32-3) important claim that those theories are still about "a domain of real objects or relations existing and acting [relatively] independently of their description ...."

Despite (or because of) Marx's apparent belief that it is not possible not to abstract - and that knowledge and the real are not the same - it is clear in the passage above that for him 'the force of abstraction' has an absolutely essential world-disclosing function. This, Patrick Murray (op. cit. chs. 9 & 10) argues, is why Marx pays such close attention in his
Grundrisse comments on method to the nature and the order of abstractions. This attention is already signalled in Marx's objection to the use of 'population' as a starting point in classical political-economy. Beginning with such falsely concrete concepts, Marx (1973: 100) goes on, the method of political-economy is to derive a series of "ever thinner abstractions until [it] ... arrive[s] ... at the simplest determinations. From there the journey would have to be retraced until ... [one] finally arrived at ... population again, but this time not as the chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations". This statement has caused great difficulties of interpretation because Marx regards the latter procedure as "scientifically correct". This seems to indicate that Marx concurrs with political-economy's path of descent from the concrete to the abstract and then ascent from the abstract to the concrete - even though he is otherwise highly critical of Smith et al.'s method. However, Wilson (op. cit. ch. 3), has cogently argued that while Marx does indeed deem this two-stage approach 'correct', he finds the classical economists' particular use of it deeply flawed by virtue of the abstractions derived along the path of 'descent'. Beginning from a misconceived starting point, 'population', political-economy searches for ever more basic abstractions which together supposedly explain and underpin the gyrations of political-economic life.

The problems here, as several recent commentators show, are four-fold. First, these abstractions are 'chaotic'. As Sayer (1992) and others have explained, what this means is that they fail to identify a meaningful component of political-economic life. Instead, they describe an incoherent entity by slicing up reality into poorly thought out conceptual boxes. Second, these abstractions are also 'thin'. What this means is that they are what Richard Johnson (1982: 166) calls 'abstract abstractions' or what Murray (1988: 121) terms 'general abstractions'. They are, in other words, relatively simple. In and of themselves they are not so much incorrect, as of little use in capturing the complexity and specificity of particular forms of social life. Marx's key example here is 'production', which he describes as a "rational abstraction". But it is also, he adds, an abstraction which is nevertheless thin in
that it applies to all epochs. Third, these abstractions are 'analytic' rather than synthetic. This may sound oxymoronic since Marx (op. cit. 101) readily concedes that all abstractions are, by their very nature, "one-sided". However, it is also the case for Marx that, if reality is a 'concentration of many determinations', then these abstractions can never be free standing and discrete but must always be internally related (on this see Ollman op. cit.). Finally, the abstractions of the classical school are also problematic in that they are historically 'indeterminate'. Against this, Marx implies that political-economic categories must be what Murray (ibid.) calls 'determinate abstractions'. These abstractions are more 'concrete' in that they are more historically grounded and more complex. In this respect, Marx particularly criticises the classical school's use of the key concept of 'labour'. An apparently simple and general abstraction which both Ricardo and Smith place at the centre of their analyses, for Marx (op. cit. 105) it "achieves practical truth ... only as a category of the most modem society". Put differently, for Marx classical political-economy paralogistically misuses abstractions, confusing the general and the determinate, and presenting them in such an order that the end point of analysis - the concrete-in-thought - amounts to a fundamental misapprehension of the concrete-real.

Science

If this particular interpretation (which is, of course, not the only interpretation) of Marx's epistemological predilections is a defensible one, then it suggests a peculiarly sophisticated mode of theoretical practice in which the cognitive 'power' of thought is deemed vital and consequential, in which the importance of careful and considered abstraction strongly emphasised, and yet in which the specificity and limits of thought are soberly recognised. More importantly, as we shall now see, this interpretation feeds into a rather different view of Marx's commitment to social 'science' than the one which would seem to follow if 'science' is understood in the conventional and pejorative sense advocates of post-prefixed critical theories would doubtless hold to. Let me elaborate.
As I noted above, while Marx deliberately and repeatedly invoked the term in his political-economic writings, nowhere did he offer a sustained consideration of what for him 'science' meant. Although it clearly signified a disciplined form of intellectual inquiry into the 'real' nature of social life, beyond this very general definition - common the all versions of science - Marx said little of substance. This definitional stinginess has allowed quite diverse interpretations of Marx's 'scientific' commitments to be put forward. The most common and simplistic - exemplified in the traditional reading I elaborated in chapter 1 - is that 'science' is a mode of knowledge productive of the Truth. Picking up on Marx's famous phrase about the 'luminous summits of science' from Capital 1, some have suggested that for him science constituted a privileged form of inquiry which enables the analyst to see with clarity and perspicacity how social life 'really' hangs together (see, e.g., Crook [1990]). This rather negative view seems further confirmed by a second strand of interpretation which has picked up on another of Marx's famously pithy references to science: that "if everything were as it appeared on the surface" then there would "be no need for science". Again, there seems here to be an almost arrogant claim to truth, wherein only science can penetrate to the 'real' nature of the social world and see what lies behind the phenomenal forms we daily encounter. In both cases, science appears to exist as a pre-eminent way of seeing (and I stress the optical metaphor), evincing little epistemological reflexivity or cognitive modesty.

And yet, I think I have also said enough by way of an interpretation of Marx's epistemological commitments to call this absolutist view of 'science' into question. So why, then, did Marx insist on using the term in his later works? Murray (1988) has suggested an interesting answer. In his close study of Marx's Theory of Scientific Knowledge, Murray argues that Marx redefines the common-place notion of science as accurate and reliable knowledge of social reality. This embodies two moments. On the one hand, Marx seeks to put knowledge, and specifically political-economic theory, on a more secure footing in order to increase the accuracy and reliability of cognitive categories. But on the other hand,
his reflexive epistemological commitments mean that science is necessary but never sufficient for comprehending social life.¹⁰

(i) Theory, appearances and underlying relations

The question of putting theoretical categories on a more secure footing permits a fuller understanding of Marx's seemingly arrogant claim that one of the distinguishing features of science is to penetrate 'surface appearances' from the privileged perspective of its 'luminous summits'. This arrogance becomes seeming, Murray (ibid. ch. 11) argues, once it is realised that for Marx penetrating surface appearances is actually very difficult because those appearances - like the commodity - are both real and materially efficacious. Hence Marx's other famous comment in volume 1 that "there is no royal road to science". Murray's interpretation suggests that analyses which are based on a too ready acceptance of and abstraction from phenomenal forms - like empiricist classical political-economy - are for Marx ill-founded and mis-directed. For phenomenal forms are, in and of themselves, insufficient and lead to only partial or one-sided understandings of political-economic life.

This is why, as I noted in my traditional reading of the explanatory-diagnostic side of Marx's political-economy, he posits a set of concepts which can grasp the non-observable relations behind surface forms. And this is also why, Murray (ibid. ch. 12) argues, Marx's begins Capital with the commodity, a phenomenal form, in order to show how such forms are as real as they are dissembling of the larger social reality they are part of. However, this in turn means that demonstrating that concepts like value, abstract-labour, socially necessary labour time etc. actually do capture real relations becomes extremely problematic: for these relations are, as I observed in chapter 2, ontologically real but really invisible. Thus, for example, empirical research on the predominant model of post-18th century science - positivism - would leave us none the wiser about these relations because they are not, in and of themselves, empirically visible.¹¹ In other words, the
seemingly rational way to demonstrate theory's veracity - empirical verification - would not in fact serve its purpose.

While this may seem to cast his theory adrift, Murray argues that Marx sought an alternative - and powerful - way to establish that the non-observable relations identified by concepts like value did have a real existence and far reaching social systemic efficacy. This alternative way is signalled in Marx's critique of the classical school's 'best representative', Ricardo. In Marx's estimation Ricardo, unlike Adam Smith, succeeded in penetrating behind appearances insofar as he identified labour time as the essence of value. However, this notwithstanding, the problem is that Ricardo "starts out from the determination of the value-magnitude of the commodity through labour-time, and then investigates whether the remaining economic relations, categories, contradict this determination of value ..." (Marx 1968: 164). In other words, Ricardo divorces appearances from the essential relations behind them. What this means is that the inner relations are established only by theoretical fiat; their existence cannot be demonstrated.

Murray (1988: ch. 11) instructively compares this critique of Ricardo with Hegel's critique of Descartes's (1960) thought-experiment concerning the bit of wax turned blob in his Meditations On First Philosophy. Asking how we know the wax to be the same thing after its sensuous appearance has been altered by heat, Descartes's answer is that primary qualities (extension, flexibility, mass) underlie appearances (touch, colour, shape). However, in his Science of Logic, Hegel (1929) takes Descartes to task for sloppy thinking. In particular, his objection is that Descartes' primary qualities are only intuitively derived: quite why these qualities show have these appearances is not asked. Against this, Hegel (1969: 479) argues that if the wax has two different appearances before and after being melted, and if primary qualities do indeed underlie these appearances, then those qualities "must appear". In other words, there must be an essential, rather than arbitrary relationship, between the two. But, crucially, because appearances are not the same as underlying qualities, for Hegel those qualities must appear as something other than than themselves.
If all this sounds ludicrously abstruse, then Murray renders its meaning clearer by returning the discussion to Ricardo and Marx's value theory. Like Ricardo, the first movement of Marx's value analysis in *Capital* volume 1 consists of asking what otherwise different commodities must have in common if they to be exchangeable and from this deriving the common dimension, 'value'. There is, as Murray (op. cit. 148) notes, nothing different in this from Descartes' strategy of reducing secondary to primary qualities. However, what, Murray continues, distinguishes Marx's value analytics is a second movement back from the hidden 'essence', value, to 'appearances', commodities. This second movement is particularly clear, Murray argues, in Marx's discussion of money. For what this discussion shows is that money *actualises value*. That is, in the absence of such a 'universal' expression of value, value simply could not exist. Money thus becomes the form *through which* value appears, even though money itself is not the same as value (see also Murray 1993).

What this amounts to, in Murray's estimation, is a considered response to both the weaknesses of empiricism and the real difficulties of establishing the existence of non-observable relations. By carefully demonstrating the *necessity* of money, Marx shows through rigorous conceptual reasoning that value must be actualised phenomenally if its ghost-like existence is to be maintained as a real force within capitalist societies.\textsuperscript{12}

(ii) Grand science, diminutive science

On Murray's reading, then, Marx puts political-economy on a stronger 'scientific' footing by negotiating the antinomies of empiricism and idealism and taking seriously the cognitive power of carefully developed abstractions. Because the fundamental relations of capitalism are not phenomenally visible, science is distinguished as a disciplined attempt to conceptually grasp these relations and show how they are essentially, rather than accidentally, related to 'surface appearances'. However, if this seems to commit Marx one-sidedly to a premature quest for certainty - those 'luminous summits of science' - then this
desire is arguably tempered by Marx's epistemological assessment of his political-economic work. For it is also Murray's (1988: xx) belief that Marx's late work is a *propadeutic* to science, not its guarantee.

On the reading of Marx's *Grundrisse* comments on method offered above, I suggested that Marx acknowledges an epistemological dilemma attaching to theoretical work of the kind he undertook in his later writing. The dilemma is this: "historical materialist science must necessarily utilise the tools of thought in order to ... [comprehend] reality, while knowing simultaneously that those tools necessarily abstract from its concrete diversity" (Fracchia *op. cit.* 163). This dilemma arguably underlines both the potential and the limits of Marx's scientific aspirations. On the one hand, the power of abstraction is exactly the tool through which the logic of political-economic life is elucidated. Without this tool, theory could not distinguish the incidental from the essential or the irrelevant from the relevant. But this is also what marks out the limits to theory. For not only is it non-identical with the real, but it is also an abstraction from its concrete-diversity. This is particularly clear, so argues Fracchia (*ibid.* 171), in Marx's major published political-economic work, volume 1 of *Capital*:

Rather than posit the conceptual presentation as that of the real, Marx defined its epistemological value in the limited terms of an 'abstract presentation of the essential'. The purely conceptual presentation temporally abstracts from the real existing, but 'contingent', elements which do not correspond to the concept of capital in order to construct a model of how the capitalist mode of production ... functions.

Of course, as I noted previously, it has been rightly argued that one should not take volume 1 in isolation from volumes 2 and 3 and from *Theories of Surplus Value*. When placed in relation to these other writings, it is suggested, Marx's aspirations were the exorbitant ones of reproducing the concrete-real 'in thought' as the 'totality' of really existing capitalism is presented. I quite agree that *Capital* 1 cannot stand alone, and that Marx did not intend it should. But I also think that even when these writings are taken into account, Fracchia's
point still holds good: that Marx's was an abstract anatomisation of capitalism from the position of the thinker-observer whose strengths - namely, the political-economic logic it allows the reader to 'see' - are also its limits - namely, its incapacity to be absolutely synonymous with that which it studies. To be sure, it was an anatomisation sufficiently grounded to capture the specificity of capitalism's essential relations and dynamics. And it is true too that in volume 1 Marx sought to link it to concrete struggles over the working day. But for all the additional facets of capitalism elaborated in the three volumes after *Capital* 1, they together still amount to a study of mode of production, not of social formation. As such, they deliberately abstract from the concrete-real in all manner of ways which may hide perhaps as much as they reveal. This is why Murray, like Fracchia, believes that Marx's political-economy redefines social 'science' as an asymptotic enterprise - notwithstanding Marx's self-declared aim in the *Grundrisse* to reproduce the concrete by way of thought. And this is why the cognitive accuracy and exhaustiveness Marx aspires to are counterbalanced by their strict impossibility - rather like the line that continually approaches a curve without ever quite meeting it.

**Dialectics**

Together, then, it is possible to read both Marx's epistemology and his commitment to 'science' as a complementary redefinition of the limits and possibilities of theory in general, and political-economic theory in particular. If the recent arguments of Fracchia, Murray, Wilson and others are defensible (which I think they are), then it follows that Marx's later work can be read as seeking to maintain a productive tension between cognitive accuracy and explanatory power on the one side, and epistemological modesty and non-exhaustiveness on the other. And it is this tension which brings me to the third focus of the recent sympathetic re-readings of Marx's political-economy: dialectics.

Even more so than 'science', Marx's invocation of the term 'dialectics' has long aroused suspicion and generated interpretive confusion. It is, as Bhaskar (1989: 115) is
right to say, "possibly the most contentious topic in Marxist thought". Much of the suspicion over dialectics has, one suspects, arisen from a basic failure to explain its meaning and purpose within Marx's corpus. As McCarney (1990: 7) notes, "there is, it must be admitted, something in the charge that the friends of dialectical have tended to use it as a magic formula who invocation can settle outstanding questions by itself". In addition, much of the interpretive confusion over dialectics has also arisen from the sheer number of contrasting readings put forward by twentieth century Marxists. From Lukács chiliastic notion of a 'historical dialectic' in the 1920s, to Adorno's mid-century 'negative dialectics', to Althusser dazzling excursus 'On the materialist dialectic' in the 1960s, dialectics has been a protean and contested conceptual terrain. The upshot, alas, has been that today dialectics is routinely regarded as double-speak - witness, for example, the attempts of analytical Marxists (e.g. Elster 1990) to vanquish the term from the Marxist lexicon altogether - which should be consigned to intellectual history.¹³

This conclusion is, however, premature. Indeed, in light of it, a number of recent attempts to carefully specify the later Marx's understanding of dialectics have restored some much needed clarity to the debate. Sensing that many important insights may have been lost behind the myriad confusions over dialectics, the works of Ollman (1993) and T. Smith (1990; 1993a) in particular amount to a powerful attempt to alter existing understandings of the meaning and value of dialectics for social scientific inquiry.¹⁴ For these authors, dialectics is not some talismanic mantra. Instead, it is a vital and clearly intelligible aspect of Marx's political-economic theory of capitalism. This has two basic dimensions. On the one hand, Marx's dialectics are seen as ontological. That is, for Marx capitalism is a society in structured motion, the generative motor of change being a constellation of contradictions between internally related parts of that society as a totality. On the other hand, though, Marx's dialectics are also seen as being methodological. Here, dialectics are conceived as a way of thinking about and of organising and presenting capitalist reality in thought. While both senses of dialectics are important (and I shall say
more about the former in the next chapter), it is the latter sense that recent authors have emphasised. Specifically, it is dialectics as a distinctive method of presentation which is seen to actualise Marx's epistemological protocols and his commitment to a 'scientific' political-economy.

This delimitation of dialectics as a particular method of presentation is already signalled by Marx himself in his discussions of volume 1 of Capital. The arguments of volume 1, as I noted earlier, are spelled out in exacting and rigorous terms. Commenting in the Afterword to the second German edition on the criticism of the book as overly 'German-dialectical', Marx distinguished the 'method of presentation' from the 'method of inquiry'. The latter, he argues, has "to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connexion." However, inquiry is not the same as exposition because, Marx goes on, it is "Only after this work is done, ... [that] the actual movement [can] be described" (Marx 1992: xxvii, italics added). This 'description of the actual movement' is what Marx calls explicitly the "dialectical method" (ibid.).

Interestingly, this specification of dialectics as method links dialectics directly to Marx's basic epistemological precepts. If we refer back to the discussion of method in the Grundrisse, Marx's inquiry-presentation distinction in the Afterword to Capital clearly recapitulates in a different register the reality-knowledge distinction found there. Further, if the method of presentation is one of unfolding categories or abstractions in order to describe the actual movement of capitalism, then dialectics must at some level partake of the epistemological modesty demanded by the non-identity of thought and the real and the fact that theory is always an abstraction from that reality.

If dialectics is thereby intimately connected to his epistemology, Marx also ties it directly to his understanding of 'science'. Again, criticism of volume 1 of Capital provides the occasion for Marx's commentary, as he bemoans the general failure of critics to understand his value theory: "all that palaver about the necessity of proving the concept of
value comes from complete ignorance of both the subject dealt with and of scientific method" (Marx and Engels 1955: 208). Here Marx's complaint is that the step by step - or dialectical - method in which he unfolds the concepts to explain labour value are *not* - as the critics insist on reading them - synonymous with the reality they represent. To suppose that the concepts presented at the start of the analysis are final and exhaustive representations is, he goes on, "to present the science *before* science". Instead, Marx insists, "The science consists in demonstrating *how* the law of value asserts itself" (ibid. 209).

What do these intriguing comments mean? And how does dialectics actualise Marx's dual commitment to scientific accuracy and explanation and cognitive sobriety? The recent readings put forward by Ollman and Smith provide an answer.

(i) **Dialectics: disclosing and explaining capitalism**

According to Tony Smith (1990), in his magisterial *The Logic of Marx's Capital*, Marx's method in his political-economy is what he calls 'systematic dialectics'. What he means by this is that Marx's mode of presentation is one in which the argument advances by means of positing concepts whose contradictions then provide the impetus for putting forward further concepts. Thus, for example, in volume 1 Marx begins with the commodity, only to decompose it into use-value and exchange-value, the contradiction between which leads him to posit value as a dimension intrinsic to capitalist commodities. It is this device of propelling the argument forward through the exploration of contradiction which, Smith argues, makes Marx's method distinctively *dialectical*. What, he further argues, makes it *systematic* is that concepts are derived *necessarily* from the contradictions inherent in the concepts with precede them. In this way, the analysis moves forward in a non-arbitrary manner such that later concepts in the argument are related in a logical and exacting manner to the earlier concepts with which the analysis begins.
In light of this, the criticism Marx faced that volume 1 was overly 'German-dialectical' can be seen to have arisen from two sources. First, that the argument seems to be what Marx (ibid.) called a "mere a priori construction" with little relation to capitalist reality. Second, and relatedly, even though Marx begins Capital with a real social form, the commodity, his initial move behind this 'surface form' to disclose value and abstract labour appeared to critics as no more than a 'mental construct' derived by means of logical deduction alone. Both criticisms, as the subtitle of Smith's book - Responses to Hegelian Criticisms - indicates, were in turn designed to emphasise the specifically Hegelian provenance of Marx's dialectical method.

There is little doubt about this Hegelian influence. Notwithstanding his attempts to distance himself from Hegel in the Afterword to Capital, Marx is nonetheless explicit that it was Hegel who first presented dialectics in "a comprehensive and conscious manner" (Marx 1992: xxvii). Furthermore, in an earlier letter to Engels, Marx proclaimed that "In the method of treatment ... Hegel's Logic has been of great service to me" (Marx and Engels, quoted in Mattick 1993: 115). However, as I have tried to argue in the preceding sections on epistemology and science, it is possible to read Marx's borrowings from Hegel as positive and productive rather than - as has long been the case and as I deliberately read them in chapter 2 - simply disabling.

This can be seen in relation to the two complaints cited above. In his reconstruction of the filiations between Capital and the Logic, Smith concedes that the early chapters of volume 1 of the former do indeed read like an idealist dialectic of concepts. In addition, he also registers the ancillary complaint that tracing out the contradictions inherent in these concepts in a systematic manner - however rigorously undertaken - can seemingly tell us little about capitalist reality. However, Smith's response is that the real problem here is the way Capital has been read by its critics. In particular, critics have wrongly assumed that the concepts and contradictions unfolded in the early chapters of volume 1 are supposed to map straightforwardly onto a reality they purportedly represent.
Oilman's (1993) *Dialectical Investigations* puts a useful gloss on this. Oilman argues that the 'common-sense' mode of reading is overly 'analytical'. In other words, it is a mode of reading whose taken-for-granted supposition is that concepts represent discrete bits of reality which they disclose exhaustively. Against this, he argues that Marx must be read 'synthetically'. Oilman, picking up on Marx's use of 'thought-abstractions', argues that for him capitalist reality is synthetic - the 'concentration of many determinations' - then theory must respect that imbricated reality. The problem, however, is that because thought must necessarily abstract from that reality, the concepts deployed to represent it can only ever form partial representations in and of themselves.

This is where Hegelian dialectical logic becomes useful. For it is Smith's claim it is this logic which, precisely, allows Marx to represent capitalism in the *simultaneous* way he desires. This has two aspects. First, Smith argues, Hegel's *Logic* is *not* one in which the early concepts laid out form the firm bedrock for later concepts. Rather, because all the concepts are one-sided perspectives on the world, it is their *inter-relations* which are their most important feature. What this is effect means is that it is only at the *end* of the *Logic* that the concepts laid out at the *start* can be fully understood. Second, the logic of contradiction is useful here because it offers a rigorous device through which Hegel can *link* the various concepts he unfolds - rather than do so in a arbitrary way. Likewise, Smith tries to show that the beginning of Capital 1 *appears* like a logic of concepts because - at this early stage in the analysis - those concepts lack content and complexity. However, because Marx's is a materialist reinscription of Hegelian dialectics, Smith argues that the cognitive content of these concepts only becomes fully apparent at the end of *Capital*, when Marx has worked through all of the other aspects of capitalist political-economy. In this light, Marx's use of the logical device of contradiction to spin out his arguments is not intended to suggest that capitalist reality is contradictory in the order that the concepts are unfolded. Instead, it is simply that - a logical device - which Marx uses to coherently drive
the analysis forward. And, again, the use of this device indicates Marx's desire to establish the non-identity of thought and the real.\textsuperscript{15}

And yet this device, \textit{despite} this non-identity, is also vital to grasping the nature of capitalism. This brings Smith to the second complaint against \textit{Capital} 1's 'German-dialectical' heritage: that unobservable entities like value are simply 'mental constructions' derived by Marx by logic alone. Again, Smith concedes that at first glance such a complaint seems plausible. However, he continues, it also ignores two things. First, that value and other non-observable processes cannot be fully understood until the end of the three volumes of \textit{Capital} (the point made above). But second, that precisely \textit{because} such processes are not phenomenally visible, dialectical logic is in fact a legitimate way of showing that they must exist.

This returns me to the comments made in preceding sub-section on science and 'essences' and 'appearances'. The two-stage critique of Ricardo's value theory I put forward there - borrowing from Murray - indicated how Marx used dialectical logic to establish the reality of those processes we otherwise cannot see. And he did so, as Murray's reading shows, by demonstrating why those processes must appear - but as something other than themselves: namely, as commodities, money and so forth. In this sense, then, dialectical logic has in indispensable role to play in Marx's analysis, not as a mere logic of concepts, but as the theoretical means for actively \textit{disclosing} the non-observable reality animating capitalism's pervasive phenomenal forms.

(ii) Dialectics: the openness of theory

Of course, all this said, it might still be argued that - whatever its distinctiveness as a method of theoretical representation - Marx's systematic dialectics nonetheless shares with conventional 'bourgeois' modes of presentation the same aspirations to cognitive completeness. In this view, Marx uses dialectics to reveal more and more concepts which add more and more dimensions to our understanding of capitalism, culminating in the
concrete-in-thought which assumes an identity with the concrete-real. However, I have already queried this assumption of completeness and identity on general epistemological grounds, and Marx's dialectical method - as Smith and Ollman read it - does not in its own right subvert the reflexive epistemological protocols he arguably develops in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. But in addition to this important general point, Marx's dialectical method can also be seen to be specifically and intrinsically *open-ended*.

Although Ollman does not especially stress this, Smith's (1990, 1993a) acute analysis certainly does. For him, the device of unfolding key concepts through the exploration of how those concepts address the contradictions of earlier concepts effectively serves both a cognitive/explanatory purpose, but also an *auto-critical purpose*. The former I addressed in the sub-section immediately above, where the logic of necessity drives the presentation forward coherently. But at the same time, Smith argues that the three volumes of *Capital* are an exercise in showing that capitalism can never be exhaustively analysed because there are always *additional* perspectives on it to build-in to the concepts already developed. Systematic dialectics is, Smith insists, important here because it is, by its very nature, a perpetually open-ended mode of presentation in which contradiction rather than consistency ensures that the analysis is restless and ongoing rather than finished and decided. Thus, for example, far from being a stable and certain bedrock for what follows, the concept of value as Marx lays it out in volume 1 is perpetually *modified* as other aspects of a changing and evolving capitalist system are taken into account by Marx.16

**III. Harvey: epistemology, science and dialectics**

Marx, too, rarely wrote in straight lines ...

R. S. Neale (1985: v)

Together, these subtle re-readings of Marx's epistemological protocols, his understanding of political-economic 'science' and his interpretation of dialectics strongly contest the negative view of Marxist theoretical practice put forward in both the modern and traditional readings. Against the modern reading, Marx's political-economic theorising
emerges as a sophisticated both/and approach which is situated, even as it dares to make general claims about capitalism, and which abjures cognitive authoritarianism, even as it insists on the cognitive value of the concepts it puts forward. And against the more specific traditional reading, Marx's theoretical practices emerge as non-identical with the political-economic world they investigate, even as they insist on the importance of theory in both explaining and making visible the social relations constitutive of that world. Put differently, Marx's theoretical practices can be seen to powerfully envision capitalism, but to do so in a two-sided way in which a commitment to cognitive accuracy and explanation is strongly affirmed while the specificity of theoretical envisioning as very particular knowledge (and social) practice is soberly recognised. The overall effect, it seems to me, is that Marx's political-economy can be plausibly read as envisioning the space economy is something like the reflexive way advocated by Buck-Morss (above pp. 18-20). That is, it actively makes seen a capitalist economy which is not phenomenally visible without an effort of theoretical labour, but does so in a way that reflexively recognises the constructedness and partiality of that envisioning.

In the remainder - and second part - of this chapter I want to argue that the three-fold nexus of epistemology-science-dialectics which makes this reflexive mode of envisioning possible can arguably be identified within Harvey's political-economic theorising. The re-reading of Marx's method I have put forward above will, I hope, have already enabled the reader to make more productive sense of Harvey's comments on method with which I began this chapter. Now, however, I want to turn to Harvey's actual theoretical practices, rather than his discussion of them, to suggest how The Limits to Capital envisions capitalism as powerfully as it does reflexively. In this way, it is possible to put flesh on the bones of Harvey's general comments on method and to tease out their non-modern, non-traditional meanings. And in this way too I can show how Harvey can be read as broadly following Marx's epistemology, 'scientific' practices and dialectical approach as I have presented them above.
Of course, there is always the risk of interpretive imposition on my part - and this applies as much to this chapter as it does to the rest of this thesis. But my point will be not that Harvey understands his own epistemology in exactly the way I describe it - after all, if he did there would be no need for me to write these words. Rather, I am trying to tease out consistently and coherently the non-modern, non-traditional moments that lie sometimes obvious, but mostly obscure in his work. In this sense, I am putting a rather better gloss on his theoretical practices than he has himself. But if this shows those practices to be worthwhile and informative then so much the better.

IV. The practice of meta-theory: re-reading The Limits

I prefer to let the methods of both enquiry and presentation speak for themselves ...  
David Harvey (1982: xv)

Clues to an alternative reading of Harvey's theoretical practices are already found in The Limits' Introduction. There it is possible to see Harvey identifying a certain tension between the explanatory and world-disclosing capacities of theory and the limitations imposed by its specificity and non-identity with the world it makes sense of and abstracts from. Moreover, it also seems that systematic dialectics is the key to actualising this tension and so putting Marx's epistemological and scientific protocols into practice:

At each step in the formulation of the theory, we encounter ... configurations of internal and external contradiction. The resolution of each merely provokes the formulation of new contradictions or their translation onto some fresh terrain. The argument can spin outwards ... in this way to encompass every aspect of the capitalist mode of production. For example, Marx opens Capital with the idea that the ... commodity is simultaneously a use-value and an exchange-value, and that the two forms of value necessarily oppose each other. This opposition ... achieves its external expression in the separation between commodities in general (use-values) and money (the pure representation of exchange-value) ... And so the argument proceeds to encompass ... [other] contradictory dynamics (Harvey 1982: xvi).

Here, dialectical method is clearly central to both disclosing and explaining capitalist political-economy in a 'scientific' way. Echoing his comments in the Introduction to The
Urban Experience, Harvey here talks about a real, complex object of study (the capitalist mode of production), about the connection between underlying processes (e.g. value) and 'surface appearances' (e.g. commodities, money), and about the necessary linkages between the latter two in terms of dialectical contradictions. Further, he also recognises that, if 'the science is not to come before the science', then the special mode of presentation that is systematic dialectics is necessary: "the difficulty is to come up with a mode of presentation ... that does not do a violation to the content of the thoughts expressed" (ibid. xv).

However, at the same time, Harvey also seems to acknowledge that his aspirations to cognitive accuracy are as limited as they are enabled by the theoretical means he uses to achieve that accuracy. The Limits is, he fully acknowledges, "an abstract conception" (ibid. xiv). While this usefully permits Harvey to abstract away from all the contingencies of daily political-economic life to reveal the wider and non-apparent processes structuring it (a 'map' of capitalism as a 'mode of production'), it also marks out its insufficiency and non-identity with the world it studies. Dialectical method, it appears, is also central here, as its impulse to explore contradictions means that Marx's - and by implication Harvey's - work "totally belies ... closure" (ibid. 446). Dialectics - aside from its world-disclosing and explanatory function - thus also acts as a check on those disclosing and explanatory ambitions.

Let me now pursue these various comments by offering an example of dialectical logic in The Limits - the dialectic of the value form from commodities to money (deliberately excluding the question of labour for now) - which, I show, Harvey unfolds in terms of dialectical explanation, dialectical presentation, and dialectical open-endedness. I use this limited example for illustrative purposes. But I also use it because to say more at this stage would be to overly pre-empt the ontological concerns and claims of the following chapter.

The dialectic of the value form: from commodities to money
i) Exchange-value and value

As I observed in chapter 1, the opening chapter of *The Limits* contains a highly condensed reconstruction of Marx's unfolding of the basic categories of his analysis of capitalism, namely the development of the value-form from commodities to money to capital, as found in *Capital* volume 1. That reconstruction is replete with instances of "ruthless application of dialectical ... reasoning", so claims Harvey (ibid. 38), who talks of Marx's dialectic as a "logical device" (ibid. xvi), and it thus offers a seemingly impeccable source for an examination of his use of Marx's dialectical reasoning. For reasons of space and in the interests of a careful exposition, I will take just one dialectical transition of the value-form, that from commodities to money (captured in Harvey *ibid.* 1-13). This will inevitably involve some repetition of concepts introduced in chapter 2. The point, however, is to appreciate their order and their inter-relations, as well as their avowed cognitive limits.

Harvey's analysis, following Marx, begins with a real social form perceivable by everyday consciousness: the commodity. On this phenomenal basis the initial argument is strikingly simple. In relation to prevailing social wants and needs, the specific use-value quality of individual commodities underpins the impulse of economic agents to associate through the exchange of commodities: there is, after all, no conceivable point in exchanging for the same good. This implies that commodities share a capacity to be exchanged, that is, they possess an exchange-value. This dual determination, Harvey (ibid. xvi) argues, therefore insinuates a contradiction into the heart of the commodity-body. For, as use-values, commodities are incommensurable, yet within capitalist societies they are routinely exchanged. The question thus becomes: under what conditions are different commodities made commensurable and thus exchangeable? Or, phrased in more systematic terms, what social forms are necessarily precipitated by the contradiction between use-value and exchange-value? Harvey's answer, pace Marx, is that in exchange commodities must embody a "social substance common to them all ... ", that substance being "Value ..." (Marx quoted in Harvey *ibid.* 14).
Like Marx, Harvey passes over this initial derivation of value very quickly by simply abstracting from use-values and asking what two otherwise incommensurable commodities could have in common. While this logical derivation seems to suggest that value does exist, it does not get beyond mere suggestiveness. On the one hand, in an exchange of equal weights of two different commodities (e.g. 10kg of iron and 10kg of corn) one is not exchanging for 10, but 10 something, in spite of the qualitative differences between iron and corn. This strongly suggests a dimension intrinsic to both commodities yet distinguishable from their material appearance as immediately different. However, at this stage, such an argument is quite inadequate on its own, for two reasons. First, it does not demonstrate that value has any real existence within capitalist societies. This is the criticism that value is merely a postulate: a formal, ahistorical deduction from given premises. Second, it does not demonstrate that all commodities must embody value and hence be universally commensurable on this value basis.\footnote{18}

In terms of Harvey's presentation so far, these concerns carry some force. The further development of the argument, therefore, must attempt to show that value does indeed inhere in all exchanged commodities and thus does have real existence: the science, he insists after Marx, consists in demonstrating "how the law of value asserts itself" (Marx, quoted in Harvey \textit{ibid.} 38). As Chris Arthur (\textit{op cit.}) puts it:

the further presentation, although it seems to assume that we already know value exists, is really an exploration of its conditions of existence through the development of more concrete concepts, which will eventually provide grounds to set aside scepticism and at least vindicate a research programme based on value.

This brings us to dialectical logic. For how is Harvey to show that value has a real and universal existence within capitalist societies? I believe that for Harvey the imperatives of systematic dialectics answer that question. Harvey's tack, after Marx, is to show us, dialectically, "how, why, and by what means a commodity becomes money" (Marx, quoted in Harvey \textit{ibid.} 10) because it is money in its capitalist form that materially \textit{realises} value.
a) Simple or isolated form

\[(\text{corn}) \quad A \rightarrow B \quad \text{(iron)} \]
relative/ relative/
equivalent equivalent

b) Total or expanded form

\[(A \rightarrow B) \quad (\text{corn}) \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow \ldots \]
relative equivalent
form "looks to" form

c) General form ("reversal" of Total form)

\[(B \rightarrow A) \quad (\text{corn}) \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow \ldots \]
relative "universal"
equivalent


d) Money form (money takes on role of corn)

\[(A \rightarrow M) \quad (\text{corn}) \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow \ldots \]
social universal
price equivalent

**Figure 1:** The dialectic of value forms
ii) Money and value

In *Capital* 1, Marx argues that a simple (barter) exchange of two commodities is 'insufficient' to establish explicitly the contradiction within the commodity between use-value and exchange-value, that is, to give value a real existence (Figure 1). This is because the exchange can be read in either direction: each particular commodity's value is expressed relative to the other particular commodity-body, which serves as its equivalent. From the perspective of the owner of commodity x the commodity y is x's value equivalent. At the same time, however, from the perspective of the owner of commodity y the commodity x is y's equivalent. Hence, for Marx, value is immanent but not articulated, the value character of each commodity being visible only in the particular use-value body of the other, and contingent upon each unique act of barter. Accordingly, Marx moves to a discussion of a fuller relative form of value, the expanded form, in which a single commodity finds its value-equivalents in an array of different commodities (Harvey *op. cit.* 11). The very number of these expressions seems to indicate that there is some magnitude present throughout the series of exchanges of different commodities which is indifferent to the use-value nature of the each of them and of the particular relative body. Yet once again, value has no articulated existence because each transaction is, in theory, particular, and thus commodities need bear no necessary or common relation to one another. The 'solution' to this insufficiency, however, is, from the perspective of dialectical logic, implicit in this expanded form. Hence Marx introduces a 'fuller' form, the general form, in which the single commodity now becomes the general equivalent for all the others. Asking the crucial question of whether such a general equivalent exists in practice leads Marx to a focus upon the money-form, of which, Harvey (*ibid.* 11) claims, the simpler forms are the "germ". To the question, "What form of exchange relation could actualise a determination that is posited as identical in each commodity, yet subsists only through the mediation of a different commodity against which it exchanges?" (Arthur *ibid.* 79, emphasis added), that
is, value, the answer for Harvey is exchange mediated by money. Let me elaborate on the ways money answers this complex question from Harvey's dialectical perspective.

First, given the contradiction at the heart of the commodity, money 'resolves' that contradiction. It does so because its acts as a universal equivalent. It solves the problem of making all commodities commensurable because it brings them all in practice within the same universe (of value) (Harvey *ibid.* 11-12). Second, given the inability to facilitate stable and extended exchange through the simple and extended relative and equivalent forms of value, money 'overcomes' that insufficiency. It does so because it is able to express what commodities have in common while circumventing the imbrication of that commonality within the specific bodies of different commodities by being set apart from them. It is thus the 'external' re-presentation of value and of the capacity of commodities to be exchanged. In Harvey's (*ibid.* 11) words "the growth of exchange and the emergence of a money commodity therefore necessarily go hand in hand". Third, it follows that for Harvey money actualises value as a real social dimension. For only when the commonality of commodities is effectively expressed in practice - that is, through the universal equivalent - can value be said to exist (Harvey *ibid.* 16). Value is a virtual dimension: its actuality is only posited through money. The actuality of value and its expression thus develop simultaneously: when we exchange commodities "we imply the existence of value ... without being aware of it" (Marx, quoted in Harvey *ibid.* 17). Or, in Arthur's (*op. cit.* 80, emphasis added) words, money "articulates explicitly the value dimension we found necessary to secure the independent status of commodities from the idiosyncrasies of their owners". 20

**Dialectical explanation**

If, in light of this example, I am correct that Harvey deploys systematic dialectics to examine capitalism critically within a materialist framework, then we can ask what makes
it specifically dialectical, specifically systematic, and thus distinctive when compared to 'common-sense' modes of explanation?

Dialectical logic, as I have presented it, is not an inductive method that generalises laws of phenomena from perceived instances. Neither is it a deductive-nomological method inferring from an axiom a result already partly contained in the premises. It is, rather, a _logical development of a system of categories, from the most simple and indeterminate to the most rich and concrete, by virtue of the contradictory imperatives of each successive form_. The results are thus not contained in the premises because later categories are necessarily richer in content (or what Marx called 'determinations') than those which precede them. But this is precisely the key to dialectical logic:

the impulse to move from one category to the next is the insufficiency of the existing stage to prevail against the contingencies to which it is subject. Upon examination, it is seen that the form under consideration is not able to sustain itself on its own basis; it depends on conditions of existence that seem contingent, such that it could easily vanish. The movement of thought is thus from the conditioned to the unconditioned ... (but each) stage ... in turn is found insufficient. (Arthur _op. cit._ 67)

Or, more schematically,

Category 1: Social form —> Necessary structural tendency re. —> Category 2: New social form
dependent social agents

Here, given the contradictions of a social form defined by Category 1, social agents acting within that form will tend to behave in such a way that the social form defined by Category 2 would come about (Smith 1993a: 19-20). Hence, in the example of the value-form, we saw that in order for value to have an articulated existence some means of overcoming the limitations of the simple, expanded and general forms must be found, i.e. money.
As I argued in my discussion of Marx above, what makes this logic specifically dialectical is that it is a logic of internal contradiction. And what makes this logic specifically systematic is that the 'insufficiency' of each social form ineluctably propels the analysis forward to seek more sufficient forms that deal with the prior contradictions. Indeed, the language of 'necessity' peppers the argument of The Limits where Harvey talks of dialectical logic in very similar terms to Smith, Arthur and other recent commentators on Marx's systematic dialectics: "the method ... is to unravel the constraints ... step by step, to see contradictions of this or that form as containing the seeds of other contradictions that require further exploration ... (the) ruthless application of dialectical modes of reasoning ... (is) just as tough and rigorous as any mathematical formalism" (Harvey op. cit. 38).

While this is hardly the only possible method for disclosing and explaining capitalism's core features, it is the very systematicity of this 'rigorous ... formalism' which, for Harvey, allows those features to be examined in a coherent, non-arbitrary and non-contingent way - and which thereby makes dialectical explanation so valuable.

Dialectical (re-)presentation

So far so good. Except we may be forgiven for wondering what such a logic of internal explanation could possibly tell us about real societies. As I noted in my reading of Marx's dialectics, at this stage it seems to be a neat, but ultimately redundant, device of pure thought since there is no apparent reason why such an logic should be particularly suited to illuminating actual capitalist relations.

From one perspective this seems to be a valid charge. If, as Harvey claims, Marx's dialectical procedure is a reproduction in thought of real social processes, we ought (ought we not?) to be able to identify those processes within societies past and present as the argument unfolds before us. This supposition has been common among critics and friends of Marx alike. For example, it was the basis of Sweezy's (1968) once influential notion of "successive approximations". Here the 'insufficient' stages (the simple, expanded and
general value-forms) are supposed to correspond to earlier, less sophisticated historical forms of economic commerce. Yet, as many authors have discovered, the historical record does not bear out the reality of these earlier forms in any compelling sense, and so Marx's argument seems flawed. Until, that is, we consider his (1973: 107) insistence that, "it would ... be unfeasible and wrong to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive". If this is so, exactly what social practices do the simple and abstract concepts with which Harvey begins (use-value, exchange-value, value, etc.) represent? If these concepts, as they are thrown at us initially, seem to possess no real historical content, then does not Harvey present a logic of concepts posited *a priori* after all? In the *Grundrisse*, Marx (ibid. 151) was already aware of this possible misunderstanding: "It will be necessary later to ... correct the idealist manner of the presentation, which makes it seem as if it were merely a matter of conceptual determinations and the(ir) dialectics". Likewise, Harvey (ibid. 1) feels it necessary to make plain that in his presentation of key concepts like value

> there is a certain difficulty. To understand the concepts fully requires that we understand the inner logic of capitalism itself. Since we cannot possibly have that understanding at the outset, we are forced to use the concepts without knowing precisely what they mean ... We are forced to grope in the dark, armed with highly abstract and seemingly *a priori* concepts we have little understanding of, working from perspectives we are not yet in a position to evaluate.

How are we to understand this seemingly strange admission?

Harvey follows Marx directly by distinguishing the mode of inquiry from the dialectical "method of exposition in *Capital* - the method I have tried to replicate" (Harvey, 1982, 38). The former, recall, "has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development and to track down their inner connection. Only after this work has been done can the real movement be appropriately presented" (Marx 1992: xxvii). The argument here, as Harvey (*op. cit.* 1, 38) interprets it, is that the mode of presentation comes *after* the complex web of capitalist processes has been comprehended.
It has thus already been concluded - albeit provisionally - through the process of inquiry that capitalism is a complex, internally related system. The task, then, is to represent in thought how that system operates. What makes the mode of presentation distinctive (and difficult to comprehend), is that the meaning and reality of the processes designated by concepts offered at the outset of the analysis can only be fully understood when the analysis is concluded. In Harvey's (ibid. 1) words, "we begin with what is in effect a conclusion". Because for Harvey capitalism is seen as an assemblage of multiple, interrelated processes which are operating simultaneously, a mode of presentation has to be found that will "preserve the focus ... on a particular aspect of the whole ... while keeping the relation to everything else broadly in view" (ibid. xv). The argument, therefore, should not "be construed as ... linear ... in spite of the linearity of the flow" ibid.). For example, Harvey tells us on the first page of *The Limits* that the commodity is the material embodiment of use-value, exchange-value and value. But as the dialectic of the value-form revealed, value and exchange-value can only be understood as aspects of the commodity after Harvey has gone on to discuss the effects of extended exchange through the medium of money. Similarly, in the rest of *The Limits* Harvey goes on to show that money (and value) make no sense outside their relation to and actualisation of abstract-labour, socially necessary labour time, surplus-value, capital, exploitation and so on.

The point, then, is that having already concluded all this through the method of inquiry, the *method of presentation* can be seen as a demonstration of *all of the social conditions, processes and interrelations necessary for all this to be true*. This seems the most coherent way to interpret Harvey's (ibid. xv) procedure of beginning "with the simplest [thought] abstractions that Marx proposed and then seek(ing) to expand their meaning through consideration of them in different contexts", if those simple abstractions are not intended to designate preceding historically existent social forms. Those abstractions (e.g. exchange-value, value) are only 'simple' and seemingly ahistorical at the beginning of the analysis because *at that stage* they are short on determinations, for their
relation to other aspects of capitalism has not as yet been disclosed: their simplicity is not ontological but theoretical. As Arthur (op. cit. 69) instructively notes, "the starting point itself is inadequate and hence provides for movement because it has been abstracted from the whole and the presentation is thus impelled to reconstruct the whole precisely through negating the starting point." The analysis thus moves on. However, when read back through the entirety of the theoretical argument (i.e. after more relations have been explored and dialectically developed), those apparently simple concepts turn out to be exceedingly complex by virtue of the fact that their existence and meaning is dependent upon their internal relations with a myriad of other processes within the mode of production. It is thus only at the end of analysis, by holding in view simultaneously all aspects of the theoretical compages, that the categories make sense and only then that the realities they represent become clear. So it is that Harvey (ibid. 38) argues, quoting Marx, dialectical presentation entails showing "how value is put upon things, processes and even human beings".

Following Marx, Harvey's systematic dialectics is, then, really a two-way street. On the one hand, dialectical logic propels the argument forward, from 'simple' to more complex concepts, as I have shown. But, in addition, it also necessarily causes the reader to look backward at where we have come from, to add determinations to preceding concepts. This is precisely because later stages of the argument are necessary parts of those which preceded them. This is, I think, what Harvey (ibid. 2, emphasis added) is getting at in his rendering of Marx's "dialectical way of proceeding" as a successive movement between different 'windows' through which "we can see things that were formerly hidden from view. Armed with that knowledge we can ... reconstitute our understanding of what we saw through the first window, giving it greater depth and perspective." If this is granted, then it follows that Harvey's dialectical method presumes a mode of reading that is equally dialectical in manner. Harvey's critics have not always appreciated this and, in reading him as offering a series of rigid and sequential theses (e.g. value theory) which form the
unassailable foundation of everything that follows, have committed what, for Harvey, must surely be seen as an act of interpretive violence.

*Dialectics: resisting theory's sutures*

On this reading, then, Harvey deploys systematic dialectics as a means of both disclosing and explaining the core relations of capitalism. However, at this point the same potential objection I raised to Marx's systematic dialectics arises: that Harvey's dialectical method is - notwithstanding its differences from 'conventional' representational forms - still basically an attempt to grasp definitively and exhaustively in thought its object, capitalism. If this were to be the case then, as I noted in my traditional reading of *The Limits*, not only would the specificity of theoretical work be overlooked but the non-identity of theory and its objects falsely sacrificed for a supposed monism in which the thought-reality distinction is totally collapsed.

There is, of course, absolutely no doubt that Harvey's intention in *The Limits* is to describe and explain capitalism. But I would argue that equal attention be paid to his frank admission that the theoretical categories he unfolds are just that - theoretical categories - which precisely because they abstract from the complexity and contingency of the world are as illuminating as they are limited. Closing *The Limits*, he (*ibid.* 450, emphasis added) says of political-economic theory:

> We cannot, by this means, hope to explain everything there is, nor even procure a full understanding of singular events. *These are not the tasks which theory should address.* The aim, rather, is to create frameworks for understanding, an elaborated conceptual apparatus with which to grasp the most significant relationships at work within the intricate dynamics of social transformation.

Harvey here seems to suggest a creative tension between theory's powerful cognitive role and its humble specificity. Just as careful theory building is able, by nature of being theory, to disclose 'the most significant relationships at work', it is also by nature incapable of mimicking or mirroring the real. Put differently, because theory is part of but not
synonymous with the world it investigates, that world always exceeds the grasp of the abstractions and concepts used to grasp it.

Harvey adds substance to this claim by suggesting a second reason why his dialectic of categories is epistemologically modest rather than absolute: because it is, by its nature, necessarily open-ended. On this he (ibid. 446, emphasis added) is quite explicit:

The dialectical mode of thinking, at least as I construe it, precludes closure of the argument at any particular point. The intriguing configurations of ... contradictions ... force the argument to spin onwards and outwards to all manner of new terrain. The opening of new questions to be answered, new paths of enquiry to take, provokes simultaneously the re-evaluation of basic concepts - such as value - and the perpetual re-casting of the conceptual apparatus used to describe the world.

On this reading, dialectics is therefore an inherently open, speculative and, as it were, self-critical mode of reasoning because of its systematic impulse to continually explore antinomies. Indeed, the three parts of The Limits are linked by this exploratory impulse. As such, it is in Harvey's eyes a counterbalance, so to speak, to the desire for identity and cognitive closure characteristic of so many other non-Marxian inquiries into capitalist political-economy.

V. Reflexive vision, asymptotic meta-theory

... abandoning old certainties does not necessarily entail the whole-hearted embrace of relativism. Linda McDowell (1995: 282)

My general intent has been to offer an alternative reading of Harvey's theoretical practices to that suggested by the modern or traditional interpretations. Beginning with recent work on Marx's epistemology, scientific predilections and dialectical method, I have approached these practices in light of this new work. The resulting reading of Harvey is, I hope, both defensible and responsible insofar as it is grounded in a close examination of his most accomplished text in theoretical political-economy. This does not make it the only or the correct reading, of course, but it is one which, I think, is productive. Specifically, by highlighting his dialectical method, I have tried to offer a window onto Harvey's
commitment to a 'scientific' political-economy and his equal commitment to epistemological self-awareness and reflexivity. Together, this triptych of systematic dialectics, science and non-mimetic epistemology constitute a heretofore largely unnoted and yet powerful basis for political-economic inquiry. By way of a conclusion to this chapter I want to spell this out by returning briefly to the themes of envisioning and meta-theory which I made so much of in the introductory chapter.

On both the traditional reading I offered in chapter 2 and the alternative reading I have put forward in this chapter, *The Limits to Capital* - indeed, I would argue, all of Harvey's work on political-economy - is an explicit attempt to envision the capitalist space economy. Moreover, it is an envisioning with specifically meta-theoretical intent insofar as its insights are intended to escape the site of their production and make claims on others, claims whose guarantor is the very generality of the processes they so powerfully disclose. However, it is here that the differences between the traditional and my alternative reading become important: because each represents a rather different modality of envisioning and of meta-theoretical practice. Where the one is omniscient and Archimedean, the other is aware that envisioning is an achievement: an act (and I stress *act*) of disclosure made possible by careful abstraction and theory building. Likewise, where one is supposedly founded in a reality identical to it, authorised by this identity, and universalising in accordance with the universality of capital, the other is meta-theoretical in the reflexive sense of abjuring foundationalism, authoritarianism and universalism, without denying that it is nonetheless founded, possessed of a certain cognitive authority and capable of extending its insights beyond the local horizon of their construction. I am, of course, drawing out the distinctions rather too sharply, but the basic points, I think, remain.

In sum, then, I am arguing that Harvey's Marxism contains a both/and form of theoretical practice. Neither an absolutism nor a free-floating conventionalism, it is in my estimation a sober, sensible and powerful response to the challenges of radical political-economic inquiry. Or, to return to Bhaskar's useful terminology, on my reading Harvey
circumvents the 'ontic' and 'epistemic' fallacies to fashion a distinctive position in which
the power of and the limits to theory are emphasised in equal measure. There is, I think,
much to learn from here. Indeed, there is perhaps something for Harvey himself to learn in
the sense that he has thus far not brought out clearly and consistently the protocols I have
adumbrated in this chapter. Above all, we are now in a position to approach the basic
ontological forms of historical-geographical materialism's object - 'capitalism' - without
fear that those forms need be necessarily disclosed in the modern or traditional ways to
which critics have so rightly objected.

NOTES

1 I say 'ill-considered' because Rorty (1979) has famously latched onto the mirror metaphor in order to
question the whole project of post-eighteenth century Euro-American epistemology.
2 There have, of course, been sporadic explorations of Marx's dialectics in geography - in either their
'original' form or as used by geographers (e.g. Peet and Lyons [1981]) - and of Marx's theoretical method
(e.g. Gibson and Horvath 1983). However, in recent years there has been a marked dearth of careful
analyses of how both of these are articulated in specific Marxist geographical works. This is one reason why
much of the recent criticism of Marxist geography has, in my opinion, more often than not been
insufficiently in-depth and discriminating.
3 The interested reader is therefore encouraged to explore it further by using my comments here as a
bibliographic guide and resource.
4 See, for example, the sharply contrasting interpretations of Wilson (1991), Rancière (1976) and Echeverría
(1978).
5 And I note here the frequently brilliant return of this challenging argument in the works of Derrida and
those drawing upon his work. Of the latter, Tim Mitchell's (1988) Colonising Egypt is especially noteworthy.
For Mitchell, the knowledge-reality distinction is a peculiarly Western metaphysic and a tool of colonial
power. By separating the world into two - objects and their re-presentations - Mitchell shows how the Anglo-
French authorities in early twentieth century North Africa were able to construct self-confirming
representations of the Other which, in quite material ways, facilitated the project of European colonial
expansion and violence.
6 Resnick and Wolff actually use the term 'rationalism' instead of idealism, but the two are, I think, essentially
synonymous insofar as for them rationalism designates "a process of theory which holds it to be the means
capable of expressing the conceptual essence of reality" (1987: 9).
7 This, of course, is one of the rocks on which Althusserian Marxism foundered and the worry many Marxists
have about the 'post-structural turn' in cultural studies, literary studies, sociology and even economic theory.
However, not all post-structural arguments shade so easily into a latter day idealism and their best exponents - like Gayatri Spivak - show how they can make a subtle and productive contribution to our understanding of Marx's political-economy. On this see Castree (1997a).

There are, it must be admitted, serious difficulties in operationalising a seemingly plausible claim like this. While one wants to hold on to the idea that some concepts are more cognitively accurate than others, there is no apodictic way of *demonstrating* this superiority and others' conceptions may be not so much chaotic as simply a different way of looking at the same thing. Philosophers of science have spent decades banging their heads against this issue of verisimilitude between competing categories.

For a survey of Marx's (and his epigones') different uses of the term 'science' see Farr (1994).

It is as well to admit at the outset that there are two notable gaps in what follows. First, the following discussion says little about the actual *practice* of nineteenth century social and natural science and Marx's relation to it. Second, the discussion also says little about Marx's indebtedness to the *natural science* model of science specifically. In mitigation, the reason is because very little exists by way of commentary of either issue within the existing corpus of studies on Marx.

And this is why Marx cannot, as some would have us believe be seen as a critical but "garden variety positivist" (Murray 1988: xv).

Derek Sayer (1979), following Hanson, calls this form of reasoning from appearances to essences and back again 'retroduction'.

For perhaps the best short history and explication of the history of dialectics in Marxist thought see Bhaskar (1989: ch. 7).

See also the excellent collection edited by Fred Moseley (1993).

There is in fact a more complex debate here about Marx's dialectical method and the way he starts *Capital*. Moseley (1993: 'Introduction') usefully outlines the several prevailing - and quite contrasting - interpretations of the cognitive status of the concepts presented in the early chapters of volume 1.

Smith (1993b) has also penned a recent and accessible general explication and defence of dialectical reasoning, one which 'takes on' both analytical logic and the incipient conventionalism of postmodern/structural/colonial thought.

I will assume that the reader has at least some basic familiarity with the concepts that follow (use-value, exchange-value and value), and also with some other Marxian concepts to which they are related (e.g. abstract labour; socially necessary labour time; labour power, etc.). Note that, following Arthur (1993), my account proceeds without any initial reference to *labour* values, thus departing from Marx who, in Arthur's opinion, introduces them too soon into his dialectical analysis. This is not, I hasten to add, an implicit rejection of Marx's labour theory of value. On the contrary, I deliberately hold a consideration of labour in abeyance in order not to anticipate too much the arguments I put forward in chapter 4.

These charges have been levelled in three ways. First, there seems to be no reason why one commodity should not simply be selected as the external numeraire in terms of which the exchange values of all other commodities are presented (e.g. gold). This commodity can be a measure of other commodities without
those other commodities embodying some intrinsic value. Indeed, this seems to correspond to capitalist
societies where money is, apparently, nothing but such a numeraire, and so we must surely agree with Bailey
(1967: 72) that value is simply a "scholastic invention". However, this objection still supposes that all
commodities are in some sense equivalent. To say that all commodities are measured in, for example, money
terms, does not tell us why, nor does it tell us what it is about money in particular that permits it to undertake
this universalising exchange function. This leads to a second objection value by way of a solution to this
problem. Neo-classical economists, notably Boehm-Bawerk (1973), argued that what makes commodities
commensurable, and what money represents, is their 'utility'. The exchange process is explained in terms of
exchangers commensurating different commodities in terms of the satisfaction they bring. There is, then,
once again no need to invoke a value intrinsic to all commodities. This argument has been bolstered by a
third. Cutler et al. (1977) have argued while it is necessary for both parties to agree to the terms of an
exchange, there is no necessity for this to entail reduction to a common element. Commodity exchange can
simply be the product of conjunctural, external relations (e.g. an elemental act of barter where the goods are
exchanged according to purely individual whims of the two parties), or it can de differentiated into several
types of non-value based exchange (e.g. gift-giving; unpaid labour).

19 A favourite term of Hegel's in The Science of Logic.
20 Another way of thinking about what distinguishes value as an immanent dimension of commodities is to
compare it with what it is seemingly analogous too: weight and length. Just as different objects can be
compared on the same scale because of their intrinsic weight and length, so value would seem to be a similar
common measure. However, it is quite different precisely insofar as weight and length inhere in
commodities - regardless of whether humans have created the concepts of weight and length and
standardised measures for them - while value only exists after and by virtue of different use-values being
brought into an equivalent relation. This is the point Marx makes in painstaking detail in section three of the
first chapter of Capital.

21 This in one sense obviously turns around Althusser's (1969) estimation of Marx as a theorist of
'overdetermination' by resituating his 'vertical' ontological argument concerning 'levels' along a more
'horizontal' (although I do not think linear) epistemological axis.
22 I adapt this diagram from Smith (1993a: 19).
23 Likewise, Smith (1993a: 19-20) claims that, "Hegel's systematic social theory has to do with claims of
necessity in this sense".
24 Not all commentators sympathetic with Marx's arguments concerning value and money have considered
them to be instances of dialectical reasoning. Most notably, Carling (1986) has offered a lucid case that they
are based on conventional logic.
25 For instance, with regard to my reconstruction of the value-form in its monetary incarnation, even though
the money-form of value was seen to be more complex than the simple or expanded relative forms, money
ultimately cannot be understood outside its relations with abstract-labour, socially necessary labour-time,
labour-power, exploitation and so on, concepts which we did not (at that stage) introduce.
I realise that Harvey would probably dissent from my use of this Bhaskarian vocabulary, having declared himself hostile to Critical Realism (Harvey 1987). However, contra Harvey, I actually think Bhaskar's conception of Marx is remarkably close to Harvey's, and that in their erstwhile differences each has much to learn from the other. I suspect that Harvey's objections to realism are more ontological than epistemological. Especially in the hands of Sayer (1992), Harvey (1987) intimates that realism is far too analytical and insufficiently relational. Judging from Bhaskar (1993) this is far from the case and one of Harvey's former students, Richard Walker, has found realism perfectly compatible with his own brand of Marxism (Walker 1989).
CHAPTER FOUR

THE ONTOLOGY OF OPENNESS: REINTERPRETING CAPITALISM'S CORE

To understand capitalism, then, is to both understand what it is, but what also prevents it from being. Adapted from Ernesto Laclau (1990: 44).

I. Introduction

The re-reading of Marx's and Harvey's theoretical practices put forward in the last chapter is only the first step - albeit an important one - in reclaiming historical-geographical materialism for a contemporary critique of political-economy. In addition to these epistemological-cum-methodological concerns, it is also necessary to reconsider the basic ontological forms of capitalism posited by the core concepts of Marx's political-economy and, as a corollary, by historical-geographical materialists. For, despite their subtlety and complexity, the theoretical practices disclosed by the alternative reading I put forward will count for little if they remain wedded to a view of capitalism's basic relations of the kind I identified in chapter 2. There, in addition to my 'traditional' reading of Marx's and Harvey's modes of theorising, I suggested that their work can be interpreted as proposing an untenable ontological view of capitalism. Together, I argued, the core concepts of use- and exchange-value, abstract- and concrete-labour, value and socially necessary labour time, labour-power and surplus-value, money and capital seem to posit capitalism as a closed totality or system, disembedded from other social processes and identities ('pure capitalism'), which is the externalised form of the efforts of a meta-subject ('the working class') located in the (supposedly) most important arena of social life, production in the workplace. The upshot of this restrictive traditional view of capitalism, I suggested, is that Marxist political-economy comes to be seen as a critique of capitalism from the standpoint of labour, which is taken to be the pre-eminent insurgent social actor within a global economy. By getting behind capitalism's delusive appearances, critique is intended to
'show' the working class that it is the true source of social wealth under capitalism, a wealth which can and should be reappropriated.

As I argued, this view of capitalism and of the main locus of social insurgency is clearly an unrealistic one. In practice, just as 'capitalism' interpenetrates with other moments of the social - thus making it constitutively 'impure' as a political-economic system - so too is class location and class identity complicated by the fact that individuals simultaneously occupy several subject-positions and embody multiple - often conflicting - forms of social identity. Moreover, as we approach the end of the twentieth century the theoretical and political consequences of these two realities have become particularly pressing for Marxists. The importance of putatively 'non-capitalist' processes - such as those associated with patriarchy and racism - means that the leading edges of critical theory can no longer be defensively claimed to lie solely in the domain of Marxist political-economy. Notwithstanding the pivotal importance of work, production and the like, the domain of the social is nowhere near exhausted by a focus on instrumental action. Likewise, the dramatic rise of so-called 'new social movements' in both the developed and developing worlds is a testament to the importance and sheer diversity of contemporary political identities and political concerns on the Left, both within and outside the academy. Indeed, as if to confirm that class politics is no longer the force it once was, the rise of these new social movements has coincided almost exactly with the precipitous decline in the power and appeal of the labour movement worldwide.

And yet, these facts notwithstanding, the world in which we live today is arguably more under the sway of capitalist economic processes than ever before. The increasingly popular, but protean, concept of "globalisation" is only the latest indicator of this awareness that political-economic relations are now truly global in scale, binding the most diverse peoples and environments with a common systemic frame (Hirst and Thompson 1996). Of course, doyens of a resurgent neo-classical and market economics would have us believe that, despite the odd glitch here and there, this has been a positive development
accompanied by the spread of economic wealth. However, against this sanguine view of the 'invisible hand', the consequences of the globalisation of capitalist relations is having and will continue to have profoundly questionable consequences. In a wide-ranging review of existing empirical evidence on incomes and poverty, Westergaard (1995) has shown that the generalisation of capitalist relations has been coincident with a discernable widening of income inequality and a growth of poverty both within the wealthy Northern economies and between them and the developing economies of the South. For these reasons and others, Harvey (1995a) has recently suggested that "globalisation" merely represents the culmination of long-established processes of capital expansion and involution which now impinge upon more and more aspects of social and environmental life in more places than ever before. And for these reasons too, Allan Pred (1998: 153) vividly describes our fin-de-siècle world as a world "hyper-commodified", one in which virtually nothing can escape the commodity-form, the capitalist measure of valuation or the logic of accumulation for accumulation's sake.¹

In saying all this I may seem to be immediately contradicting my opening comments about the impossibility of discussing 'capitalism' as a discrete system, let alone one which is based on the exploitation and externalisations of a putative meta-subject, the working class. However the contradiction is only seeming for three reasons. First, while I am indeed of the conviction that system ('pure capitalism'), subject ('the working class') and ground (production) are all impure, messy and overdetermined, I agree with Sayer and Walker (1992) that it is nonetheless possible to distinguish - through inquiry, abstraction and theory building - what is distinctive about capitalism as an arena of political-economic relations of worldwide importance. For example, while capitalist social forms and relations most certainly interact with various modalities of patriarchy and racism in practice, the three should nonetheless not be elided. Indeed, in ontological terms each can exist without the other two, indicating their relative autonomy and efficacy in theory, if not in determinate real world contexts.² This is why I paid so much attention to how one theorises
capitalism in the last chapter. Second, in light of this I therefore think that the Left in geography and beyond still needs to focus its energies on formulating coherent political-economic theory. This is hardly an exceptional claim, of course. But the key question then becomes - and this is my third point - what kind of theory? In this chapter it will be my suggestion that, in spite of the obvious weaknesses of a traditional Marxian view of 'capitalism', it is not necessary to turn to post-Marxist frameworks to make sense of the capitalist world in which we still live. Put differently, I think it is possible to detect in the venerable categories of Marx's political-economy - the same categories which lie at the heart of historical-geographical materialism as a research programme - an understanding of capitalism's basic forms which is still of vital relevance to the late twentieth century.

Establishing the relevance of these categories can, of course, only be done if they can be read anew. Given the welter of existing interpretations and reinterpretations of Marx, each seemingly more convoluted and arcane than the last, this may seem a remote possibility. And yet in what follows I seek to put forward a reading of capitalism with a freshness and vitality that leaves the unhelpful and unrealistic traditional view far behind. Building on the insightful work of authors like Chris Arthur (1993), Norman Fischer (1982), Thomas Keenan (1993), Geert Reuten (1988), Derek Sayer (1987) and Gayatri Spivak (1988), and particularly the critique of traditional Marxism elaborated by Moishe Postone (1996), it will be my suggestion that what makes capitalism distinctive is two things, concerning subject and system respectively. First, while it is indeed a crisis-prone system founded on the exploitation of living labour in production, the constituency exploited is not a coherent entity but, rather, radically heterogeneous. It is thus a plurality rather than a meta-subject or class tout court. Second, while this suggests that what occurs in production is still a vital aspect of our capitalist world, the 'essence' of capitalism is not simply worker exploitation or class relations. This returns me to the question of capitalism's seemingly self-moving qualities to which I referred numerously in chapter 2. For it is the wider domain of relations which give 'capitalism' these systemic qualities
which deserves to be put on an equal ontological footing to questions of production and exploitation. It is this domain which, precisely (as I said earlier), brings otherwise socially and spatially separate and differentiated working people into relation. But, more emphatically, it is this domain of structured relations which - more than production or class alone - is the real source of capitalism's world shaping power. For it is these relations which make capitalism an "historically specific form of social interdependence with an impersonal and seemingly objective character", that is, "an abstract form of social domination" (Postone, ibid. 3, emphasis added) which is increasingly global and pervasive. As such an "invisible Leviathan" - to borrow sociologist Murray Smith's (1994) useful term - capitalism extends beyond production and exploitation to constitute a coercive domain of relations which dominates the working constituency which is their ultimate originator. This wider domain thus does not simply conceal what have traditionally been seen as a the 'real' social relations of capitalism, but is itself every bit as real and consequential. As Smith (ibid. 8) puts it, capitalism is first and foremost "a structure of socio-economic relations that has usurped from conscious humanity real control over the socio-economic life process and imposed ... [social] laws that are both very poweful and deeply hidden from view."

This is where these distinctively capitalist aspects of subject and system come together. On the one hand, because workers - while collectively exploited and dominated by value relations of their own making - are radically diverse across the globe, capitalism as a specific political-economic system possesses the peculiar quality of structuring the heterogenous. Far from being a closed totality founded on the exploitation and externalisations of a class, labour-power proves to be the commodity which makes it strictly impossible for capitalism to suture social life, global in reach though capitalism is. In other words, the variability of labour-power means that capitalism is a constitutively 'open totality', a precarious structuring of the diverse. Conversely, it is precisely the wider domain of relations which lend capitalism its systemic qualities and which unite disparate
working communities worldwide which gives rise to this diverse constituency in the first
place. This means two things. First, that capitalist relations are so structured as to ground
immanently their own opposition. But secondly, that this constituency, because it is
radically heteroclite, is precisely not a 'self' whose externalisations return to dominate it -
just as it is not a 'singularity' who is exploited. Put differently, far from being a subject
('class-in-itself') which would come into 'its' own ('class-for-itself') and reappropriate 'its'
wealth if capitalist relations were to be transcended, it is an oppositional constituency
which would disappear as such if capitalism did. 'It' only exists by virtue of the relations
that bring 'it' into being.

In this non-traditional view, then, the defining motif of capitalism is that it is a
specific form of social life in which people worldwide - of all manner of ethnicities,
nationalities, 'races', sexual orientations, statuses and so on - are exploited and dominated
by relations of their own making. I stress relations because it is these - not any one social,
economic or political actor - which are the driving force, even though it is specific actors
which perpetuate them. By being non-particular and utterly abstract, the constellation of
relations constitutive of capitalism is able, precisely, to extend beyond the merely local to
operate on and across radically diverse peoples (and environments). Crucially, these
relations are non-sensous and non-material, even though they have crushingly sensuous
and material effects. And, equally, they are virtual and invisible, even though their
actualisation and impacts are painfully visible for all to see. None of this is to demote
questions of class analysis and class struggle. But it is to reconfigure them and to set them
within a wider conception of capitalism in which the 'centre of gravity' is irreducible to
production or exploitation.

The key to the dual reinterpretation of capitalism's core I propose is, I suggest, to
be found in Marx's frequently over-looked categories of concrete- and abstract-labour. This
may seem a remarkably slim basis on which to launch a reinterpretation of capitalism. And
yet it is often forgotten that Marx (1976: 132) regarded the argument that only in capitalist
societies does labour have a two-fold aspect as "the crucial point ... upon which an understanding of political-economy is based". Taking Marx at his word, I will argue that capitalist labour in its distinctively double aspect constitutes an historically specific, quasi-objective and invisible form of social mediation within capitalist societies. It is a form of social mediation which relates workers in all their diversity and concrete-particularity. It is a form of mediation which lends capitalism its qualities as an impersonal, despotic, crisis-ridden and seemingly self-activating force to which people become subject on a global scale. And it is thus a form of social mediation which makes capitalism a form of political-economic life which is at once structured and yet open-ended.

If this reinterpretation of capitalism's core can be sustained then, in turn, it has fundamental consequences for our understanding of the nature and purpose of Marx's political-economy and of historical-geographical materialism. Specifically, it means that rather than (respectively) being a critique of capitalism and of its geographies from the standpoint of labour, both bodies of work are instead a critique of labour in capitalism (Postone 1996). The distinction is vitally important. As critique of - rather than on behalf of - labour, the work of Marx and of Harvey et al. comes to have a much wider critical appeal and critical purchase than any traditional or modern Marxism ever could. If labour is a social mediation which is pivotal in enabling the structured exploitation and domination of working people worldwide - of whatever nationality, gender, 'race' or ethnic identity - then it follows that Marxian political-economy does not undertake critique in the name of a putative meta-subject - just as it is not a critique of production per se. Instead, it is primarily a critique of this specific form of social mediation on behalf of workers whose only identity is that they share a common structural address, as it were, by virtue of their implication in this very form of mediation. Variable and heterogenous, labour-power is thus not possessed of a class 'essence' to be realised. Indeed, since labour is the specific social mediation which unites otherwise disparate workers we will see that Marxian political-economy criticises exploitation and domination on behalf of an otherwise non-
identical constituency whose interest is to abolish the very relations which give rise the constituency itself.

The upshot of all this, I hope to show, is that the core claims of Marxian political-economy remain as relevant today as ever. Specifically, if labour is an increasingly global and intrusive form of social mediation which is drawing increasing numbers of people (and environments) within the orbit of capital, then its theoretical disclosure is vital. More particularly, because labour is an ontologically \textit{invisible} form of mediation then its disclosure takes on an even more acute importance. The appeal of such an act of envisioning is that - in addition to the epistemological reflexivity attached to it, as outlined in the previous chapter - it can 'show' the common subjection of working people worldwide to relations they cannot immediately 'see' - but, crucially, without in any way positing those relations as closed or those people as a socially pre-eminent singularity. As such, the meta-theoretical impulses of Marx and Harvey \textit{et al.}'s political-economy are vouchsafed by capitalism's totalising tendencies while remaining alive to the fact that capitalism cannot and does not exist as a discrete or all-dominant domain which exhausts the space of the social.

Of course, to dwell on Marx's core categories as I do in this chapter, while illuminating, requires in addition a consideration of capitalism's current forms. These forms have been captured in such diverse formulations as 'late capitalism' (Mandel 1978), 'disorganised capitalism' (Lash and Urry 1987), 'flexible accumulation' (Harvey 1989a), 'post-Fordism' (Leborgne and Lipietz 1988) and the like. It is also the case, as we will see in Part III in relation to the production of space, nature and the subject, that the fundamental forms of capitalism I disclose in this chapter cannot be understood in any non-geographical way. However, it remains the case too that before these and other considerations can be addressed these basic and enduring relations of capitalism must first be identified and explained.
My argument proceeds in two stages. I begin by arguing that the seeds of the non-traditional view of capitalism's basic forms I am arguing for can be found in key texts of historical-materialist inquiry, namely *The Limits to Capital* and Neil Smith's *Uneven Development*. This may seem an unlikely claim. Until, that is, it is understood that in both texts it exists as a strictly subordinate view, one which is, in fact, barely developed. This is particularly so in the case of *The Limits*, rather less so in *Uneven Development* where the traditional reading of capitalism's basic forms is arguably more muted. Having teased out these latent elements of a non-traditional reading of capitalism's basic forms, I then seek to offer a coherent and elaborated account of that reading by drawing upon Marx's core political-economic categories, especially those of concrete- and abstract-labour. Continuing a theme from the previous chapter, I end with an acknowledgement and appreciation of the Hegelian inspiration for the alternative reading put forward - although, again, this inspiration is conceived in more interesting and positive than implied by the usual view of Hegel as a meta-philosopher in the negative sense.

In this sense I take Harvey's and Smith's arguments in a direction they only tentatively venture. But more than that my alternative reading actively opposes the traditional view of capital's core to be found in both authors' work. Given that neither Harvey nor Smith has offered (or probably would offer) a fully elaborated alternative reading of the kind I propose, I cannot claim more than that it is a potential existent in their work, a potential I am seeking to draw out here and make explicit. Most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, by thus re-interpreting the core substantive claims of historical-geographical materialism (and therefore the core of capitalism) I hope to put in place an ontological pillar which can reanimate this modality of Marxism - and which will complement the epistemological pillar I put in place in the last chapter.

**II. The core of capitalism: towards an alternative reading**

A spectre is haunting th[e] ... analysis.
Thomas Keenan (1993: 169)
In chapter 2 I exposed, in some detail, the traditional thematics animating the core categories of Harvey's *The Limits to Capital*. It may seem surprising, therefore, to find that Harvey uses those same categories to gesture towards a non-traditional reading of capitalism's basic relations and forms. I say 'gesture' because these non-traditional ontological theses are very much subordinate within the text; they exist almost as a spectre. Hints of Harvey's alternative view of capitalism appear early on in chapter 1 of *The Limits*, just after he has introduced the concepts of concrete- and abstract-labour and socially necessary labour time. Making, at this stage, no mention of class or production, Harvey points towards a wider conception of capitalism as a dominative system which is based on the exploitation of a heterogeniety rather than a singularity:

The invocation of social necessity should alert us ... What Marx will eventually show us, in a discourse pervaded by a profound concern with marking the boundaries between freedom and necessity under capitalism, is that human labour in the abstract is a distillation finally accomplished under very specific relations of production, out of a seemingly infinite variety of concrete labour activities. We will discover that abstract labour can become the measure of value only to the degree that a specific kind of human labour - wage labour - becomes general (Harvey 1982: 15).

Capitalism thus appears here as a specific sphere of ramified social relations - irreducible to production alone or to exploitation of a putative class - which acts as a "guiding force within ... history" (*ibid.*). Interestingly, towards the end of chapter 1 - after Harvey has gone on to introduce the concept of class - elements of this non-traditional view still persist. Commenting on his understanding of labour and value, Harvey (*ibid.* 37) insists that both are "social relations" which "discipline ... [workers] as if they are an externally imposed necessity". "But", he goes on, " ... in the final analysis [it is workers who collectively] produce ... and reproduce ... the conditions of ... [their] own domination".

There is clearly a strong sense in these comments that it is the *relations* constitutive of capitalism which really count here rather than any given social agents or any one social site, like production. Indeed, there is a strong sense here too that it is only *by virtue of*
these relations that one can even talk of 'workers' as an historically existent 'constituency' to be collectively exploited and dominated and of capitalism as a putative 'system'. This is given further warrant by Harvey's long standing attachment to Bertell Ollman's (1971) seminal account of Marx in *Alienation*, to which I referred in chapter 2. For Ollman, as I noted earlier, what is most important in Marx's social ontology is the 'internal relations' between people and between things. Against the atomism of conventional analytical thought in which both people and things are deemed to possess identities *prior* to entering into relations, Ollman argues that for Marx it is the relations which are constitutive. Leaving aside the intimations of closure associated with the term 'internal' of which I made so much in my earlier critique of Harvey, his use of Ollman can also be seen to point towards a rather different set of ontological commitments to those supposed in the traditional view, where everything apparently begins and ends with the exploitation of a singular meta-subject in production. It supports a view of capitalism as first and foremost a very specific structure of relations - irreducible to class and production - which gather people together in a way that those people help sustain the very relations which bring them together in the first place - and, moreover, in an exploitative and dominative fashion.⁴

Clues to this alternative reading of capitalism can be found in more emphatic form in a text that in many ways is a direct complement to *The Limits*, Neil Smith's *Uneven Development* (1984). More straightforward than its forebear, *Uneven Development* is an original and penetrating theoretical disquisition on why capitalism necessarily produces both nature and space and why, secondly, this produced landscape necessarily develops unevenly, be it at the urban, regional or international scales. What it shares in common with *The Limits* (among other things) is that it is deliberately written from the third-person perspective of the thinker-observer as a study of system-integration. I will say more about the geography of Smith's account in Part III, but for now I simply want to focus on his understanding of Marx's core political-economic categories, categories upon which the geographical insights of *Uneven Development* are built. That understanding is presented in
a highly condensed exposition of 'Capitalist Production' (1984, pp. 47-60). There, like Harvey, Smith introduces Marx's key concepts, concluding that the capitalist system is inherently crisis-prone and that the fundamental relation at its heart is the class antagonism between workers and owners in production. In this sense, it would - not surprisingly - be possible to read Smith as instantiating a traditional ontological view of capitalism not dissimilar to that I read into *The Limits* in chapter 2.

And yet, that said, there is in Smith's recapitulation of Marx signs of another narrative. This alternative narrative is, moreover, less implicit that in *The Limits*. To begin with, Smith actually says very little about class. This is not to say he rejects Marx's key tenet that workers are exploited - on the contrary. But it is noticeable that Smith uses the class concept only sparingly and prefers more general terms like "people" and "social subjects". In the second place, Smith (1984: 48) also strongly accentuates the systemic qualities of capitalism as an elaborated "structure of economic relations" including but extending beyond production. Interestingly, he indicates that abstract labour and value are crucial here because they operate as a "socially imposed necessity" operating as a "blind law" (*ibid.*):

> The logic of social mediation is not the simple rationale that springs immediately from the need to produce and consume use-values, nor even the rationale of production for exchange. Rather it is the abstract logic that attaches to the creation and accumulation of social value ... [T]he movement from the abstract to the concrete ... is the perpetual translation actually achieved ... under capitalism. (*ibid.* 49)

Here, echoing Harvey's alternative view of capitalism, Smith seems to be pointing to a structure of social relations - grounded in but not reducible to production relations - which brings the diverse (or concrete) forcibly into relation by virtue of the *compulsion* of those relations. These relations, then, rather than being secondary to the 'real relations' which supposedly lie in the realm of production, are themselves every bit as real and important. Indeed, they must be since in their *absence* otherwise disparate sellers of labour-power
would not share anything in common except their differences. And in their absence too the logic of exploitation and surplus value extraction in production would have no rationale or dynamic.

How can we build on these fragments of a non-traditional view of capitalism's core? Inspired by the sympathetic reinterpretations of Marx elaborated by the likes of Arthur, Fischer, Keenan, Reuten, Postone, Sayer and Spivak I propose to provide an answer. Not surprisingly, this will involve revisiting Marxian concepts already discussed in chapters 2 and 3. However, in both those cases I deliberately said little of substance about the two concepts which form the basis of the alternative ontological view I propose here - namely concrete- and abstract-labour. In addition, what follows sets the dialectic of the value form from commodities to money used as an example in the last chapter within a fuller - and non-traditional - account of capitalism's core.

**III. Preliminary considerations**

*That every beginning is difficult holds in all sciences.*

Karl Marx (1992: xxiii)

Before I begin in earnest I need to make some preliminary observations. First, although in what follows I talk authoritatively about what Marx did and did not say, I need not remind the reader that mine is only a particular interpretation, not a 'proper' reading. Second, in accordance with the arguments put forward in the last chapter, the presentation adopts a dialectical method to unfold the alternative view of capitalism's core I propose. As I hope I demonstrated earlier, there is nothing strange or mystical about this. On the contrary, I suggested that as a synthetic and synchronic method of both representation and explanation it possesses striking advantages over linear and analytical modes of thought, as well as actualising a productive tension between cognitive realism in theory and cognitive conventionalism. However, it is worth reminding readers that since the method assumes at the start what has yet to be shown, then a non-linear mode of reading is required. Third, despite the importance I attach to the categories of concrete- and abstract-labour, I depart
from Marx's decision to introduce them in relation to commodity exchange. Instead, following Arthur (1993), it seems to me that they can only be logically introduced after a consideration of commodities, money and capital. Finally, in light of my use of dialectical method I also agree with Reuten (1988) that in beginning his account with the commodity Marx actually begins with too complex a determination. If the aim is to present a categorial account which grasps the core of capitalism in as rigorous, non-arbitrary and compelling way as is possible, then it seems to me that a more 'presuppositionless' beginning is necessary prior to a consideration of the commodity.

That beginning involves consideration of a simple - but fundamental - triad of categories: sociation, dissociation and association. By *sociation* is meant the ahistorical, universal reality than in order to be economically active people engage in social relationships of some kind, be they overt or non-overt. By *dissociation* is meant the historically specific reality that in capitalist societies economic agents are socially and geographically (more or less) separated. In modern terms, this is called the social (as opposed to technical) 'division of labour' in which different private producers each produce different kinds of goods for sale. Finally, the opposition of sociation and dissociation is overcome by *association*, whereby in capitalist societies exchange is the form of mediation whereby sovereign consumers acquire the goods they require. Although simple and very general, these concepts, I think, enable us to better approach Marx's chosen starting-point - the commodity - and to begin to understand why the commodity is the 'cell form' of a global, demiurgic and unstable social system which is at once structured and yet open-ended. Let me elaborate.

IV. The core of capitalism: from the commodity to production

*Commodities*

Commodities are ... social mediations.
Moishe Postone (1996: 151)
In contrast to societies in which the production and exchange of goods is regulated by overt social relations, customs, direct forms of power and conscious economic decision making, the fact of dissociation within capitalism means that association must take a non-overt form. I say 'form' because, even though it does not seem so at the outset, the commodity is an historically specific form of social mediation. I say 'non-overt' because, even though it also does not seem so at the outset, the commodity is a distinctively mediate - rather than immediate - social form. The way Marx indicates this, right at the start of the analysis, is to describe the commodity as a form of wealth. Normally understood as a thing (e.g. gold), Marx signals his intention to subvert this common-sense view in order to see the production and distribution of wealth under capitalism as a specific process, which itself is a structure of distinct relationships. However, we will only come to fully understand this seemingly peculiar argument at the end of the presentation.

I say that Marx posits the commodity as a form of non-overt social mediation right at the start of Capital because the famous first sentence of the text suggests that each commodity is in some sense a unit of something larger than itself. In the concern of traditional Marxists to 'get behind' commodities to the supposedly 'real action' of production and class struggle, this important point is often overlooked. If the wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities', then it follows that the single commodity with which Marx's analysis begins must be a 'cell form' of something greater than itself, yet which it in some sense constitutes.

This point helps us to better understand Marx's by now well-worn distinction between use- and exchange-value. As a specific, and qualitatively distinct object for use, a commodity is a form of material wealth. There is nothing distinctively capitalist in this, of course, since material wealth exists in all productive societies. However, in societies where production is dissociated and individuals and groups only privately produce a limited number of the goods they require for reproduction, some form of association is required in
which goods are exchanged. This, of course, is the exchange-value aspect of commodities, their capacity to be swapped for materially and qualitatively different commodities. This immediately takes us away from the individual commodity to consider mutual interconnections within the world of commodities. And it is this move which, in turn, better enables us to understand Marx's derivation of 'value'.

Here I can add to the discussion of value offered in the previous chapter. There I indicated that, given that commodities are materially incommensurable, Marx's uses the use-value/exchange-value contradiction to identify a 'common element' which must lie behind all the myriad exchanges of commodities. However, the point is that this value dimension does not inhere in commodities as some intrinsic property; nor, additionally, does it exist merely at the level of specific commodities. Instead, specific commodities 'take on' a value-identity because value is a general dimension which, precisely, explains why it is 'common' to commodities. Value is thus a more 'universal' concept than either use- or exchange-value, one which refers to the 'world of commodities' with which Marx begins Capital. And it is this common dimension, which brings specific forms of material wealth into relation, which Marx argues is the distinctive measure of social wealth within capitalism. In contrast to material wealth, social wealth is a general measure, one which is not imbricated in specific commodity-bodies, even though those commodities take on this value-form.

This returns me, at last, to the point with which I began this section: that commodities are specific forms of social mediation. For if value is the measure which allows generalised exchange between socially and spatially disparate producers, then effectively commodities become the medium for social synthesis within capitalist societies. Thus, in principle, each commodity-body - notwithstanding its qualitative specificity - can effectively enable and mediate relations between otherwise different productive individuals and groups. This is an important point. It signals the fact that commodities are more than mere things. But, in addition to this venerable Marxist
argument, it also alerts us to the real and efficacious materiality of commodities as mediators of non-overt social relations. Against 'traditional Marxists' who want to rush beyond 'appearances' straight to production and class relations, this focus on commodities as mediators contests the ontological hierarchy upon which such a summary rush is based.

And yet at all this said, at this stage many of these points clearly remain underdeveloped and contentious. In particular, two problems loom large. First, as we shall see, the commodity is too simple a determination to give a proper picture of the complex of relations constitutive of capitalism. We are nowhere near specifying the core of capitalism and so also unable at this point in the argument to disclose fully what makes the commodity a distinctively 'capitalist' social form. Second, at this specific stage in the presentation this is largely because value - the general dimension supposedly common to commodities - seems merely a postulate. As I noted in the previous chapter, Marx passes over his 'derivation' of value in Capital astonishingly quickly, making it seem to be a mere mental construct dialectically developed from the use-value/exchange-value contradiction. Yet, as I also showed, if generalised exchange is to be truly possible, any particular exchange (e.g. '10x is worth 10y') requires a determinate general measure which is real. Otherwise exchange relations remain unstable, insecure and unsystematic. So it is that we turn to money. And in so doing we turn to a more complex and consequential facet of capitalism's core.

Money

To the extent that money, with its colourless and indifferent quality, can become a denominator of ... values, it becomes the frightful leveler - it hollows out the core of things, their specific values and their uniqueness.

George Simmel (1971: 330)

In contrast to Marx’s hasty derivation of value in the first two sections of Capital 1, section 3 seems overly elaborate. In this section Marx considers in detail the four forms of value I considered in my example of dialectical logic and in Figure 1 in the previous
chapter. Yet the point of this detailed focus is precisely Marx's desire to show that value *must* exist as a universal dimension within capitalist formations. To recapitulate, what Marx's consideration of the 'simple', 'total' and 'general' forms demonstrates is that value is immanent but not articulated. It remains a vanishing semblance. If value really exists as a sort of homogeneous 'matter' underlying the diverse use-values of commodities, then some means of actualising and expressing that material homogeneity must be found. And, as I also showed, for Marx that means is *money*. The contradiction between the use-value and exchange-value qualities of commodities 'precipitates' a doubling, in which a single commodity set apart from others - money - is able to mediate commodity exchange by acting as a general measure of value. Money, in other words, is the incarnation of the abstract identity of the world of different commodities as values. But, crucially, it is so because it materially realises value: money is its articulated form of appearance. Without money, value is but a 'ghostly-objectivity'.

I say all this, not simply to repeat the points made in chapter 3, but to extend them - as I did above in the case of the commodity-form of value. For, from what I have said so far, money only emerges 'negatively', as it were, as a sort of 'servant' of value. In the analysis, that is, money 'fulfils' an 'insufficiency' in the commodity-form of value. However, I want now to stress that money *itself* - precisely *because* of its relationship to value - is a social form which is remarkably consequential within capitalism. I mean this in four senses. First, because money is not simply a convenient *numéraire* but, instead, a necessary and real representation of value, it is effectively "value for itself" (Marx, quoted in Arthur 1993: 81). In other words, unlike the commodity, money is remarkable in that, for the first time, it posits value *as such*. Second, money also confirms the fact that this value dimension is not an inherent property of commodities. In principle at least, *any* commodity can serve as money because the point about value is that it is "a representation in objects, an objective expression, of a relation between men, a social relation ..." (Marx quoted in Smith 1994: 51). More than the commodity, therefore, money is in fact what

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Postone (1996: 139) describes as a "structured and structuring form of ... social interdependence". It is a material form of appearance which actively brings myriad forms of material wealth together through the abstraction of social wealth - value - which permits commensuration. As a real social universal it thus possesses the peculiar quality of practically unifying the otherwise diverse. Thirdly, however, money does not appear to be such a social universal (i.e. what it really is). After all, as Marx famously put it, value 'does not go around with a label describing what it is'. But, as with the commodity, this should not license a dismissal of 'surface appearances' as somehow less important. On the contrary, as Marx shows, without its appearance as money, value would not exist. Fourthly, it therefore follows (as we shall see further below) that money is every bit as important as any other aspect of capitalism's core. It does not simply 'veil' invisible value relations, still less production and exploitation, but is itself a condition of their possibility as well as a force in its own right.

Capital

A little money must become more money ....
Elmar Altvater (1993: 60)

With the category of 'capital' we move beyond commodities and money to add a necessary further element to our consideration of capitalism's core. I mean 'necessary' in two senses. First, in the sense that the category develops systematically from what I have said about commodities and money. But, additionally, I mean necessity in the sense that with capital we now glimpse what is distinctively 'capitalist' about the political-economic system in which we live. For, on the presentation so far, there is nothing obviously 'capitalist' about either commodities or money; they could easily belong to any social formation.

This explains Marx's interest in a form of circulation M-C-M, as opposed to one of the form C-M-C. In the latter case - which is really the case we have so far been considering - money serves doubly as a measure of value and as a medium of circulation. However, in societies with a social division of labour, the problem with this form of
circulation is that it has the capacity to constantly break down. Contra Say's Law, a producer may not find a market and a sale need not follow a purchase. This possibility of a hiatus in circulation gives rise to the determination of money as a store of value. Because money represents value as such, and because money is thus exchangeable for any commodity - both now and in the future - there is thus a systematic impetus to hoard money in order to acquire the means of consumption, pay debts and the like. This is crucially important. For it is this impetus which for Marx grounds the circuit M-C-M', where at the end of the process more money has been accrued than was put in at the start. The amassing of extra, or surplus, value is thus the point of this specific form of circulation. And it this form of circulation Marx calls 'capital'.

With a move to this form of circulation we begin to appreciate the enormous force of capitalist social relations. Moreover, we also begin to truly appreciate why what matters about capitalism is the relations which structure both people and things, rather than any particular social agent or any one 'part' of capitalism alone. To understand what I mean here I need first to comment briefly on Marx's well-known definition of capital as 'value in process'. This process-definition has often seemed enigmatic. However, in light of what has been said about commodities and money it can actually be seen as a further, but more complex, development of the value-form. With the commodity, value was immanent but unarticulated; with money, value was articulated but tied to a form of circulation lacking self-subsistence such that value threatened to become a means to an end outside of itself. With capital, however, the point is that value becomes an end in itself. Effectively, it becomes 'self-subsistent'.

If this sounds teleological it is not meant to be so. The critical charge of Marx's definition of capital, on my reading, is that historically people have created a structure of social relationships in which form (value) takes precedence over content (concrete individuals). With capital, unlike other forms of circulation, the pursuit of an abstract form becomes its own end: value serves as the raison d'être of circulation. This has several
implications, but chief among them is that this form of circulation is inherently growth orientated: it is an iterative process. A little money must become more money, and so 'accumulation for accumulation's sake' becomes what Altvater (ibid. 60) calls the "organising principle" of capital - a principle with nothing less than world changing implications. This is why I said above that capital is a social form of enormous force. And this is also why I suggested that it is the relations which matter here, since as a form (money) in process capital is precisely a relation.

And yet even with this in mind, the process-definition of capital still seems rather enigmatic in at least one respect. For it involves the seemingly strange claim that value enters into a relationship with itself, as it were, throwing off more of itself at the end of circulation than at the beginning, as it assumes the form (in turn) of money, commodities, then more money. In terms of our dialectical presentation, if capital is to really exist then this point must be addressed. For how can value 'valorise' itself? Moreover, how can it do so when the exchange relation is supposed to be equalitarian? In answering these questions we uncover other facets of capitalism's core which, at last, begin to show us why commodities, money and capital are distinctively 'capitalist' social forms.

Production

Capital opens up the abstraction necessary to anti-essentialist thinking.
Alys Weinbaum (1994: 100)

If value, as capital, is to be 'self-expanding' then this means that value must produce value. Yet, on the presentation so far, there is nothing to indicate that this is so. This is why Marx turns away from the realm of exchange towards that of production. As things stand, produced goods enter the value-circuit from 'outside', as it were. Although they take-on a value character in exchange, at the stage in their life-cycle when they are made into use-values commodities are not, according to the logic of our analysis thus far, value-things. This is because the process of production is not itself governed by value relations. Until, that is, we understand that capital must make production its own if it is to exist at all. The
possibility of self-valorising value can only become a reality when production itself succumbs to a value logic. As Arthur (1993: 85) puts it, "Insofar as capital 'conquers' the sphere of production, it gains reality and permanence instead of being dependent on external conditions to provide the values on which it feeds".

How, then, does production succumb to the logic of value? How, in other words, is it able to provide a condition of possibility for capital's existence? We can uncover the answer in two stages. The first lies in Marx's familiar concept of the social relations of production. Identifying this as one of the differentia specifica of capitalist societies, Marx argues that production is structured by a separation between those who own the means of production and those who do not. The former thus buy the latter's capacity to work (their labour-power) and combine this wage labour with other purchased inputs to production in order to fashion new commodities for sale. This apparently obvious insight is crucial: because it immediately indicates that production itself takes on a value-form since money (a value-form) is used to purchase commodities (a value-form) to make new commodities for sale in return for more money. Accordingly, the capital circuit now includes production and takes the form

\[ M \to C \text{ (LP & MP)} \to P \to C' \to M' \]

where money (M) is advanced to purchase LP (labour power) and MP (the means of production), where P the productive process that transforms C into output commodities embodying greater value (C'), and where M' is money capital or surplus value.

Secondly, though, it still remains to specify where the value surplus that is the goal of commodity production and exchange actually comes from. And here, of course, Marx makes great play of labour-power's 'special' qualities as what Storper and Walker (1989) call a 'pseudo-commodity' somewhat different from the other inputs into the production process. For labour-power has the capacity to produce more value than it receives in the form of wages. Although a seeming contradiction, this situation of labour-power being
paid less than it produces is resolved practically by virtue of the fact that while its consumption occurs in production - where it is put to use by capitalists - its sale and purchase occurs entirely in the sphere of exchange. So it is that labour-power is the origin of new value and the subject of exploitation.

Through these two familiar stages we arrive at several important conclusions. We now see that the seemingly oxymoronic idea of value valorising itself has a real basis in production. Production now has a dual determination as the production of material wealth (commodities as use-values) and the production of social wealth (commodities as values). We see too that value is in fact the unity of both relations of exchange and relations of exploitation in production. We also come to see the remarkable fact that labour-power is productive of the specific form of social wealth (value) through which it is itself valued: is thus effectively 'self'-mediating. And finally we see that it is the quest for this self-mediating form of social wealth which defines the entire purpose of commodity production and exchange.

All four points are important. But left like this they can easily be misinterpreted. At first glance they seem as familiar as the two-stages through which we arrived at them. As I have said, I agree with Postone (1996) that all-too-often Marxists and their critics have read the concepts of class and exploitation as together a sort of deus ex machina which constitute the real foundation of capitalism and which indicate what makes it truly distinctive as a form of social life. In what Spivak (1988) usefully calls a 'continuist reading' of value, Marx's turn to production seems to close the value circuit by grounding capital in production and identifying 'the' working class as its originator and victim.

Yet on my presentation this, in fact, cannot be so. In fact, there is nothing in what I have said so far to license an ontological privileging of production or an identification of the working class as a universal and singular insurgent social agent. There are several very important issues here. First, although from what I have said valorisation now has a basis, it is still not entirely clear what value is. Although we have now disclosed a series of social
forms which indicate that, as a general measure of social wealth, value seems really to exist, we still await a social form which, if you like, can measure the measure. Without such a social form, quite how value can actually exist as a determinate dimension to be produced and accumulated remains elusive. In addition, without such a social form it is also difficult to understand how value as a social relation (the unity of exchange and exploitation) can at the same time be a determinate dimension in process (capital). By what means can this translation take place in practice? Money alone cannot provide the answer, of course, since it is merely the phenomenal realisation of value. The question thus remains: what is the measure of value itself? Second, quite how labour-power can produce more value than it receives is also by no means clear. At the moment it remains a mere assertion, with no explanatory justification. Third, it seems in any case difficult to talk about labour-power as an 'it' - as a class agent located in production - when 'it' seems to exist purely by virtue of the value relations 'it' gives rise to and is measured by. There seems to be a chicken-and-egg problem here. In other words, then, while in terms of our presentation production underpins the circuit of capital, what these three points indicate is that production is still itself 'insufficient' to fully 'ground' capitalist social relations and to fully specify what makes them specifically capitalist.

So it is, at last, that we turn to concrete- and abstract-labour. The key to answering all three issues posed above is that wage-labour, when put to work as labour-power, has a double-aspect. This insight will lead us far beyond traditional Marxism to see the core of capitalism as an open-ended system of production and exchange of commodities which faces individuals - rather than a single class agent - as an exploitative and dominative force standing over against them - even as it is a system of their own collective making. However, as we shall now see, it is an insight whose implications will take some time to unfold.

V. The core of capitalism: labour and time
Abstract- and concrete-labour

Value is ... 'materialised' labour and simultaneously and expression of ... relations among people. The two definitions of value contradict each other if one deals with physiological labour but they perfectly supplement each other if one deals with social labour. I. I. Rubin (1973: 153)

Those familiar with Marx's work will know that he introduces the concepts of concrete- and abstract-labour into his analysis very early on in Capital 1, immediately after decomposing the commodity into its use-value and exchange-value aspects. Given the importance I attach to these concepts - like Marx I regard them as the 'secret of his critical conception' - it may seem strange not to follow his lead by deferring a consideration of them until this relatively late point in the analysis. However, I agree with Arthur (1993) that there are serious problems with Marx's introduction of the question of labour so early on in his analysis - problems which, ironically, actively obscure its vital importance in understanding capitalist political-economy.

Marx's distinction between labour in its concrete and abstract aspects does not refer to two different sorts of labour, but to two aspects of the same labour in commodity producing societies. This, one suspects, is why Marx discusses labour so early on in Capital 1. For, in chapter 1, he is eager to show that just as the commodity is a duality (not dualism) of use- and exchange-value, so is it also a duality of these two aspects of labour: "It follows from the above that the commodity does not contain two different sorts of labour; the same labour, however, is determined as different and as opposed to itself, depending on whether it is related to the use-value of the commodity as its product, or to the commodity-value as its objectified expression" (Marx, quoted in Postone 1996: 144).

Aligning concrete-labour with the production of commodities as use-values - that is, as a specific and qualitatively distinct activity - Marx is suggesting that labour is simultaneously abstract and homogenous, relating this to the exchange-value aspect of commodities. In particular, Marx argues that it is abstract-labour that solves the riddle of value. For his claim is that the common element enabling commodity commensuration is "human labour-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure", that is, as
"congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour" (Marx, quoted in M. Smith 1994: 50). In other words, abstract-labour is for Marx the immanent measure of value.

This seemingly innocuous statement, as I will show, is profound in its implications. Yet it has also been profoundly misunderstood by Marx's devotees and detractors alike - at least according to the interpretation I put forward here. The problems are two-fold. First, Marx introduces labour at a point in his analysis where its relevance and its actuality cannot be established. Although he is right to discuss value after his dissection of the commodity, his eagerness to establish abstract-labour as its measure is, at that stage in the account, unfounded. What this means is that, while the meaning of concrete-labour has been readily understood, abstract-labour has been seen as a mere mental abstraction akin to the view Marx's critics have had of value. Secondly, Marx further sowed the seeds of confusion with the following highly problematic claim about abstract-labour from Capital 1: "labour is an expenditure of human labour-power, in the physiological sense, and it is in this quality of being equal, or abstract, human labour that it forms the value of commodities" (Marx, quoted in M. Smith 1994: 96, emphasis added).

This 'physiological' conception of abstract-labour has been extremely detrimental. As Lucio Colletti (1972) noted long ago, a surprisingly large number of Marxists have uncritically deployed it in their own interpretations of Marx, with two results. First, it wrongly implies the estrangement of what had previously existed as the property of workers in a form now external to them. Second, it also wrongly implies that workers are a homogeneous constituency by virtue of their commonality as 'labour'. For these two reasons, Postone (1996) regards the physiological conception as, at root, responsible for the traditional view of Marx's political-economy to which I have made so much reference. As he puts it, "'Labour' here has become the ontological ground of society - that which constitutes, determines and causally controls social life" (ibid. 60). With labour understood in a common-sense way, the function of Marx's critical theory is that of 'showing' a pre-existing constituency that it is 'really' the source of value in capitalist society. Cutting
through surface appearances, it is thus, as I have said, a critique of capitalism from the standpoint of labour, located in the privileged site of production.

And yet as we shall see, the point of Marx's dual notion of labour is precisely that under capitalism (i) what is 'estranged' does not pre-exist its estrangement and that (ii) workers are not at all homogeneous but forcibly brought into relation by relations of their own making. This means that Marx's critical theory cannot be a critique from the standpoint of labour since his point is that labour should be the object - not the standpoint - of critique. Labour cannot 'come into its own', as in traditional Marxism, because labour in its dual aspect would cease to exist if capitalism were to be superceded by a different form of political-economic life. What this means, then, is that Marx's is a critique of labour in capitalism. If all this seems confusing, then it is time to establish what Marx's understanding of labour actually entails.

Private- and social-labour

The duality of the concrete and the abstract characterises the capitalist social formation.
Moishe Postone (1996: 152)

For Marx, labour is neither physiological nor understood in the common-sense way as being the site of interaction between people and nature. To be sure, concrete-labour does involve such an interaction as material inputs to production are refashioned to make commodities. However, there is far more to capitalist labour than this. As Marx put it:

Not an atom of matter enters into the object-ness of commodities as values; in this it is the direct opposite of the coarsely sensuous objectness of commodities as physical objects ... However, let us remember that commodities possess value object-ness only in so far as they are all expressions of the same social unity, human labour; their objectness as values is therefore purely social ... The value-form of the product of labour is the most abstract, but also the most general form of the bourgeois mode of production (quoted in Postone ibid. 145).

In this passage Marx is discussing abstract-, as opposed to concrete-, labour. What is interesting is that he clearly states that we are dealing with labour here as a social category.
Further, he also states that this social dimension has an *inmateriality*, describing it elsewhere in *Capital* as a social 'substance'. And finally, he describes abstract-labour here as *historically specific* to capitalist societies.

This being so, abstract-labour cannot be physiological - and nor, for that matter, can it be a mental-abstraction conjured up by Marx. As I. I. Rubin (1973: 135) put it,

> One of two things in possible: if abstract-labour is an expenditure of human energy in physiological form, then value also has a reified-material character. Or value is a social phenomenon, and then abstract-labour must also be understood as a social phenomenon ... It is not possible to reconcile a physiological concept of abstract-labour with the historical character of the value which it creates.

The key to understanding abstract-labour as social is to consider again that in societies characterised by a social division of labour some means of association must be found. If, as Marx argues, commodity exchange constitutes the immediate form of such association, then such exchange must necessarily abstract from the concrete-labours necessary to produce commodities as specific use-values. This does not make abstract-labour social in the sense of being 'concrete-labour in general'. Instead, it means that, as the 'substance' of value, abstract-labour is social because it is a *social relation* between otherwise separate and qualitatively distinct concrete-labours. We can phrase this differently by observing that Marx sometimes used the term 'private-labour' as a synonym for concrete-labour. In capitalism, private-labour refers to all the socially and spatially dissociated activities of commodity production conducted as specific concrete-labours making specific use-values. From this perspective, then, abstract-labour is social because it is the *unity* of private-labours. In other words, abstract-labour is social because it is the only form in which otherwise dissociated private-labours can overcome their non-social status.

Here we come to Marx's description of abstract-labour as immaterial or what he famously called a "phantom-like objectivity" (Marx, quoted in Smith 1994: 50). Unlike societies in which social relations between people are overt, within capitalist societies the fact of abstract-labour makes social relations ostensibly non-overt. This is nothing
necessarily unusual about this, and Marx does not object to the fact of interpersonal relations being mediated in some way. But what, he argues, is unusual is that under capitalism social relations exist as a quasi-independent realm relatively distinct from individuals, that is, as a sphere of impersonal 'objective-dependence'. Even though that realm is constituted as the unity of private- and concrete-labours, it takes a form different from and super-ordinate to them: as abstract-labour. In other words, capitalist labour is not social in the prosaic, ordinary sense. Instead, the sociality of capitalist labour takes on the peculiar form of an over-arching yet intangible meta-domain. This leads to two additional points. First, the existence of this immaterial realm means that private-labour under capitalism is in fact directly social but does not appear to be so. Because abstract-labour in intangible then private- and concrete-labours seem to be nothing more than private and concrete. Second, we can now more clearly understand our earlier claim that labour-power is 'self-mediating', since the 'self' is in fact a heterogeneity whose labour constitutes an invisible and pervasive dimension.

To summarise, we now see why Marx regards labour in its dual aspect as historically distinctive to capitalist societies. For him, only under capitalism is labour concrete and abstract simultaneously. For him, only under capitalism does private-labour appear as social-labour. For him only under capitalism does this appearance take the virtual form of an immaterial realm of social relations or 'ghostly' dimension. And for him only under capitalism does this ghostly dimension assume a form super-ordinate to the particulars it represents.

Abstract-labour and social mediation

We have to understand Marx's account of value not as indicating the possibility of labour representing itself in value ... Colin McCabe (1988: xv, emphasis added)

A dialectical mode of reading is demanding. By discussing concepts yet to be fully explained and by thus forcing the reader to wait until the end of the presentation to fully
understand the concepts unfolded along the way I am doubtless trying his or her patience. But I have now put in place what I regard as the centrepiece of Marx's political-economy. Although the presentation still has a little way to go if we are to grasp fully what constitutes capitalism's core, we have arrived at the heart of Marx's 'critical conception'.

If we now refer back to the point at which I introduced labour into the discussion - namely, after first considering commodities, money, capital and production - we can fully appreciate the importance of concrete- and abstract-labour: for labour in this dual aspect has in fact underpinned each of these social forms all along. As the 'substance' of value, it underlies commodities and money. As capital it becomes a directionally dynamic end in itself. And finally, as labour-power it structures production so that it becomes self-production. In short, then, because abstract-labour is the form in which concrete-labours appear, it becomes a self-mediating dimension of global, demiurgic power - even though, strictly speaking, it is not a 'self'.

As such, abstract-labour is an historically specific, powerful and peculiar form of social interdependence. In societies where people do not consume what they produce but produce in order to acquire commodities from others, the objectification of one's labour is the means by which such acquisition takes place. As Marx put it, "These objective dependency relations ... appear ... in such a way that individuals are now ruled by abstractions, whereas earlier they depended on one another" (Marx 1973: 164). This form of social mediation has the same general quality on the individual level as on the level of society as a whole. Viewed from the latter perspective, the concrete-labour of the individual is particular and part of a qualitatively heterogenous whole; as abstract-labour, however, it is an individuated moment of a qualitatively homogeneous, general social mediation constituting a social totality. As Postone (1996: 150) aptly expresses it, "In a society characterised by the universality of the commodity form ... Labour itself constitutes a social mediation in lieu of overt social relations".
This understanding of abstract-labour has considerable implications for our understanding of what defines and distinguishes the core of capitalism as a specific form of social and political-economic life. But before we can truly appreciate them, we need to put two final pieces of the jigsaw in place: socially necessary labour time and its corollary implications for economic competition and crisis.

_Socially necessary labour time_

The commodification of time ... holds the key to the deepest transformations of day-to-day social life that are brought about by the emergence of capitalism.

*Anthony Giddens (1981:131)*

At the end of the section on production I raised a series of important questions to which, I suggested, Marx dual concept of labour provides an answer. However, in what I have said about concrete- and abstract-labour so far, we are only half-way towards providing such an answer. Although we now understand the sense in which abstract-labour constitutes the 'substance' of value, it is still not clear how _in practice_ it can exist as a determinate dimension within capitalist societies. We still await a real measure which can represent abstract-labour. This has three implications. First, without such a measure abstract-labour still, strictly speaking, remains an ideality rather than an actuality. Second, without such a measure the exploitation of labour-power remains imperfectly explained. And finally, without such a measure we are still unsure as to quite what is being exploited: a determinate social agent or something altogether different and more interesting.

So it is that we turn to Marx's long-debated category of socially necessary labour time. I do not propose to enter the complex debate about the 'real' meaning and importance of this key concept here. Nor do I intend to enter the ancillary debate about the so-called 'transformation problem'. Suffice to say that a plethora of interpretations have been put forward, interpretations often quite at odds with each other. My own interpretation is guided by considerations of what _must_ be the case if the arguments I have already put forward are to hold together.

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Marx famously defines socially necessary labour time as "the labour-time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society" (Marx, quoted in M. Smith 1994: 53). This is a very complex definition. However, when analysed into its constituent parts it proves as comprehensible as it is illuminating. First, it points to a real, determinate and historically specific measure of value: time. Time in the modern sense, as clock time defined in seconds, minutes and hours, constitutes a really existing social convention with which abstract-labour and value can be practically measured. At last, then, the argument arrives at the measure that has been implicit all along. Second, though, not just any form of time will suffice to give abstract-labour and value a real existence. Since the latter are non-particular and homogenous then a peculiarly "abstract-time", as Postone (1996: 200) calls it, is required. All societies possess some form(s) of time: it is, of course, a socially and historically specific construction (Adam 1990). What is distinctive about the form of time dominant in capitalist societies, though, is that it is "uniform, continuous, homogeneous, 'empty' time ... independent of events" (Postone, ibid. 202). This form of abstract time, which began its life in Western Europe from the fifteenth century onwards, rose to prominence unevenly in the nineteenth century as capitalist industrialisation in Britain, Germany and France proceeded apace (Thompson 1967; Biernacki 1995). As Postone (1996: ch. 5) argues, in the process it displaced multiple secular and religious forms of 'concrete-time'. Although concrete-times could, like abstract-time, be linear and directional, unlike the latter they were/are routinely linked to events (e.g. the Jewish Exodus, Exile and Coming; the Christian Fall, Crucifiction and Second Coming) which make them a determined, rather than independent variable. Against this, by being independent and utterly abstract and homogeneous, capitalist time is thus possessed of the capacity to act as a truly general measure of value.

If these two points establish the relevance of time to Marx's account, his reference to 'social necessity' has often seemed more obscure. Yet it is of the utmost importance to
his argument and cannot be underemphasised, as many Marxists have been wont to do. To begin, it points to the fact that while the existence of an abstract measure is necessary to establish abstract-labour and value it is not sufficient. Abstract-time as can exist without abstract-labour, meaning the two are not synonymous. Where the former is a social convention which can measure labour hours as easily as it can the duration of a night's sleep or game of chess, the latter is a specific social construction of capitalist societies distinctive only to labour. More specifically, Marx is arguing that it is its special qualities as 'socially necessary' which establish it as a guiding force in capitalist society. What does this mean?

We have already seen why abstract-labour is social. It follows that abstract-labour time is also 'social' is the sense that it is the unity of the specific and particular labour times actually expended by producers to make specific commodities: it is what Marx (quoted in Postone ibid. 190) describes as "one homogeneous mass of human labour-power". In itself, this adds little to what has been said earlier. Until, that is, we add the following crucial corollary claim: "the value of a commodity is related to the value of any other commodity as the labour-time necessary for the production of the one is related to the labour-time necessary for the production of the other" (Marx, quoted in M. Smith 1994: 55). This qualification that labour-time be 'necessary' is enormously important. On the one hand, specific concrete-labour times together constitute a 'social average' - abstract labour-time - related to but different from them. But on the other hand, that social average then serves as a real social reference point against which individual commodity-values are valued. As Murray Smith (1994: 54) puts it,

The concept of socially necessary labour stands in contrast to the concrete and individual labours expended under varying conditions of technical efficiency in different productive enterprises. Just as a given commodity is produced through an expenditure of concrete-labour that is also an allocation of abstract social-labour, so the individual labour-time expended in the production of that commodity stands in a particular relation the socially necessary labour time required for its production. In measuring the value represented by a particular commodity, then, it is necessary to
approach this measurement at the social ... level, not at the individual level. The labour-time actually expended on the production of a commodity is determinant of its value only insofar as that labour time enters into the determination of the average conditions of production of all such commodities ...

There is thus a duality of labour-time which enables concrete labour-times to be subject to the rigours of abstract-labour time - even though the latter is constituted by the former. Regardless, then, of the material wealth produced by diverse concrete-labours, on a world market those labours are judged profitable or otherwise in terms of social wealth, specifically their capacity to produce in a time which betters the social average.

We now understand what abstract-labour (and by implication value) is. As abstract labour-time it is a real, determinate mass of homogeneous human labour, a ghostly domain of social wealth which appears on the form of commodities, money and capital. As abstract labour-time, we also now see how a set of social relations can be translated into an abstract dimension the quest for more of which makes the latter a process. Finally, as abstract labour-time socially necessary, we now have a powerful lever to grasp the how and who of exploitation. It is a lever, as we shall now see in relation to economic competition and crisis, which shows us that exploitation cannot be understood by examining production alone, nor by searching for a class, a social-'self' or an 'it' which is exploited.

*Competition and economic crisis*

Competition is nothing other than the inner nature of capital, its essential character, appearing in and realised as the reciprocal interaction of many capitals with one another, the inner tendency as external necessity.  

Karl Marx (1973: 414)

Capital, Marx argued, only exists as many capitals. What this means, of course, is that in societies where production is organised according to the pursuit of profit dissociated producers may make similar products to be sold competitively on the same market - or more properly markets, in the plural, since production is routinely differentiated by sector and product. Due, in part, to the fact that the production of even the same commodity can
be organised in multiple possible ways, different production enterprises enjoy quite
different profit margins. With socially necessary labour time as the chief regulator of what
counts as productive and unproductive at any given moment, firms which earn less than
the average rate of profit cannot be expected to survive indefinitely. In a competitive
environment, firms thus look to maximise their returns through the extraction to both
'relative' and 'absolute surplus-value', to which Marx devotes so much attention in *Capital*
1. Firms which can reduce the labour-time necessary to make specific commodities in
relation to the social average, stand to gain more than those who do not.

Yet the competitiveness of any given firm cannot be determined simply by looking
at what occurs in and around work and the labour-process. For Marx's point in identifying
the tendential formation of an abstract labour-time socially necessary is that individual
capitalists do *not* directly appropriate the surplus-value generated by their own workers. To
think otherwise is to forget that value, and thus surplus-value, are social - not individual -
magnitudes. Thus, with surplus-value conceived as a social aggregate, its *actual
distribution* among capitalists is, according to the reading proposed here, an a posteriori
"effect of inter-capitalist competition in the sphere of circulation and the tendential
formation of a general rate of profit" (M. Smith 1994: 68).

What this means is that the exploitation of labour-power cannot be understood with
reference to production alone. Exploitation can now be seen to be achieved only *after*
commodities have been sold competitively on the market. Although surplus-value is
generated in production, it is only *realised* through successful sale and exchange, sale and
exchange contingent upon the prevailing competitive conditions. This Marxian argument
has been powerfully elaborated by Shaik (1981), who points out that without such
exchange and competition socially necessary labour time could not exist as a real
determinant of which firms are and are not profitable. In turn, this indicates that far from
being ontologically subordinate to production and exploitation, abstract-labour (as socially
necessary labour time) is what gives the latter existence and rationale. Labour thus
mediates production, exchange and competition, both constituting and being in part constituted by exploitation and domination.

This brings us, finally, to the topic of economic crisis. I do not propose to go into any detail here having discussed Harvey's crisis theory in chapter one. For my purposes here it is enough to say that with socially necessary labour time as the general measure of value, a compulsive norm is set up which drive commodity production to the point of over-accumulation, inducing crises of capital realisation. Although the twin forces of inter-capitalist competition and class exploitation are, of course, pivotal here, the point is that both become indeterminate without the duality of labour providing a real social mechanism driving both of them forward.

VI. 'Open capitalism': labour, exploitation and social domination

Original thoughts can be understood only in virtue of the unoriginal elements they contain.
Stanislav Andreski (1972: ?)

I have sought, in a way Harvey and Smith do not, to build on the few fragments of a non-modern and non-traditional view of capitalism to be found in The Limits to Capital and Uneven Development. By returning to Marx, I have attempted to revive the cognitive power of familiar political-economic categories by combining them into a novel reading of capitalism's ontological core - a reading which can arguably reanimate the theoretical core of historical-geographical materialism as a research programme.

The view of capitalism which emerges is, to my mind at least, one which is as powerful as it is relevant to the conditions of the late twentieth century world. By shifting attention away from traditional and modern thematics of working class meta-agency and away from production narrowly understood, we see capitalism rather differently. By focussing squarely on labour in its dual aspect we see that capitalism must be appreciated for its overall systemic qualities, which take the peculiar form of exploitative and dominative social relations at the centre of which is abstract-labour. Capitalism is thus not first and foremost about class relations. Neither is it primarily about exploitation. Neither
is it about 'the' working-class. And neither, finally, is it about delusive appearances which are less important than the supposedly 'essential' realm of production. Instead, capitalism is a particular form of political-economic and social life in which a radically diverse working constituency is dominated and exploited by ramified relations of 'its' own making. Further, this domination and exploitation is achieved through abstract, dissembling social forms seemingly external to the variable labour-power that gives rise to them. Abstract- and concrete- labour are vital here, and lend capitalism the unusual quality of structuring the heterogenous into a putative unity and of thus being open-ended and structured rather than closed. And they are vital too, because they enable a remarkable process in which concrete-particularity is gathered into abstract social relations and forms which commonly dominate and exploit otherwise diverse working populations worldwide (Figure 2 schematically summarises my argument).

I realise that such claims - indeed much of the argument of this chapter - might sound arcane when phrased in such abstract, austere terms. But their importance and relevance perhaps becomes clearer when compared to the modern and traditional views of capitalism I outlined earlier in this thesis. Against those views - which see Marxists in general and historical-geographical materialists in particular positing 'capitalism' as a global, internally structured meta-system which exploits a meta-class in the key realm of production - 'capitalism' emerges as global and structured, yes, but as about much more than class and production. It emerges as a political-economic system constantly infused by its 'exteriors' since its 'internal relations' structure the most socially and geographically heteroclite working constituencies imaginable into a putative (and I stress putative) whole.

What effects does this view of capitalism's core have upon our understanding of the nature and purpose of historical-geographical materialism as a research programme? On modern and traditional readings, as I have said, it appears as a critique of capitalism from the standpoint of labour (or the working-class). However, if based upon the view of capitalism's core adumbrated here, it emerges as a critique of labour in capitalism. This
Fig. 2 The core of capitalism

- Commodity production, distribution, consumption and exchange
- Inter-capitalist competition
- Over-accumulation and economic crisis

THE GLOBAL/SIMILARITY

THE LOCAL/HETEROGENEITY

Capital circulation and accumulation

System integration

THE GLOBAL/SIMILARITY

Domination

Socially necessary labour time

Exploitation

Abstract/social labour Invisible

The duality of labour

Concrete/private labour Visible

C Capitalists
LP Labour power

Individual productive unit
descriptive contrast may seem mere semantic game-playing, but in fact the latter critical project is profoundly different from the former in ways that can help re-establish historical-geographical materialism as a problematic of widespread appeal and relevance. Let me explain.

Unlike a critique from the standpoint of labour, a critique of labour has both a different object and a different subject. The object is capitalist labour, particularly in its abstract form, whose "ghostly ontology" - as Norman Fischer (1982: 29) describes it - lies at the centre of capitalism as a global political-economic system. The object is thus not the modern/traditional one of production and exploitation per se. Likewise, the subject of a critique of labour is not 'the' working class, nor any other meta-agent for that matter. Rather, it is a socially and spatially plural working constituency whose only common identity is that 'it' is exploited and dominated by value relations largely of 'its' own making. A historical-geographical critique of capitalism, then, is not about the working class 'reclaiming' what is its own, since it is precisely the social relations and forms which are sustained by labour-power worldwide which give rise to a commonality of 'class interest' in the first place. As Keenan (1993: 181) perceptively puts it of one of those relations, value: it "constitute[s] ... the nothing as a something that could be substituted for". In other words, if capitalism were to be replaced by a different form of political-economic life, then the forces unifying an otherwise heterogenous working constituency would also disappear and thus this putative constituency too. To suppose otherwise is to base critique on an acceptance - rather than a transcendence - of actually existing social forms and relations.

Such a redescription of the essential nature and intent of historical-geographical materialism may at first sight seem heretical. It seems to radically displace the importance of class - at least in the traditional sense of the term - and to radically demote the importance of production and exploitation. Certainly, it seems to bear little relation to descriptions like that recently offered by Harvey (1992: 302) of Marx's and his own project: "[Marxian] political economy [is] ... the means to define an alternative subaltern
and subversive science situated from the perspective of the proletariat". However, the heresy is perhaps more apparent than real. Class is clearly still essential to any Left politics and theory in geography. This is why the interpretation I am proposing does not reject but instead reconfigures traditional and modern meanings of the term. On the analysis presented here class is about a common structural address within a ramified system of capitalist relations and forms that sustain as much as they produced by that address. It is thus not about singular agency ('the proletariat') and certainly not about common identity. Rather, it is all about similarity-in-difference: a similarity in which workers of all manner of ethnicities, nationalities, sexualities genders, religions, cultural beliefs and so on are brought together. This is thus a similarity constituted by and in difference. And it is thus also an historically specific and contingent similarity in which different concrete-labourers are forcibly articulated into a global systemic frame. Likewise, the arguments I have put forward in this chapter do not reject the central importance of production or exploitation, but rather resituate both within a wider understanding of what is important about and distinctive to capitalism. With labour, rather than production or exploitation per se, the central focus, we come to see that 'surface appearances' and moments of capital other than those associated with the workplace become absolutely vital to the functioning and survival of this system of political-economic life.

VII. Thinking globally: labour, totality and the revisitation of Hegelian themes

I suggested in the previous chapter that the Hegelian legacy can be positively reappraised as integral to the alternative reading of the theoretical/epistemological practices of historical-geographical materialism. The same can, I think, be said for the ontological reappraisal of capitalism's core put forward in the previous pages. Although once again I can do no more than offer a cursory look at Hegel's legacy, an acknowledgement of it is, I think, appropriate in suggesting its continued relevance.
In chapter two, I suggested that Hegel can without difficulty be linked to a modern/traditional Marxian view of capitalism and to a notion of classical Marxism and historical-geographical materialism as critiques from the standpoint of 'the' proletariat. For the Hegel of The Phenomenology of Spirit, Geist constitutes objective reality by means of a process of externalisation or self-objectification which is ultimately overcome by the realisation of Geist as a totalising and totalised Subject. Accordingly, Marx supposedly inverts Hegel's analysis, substituting the working class and capitalism respectively for the subject and object of Geist. As such, 'capitalism' becomes a 'totality' to be reappropriated by a meta-class-subject.

As I indicated at some length, modern notions Marxian of totality and meta-subjectivity have deservedly come under fire in recent years. This is why the re-reading of capitalism's core adumbrated in this chapter seeks to reconfigure both. My suggestion that capitalism is global, systemic but open-ended is among other things intended to signal a need for holistic political-economic thinking without succumbing to outdated notions of closed totality some discrete from its putative 'exteriors'. Likewise, my focus on domination, rather than exploitation alone, and on labour, rather than class traditionally understood, is intended to subvert modern notions of 'the working class' while still demonstrating the existence a putative meta-constituency which suffers the brunt of capitalist violence. Yet for all the differences between these arguments - which posit classical Marxism and historical-geographical materialism as critiques of labour - and those which function as critiques of capitalism from the standpoint of labour, the former can be seen to build positively on the Hegelian themes which hobble the latter.

The objective moment of Geist now becomes transposed as a seemingly self-moving substance which is capitalism as a global, dominative and exploitative system of social relations at the heart of which is the duality of concrete- and abstract-labour. Likewise, the subjective moment of Geist becomes transposed as a international constituency which is less a Subject than a heterogeneity with a common social-relational
location. In turn, the relations between system and subject differ from those found in modern and traditional readings. With Subject no longer a class and production and exploitation no longer the 'essence' of capitalism, capitalism is less a closed externalisation of working class activities and more an open-ended 'totality' in which abstract-labour plays a central, if invisible, mediating role.

VIII. The persistence of vision

... representation articulates - puts into words, visualises, puts together - social practices and forces which are not ... there to be seen but which we theoretically know condition our existence.

Griselda Pollock (1988: 6)

With capitalism understood in the way I have argued for - and with the object and subject of historical-geographical materialist critique thus reconfigured - the nature and pertinence of a contemporary critical project of envisioning capitalism should, I hope, finally be clear. If, as I have argued, concrete- and abstract-labour lie at the heart of capitalism as a global economic system, then it becomes vital to disclose and critique this consequential duality, particularly in its aspect as abstract-labour which exists as a real but invisible dimension. An historical-geographical project of envisioning the economy is thus not about getting behind surface appearances to reveal the 'real action' of production, class struggle and exploitation. Rather, it is about 'showing' manifestly different workers worldwide their common implication in an exploitative and dominative system whose fetishised forms - commodities and money - help constitute and conceal labour in its dual-aspect.

If this makes a project of envisioning sound less glamorous than when linked to high-sounding modern/traditional notions of 'international class struggle' and 'class-for-itself', it makes its no less relevant. While such hoary Marxian notions ring hollow today, the project of envisioning I am arguing for here entails the linking of social and spatial differences within and between working people into a broader struggle against capital. This is not a Marxist class politics of old, where the struggle against capital often went hand-in-hand with aggressive affirmations of a common class identity and the equally
aggressive displacement of other social identities and struggles. Rather, it is about the building of alliances and affinities in a common struggle to contest the violence of capitalism. How such alliances and affinities can be built, and what role theoretical work can play in building them, are, of course, crucial issues - ones to which I will turn in the final chapter. For now, though, it is enough to make the basic point: a contemporary historical-geographical project of 'envisioning the economy' is about establishing the continued relevance of a critique of capitalism, but need bare little relation to an older, arrogating class politics of identity which has long proven to be as unrealistic as it is reductive (I say more about the 'politics' issuing from 'theory' in the final chapter).

* * *

I have covered a lot of ground in the last ninety or so pages. Let me now try to draw the concerns of the last two chapters together by way of a summary of this Part. My aim has been to indicate the importance and possible shape of a contemporary project of envisioning capitalism. More specifically I have tried to indicate why an amended historical-geographical materialism offers the ontological and epistemological resources appropriate for such a project. If my arguments hold good, then they amount to a qualified defence and advocacy of a Marxian political-economy in geography which is at once meta-theoretical and systematic. I say 'qualified', of course, because I have sought to contest the 'modern' meta-theoretical practices that Harvey, among others, has been seen to succumb to. By revealing a sophisticated but latent epistemological reflexivity at the heart of Harvey's work I have suggested that meta-theoretical political-economy need not be foundationalist, universalist and authoritarian. At the same time, by re-interpreting the core of capitalism by using the venerable Marxian categories which lie at the heart of historical-geographical materialist's work - namely, that of Harvey (again) and Smith - I have tried to show that capitalism is not a closed, all-dominant system reducible to production and working class exploitation. Together, I believe, these epistemological and ontological
Figure 3 Modern/traditional Marxism and late modern/traditional Marxism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modern/traditional Marxism</th>
<th>Late modern/traditional Marxism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[critique from the standpoint of 'the' proletariat]</td>
<td>[critique of labour in capitalism]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemology</strong></td>
<td><strong>Epistemology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• foundational (search for essences)</td>
<td>• qualified foundationalism (search for key processes/relations but no presumption of their a priori privilege)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• universalist (meta-theoretical)</td>
<td>• qualified universalism (meta-theory still important but situated and an achievement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• authoritarianism (search for Truth)</td>
<td>• reflexive theorising (theory still committed to accurate description and explanation but also aware of its necessarily aporetic nature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• scientific</td>
<td>• science redefined as asymptotic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• world-disclosing</td>
<td>• world-disclosing but also simultaneously world-concealing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• identity of thought and the real</td>
<td>• non-identity of thought and the real</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>Ontology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• essentialist (The Social determined by capitalism; capitalism, in turn, reducible to class and workplace exploitation)</td>
<td>• non-essentialist (capitalism still object of inquiry but awareness that Social is over-detemined; capitalism, in turn, irreducible to class and workplace exploitation alone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• globalist (capitalism is global and all-encompassing 'totality')</td>
<td>• qualified globalism (capitalism still seen as global, linking otherwise disparate peoples and places, but is hardly all-encompassing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• disembedded ('pure capitalism' as a discrete, self-moving 'system')</td>
<td>• embedded (impure capitalism; although capitalism still seen as possessing structure and seemingly 'self-moving' qualities it is based on structuring its putative exteriors in the form of the always already heterogeneous labour-power)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• closed totality</td>
<td>• open totality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• hierarchical ('essences' more important than 'appearances')</td>
<td>• non-hierarchical (appearances as materially important as 'essences; all the 'moments' of capitalism causally important; capitalism as dominative as it is exploitative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• class the key and singular form of social identity and insurgency</td>
<td>• class still important but neither the key nor singular form of identity and insurgency; class redefined as plurality with a common structural address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• capitalism ramified externalisation of labour of 'the' working class</td>
<td>• 'capitalism' medium and outcome, result and cause of value-creating labour which is a paradoxically heterogeneous unity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reinterpretations retain the explanatory power and relevance of historical-geographical materialism today, while dispensing with the outdated epistemological practices and ontological claims animating modern and traditional Marxism. In other words, I believe they point towards historical-geographical materialism as a form of 'late Marxism', one neither sternly modern nor flaccidly postmodern (Figure 3 summarises, with deliberate starkness, my arguments thus far).

However, it still remains to examine the geographies of capitalism. With the 'core' of historical-geographical materialism reinterpreted, it is thus time to take things a step further. So it is than I now attempt to explain and reevaluate some of the ways in which Harvey et al. have extended this core in order to make Marx's historical-materialism a geographical materialism too.

NOTES

1 Perhaps the most stunning and most recent testament to this is the proliferation of highly commercialised research into human genetic research ('genomics') and into practical applications of it like gene therapy. This latter kind of biomedicine - without suitable moral and political safeguards - threatens to make the manipulation of human life itself a profit-making enterprise, in which, for example, those who can afford it can pay to avoid suffering personal or procreational 'abnormalities'. I say more about this, and other forms of the 'production of nature', in chapter 6.

2 Although in this context I agree with Sayer (1995) that Marxists have often claimed too much for capitalism through a failure to ask 'counter-factual' questions which would help identify what in the social world is attributable to capitalism and what is not.

3 None of these very different authors reads Marx in quite the way I propose here, though Postone's interpretation is particularly resonant. Rather, my interpretation draws loose inspiration from the work of each of them and, accordingly, it is not my intention to make detailed reference to them in what follows.

4 And I note that in his non-traditional reading of capitalism's core features, Postone (1996) directly compares his own efforts to those of Ollman's.

5 See, for example, the works of Landes (1983), Le Goff (1980) and Whitrow (1975) on this.

6 On this particular issue there are - notwithstanding my earlier criticism of 'her' work - certain affinities between my own arguments and those recently proposed by K J Gibson-Graham (1995; 1996, ch. 3; 1997).

7 I borrow this title from Haraway (1991: 188).
RECLAIMING SPACE, NATURE AND THE SUBJECT

Historical materialism has to be upgraded to historical-geographical materialism.
David Harvey (1989b: 6)
I have presented a reconstruction and reinterpretation of the epistemological practices and basic ontological claims to be found in key works by David Harvey and by Neil Smith. I have done so with the aid of recent scholarship outside human geography which offers an alternative view of the practices and arguments of the thinker both authors draw upon directly, Karl Marx. The effect, I hope, is to show that the ‘core’ of historical-geographical materialism and the ‘core’ of the capitalism it studies are both less and yet more than recent critics of Marxist geography suggest. I say less in the sense that, on the epistemological reading I have proposed, historical-geographical materialism does not unreflexively call forth a monstrous representation of disabling performative force (‘Capitalism’), but instead ‘envisions’ capitalism in a modality not dissimilar to that advocated by Buck-Morss. Equally, by virtue of the ontological openness I have identified, ‘capitalism’ is not quite the hermetically sealed, intransigent meta-system Gibson-Graham and other critics rightly decry. But I also say more because the demiurgic qualities I have accented show capitalist social relations and forms to be invisible, pervasive and structured as well as exploitative and dominating. Thus, where the critiques of Gibson-Graham, Barnes and others - for all their virtues - arguably evacuate the theoretical substance of Marxist inquiry, the interpretation I offer here seeks to retain an explanatory power and purchase adequate to a system still very much with us. This retention is vital, I would submit, if the critique of Marxism in geography and beyond is not to leave open a cognitive space which the misleading rhetorics of contemporary free-market economic theories can all-too-willingly occupy.

In this Part I now want to put my basic reinterpretation of historical-geographical materialism's epistemological procedures and ontological claims to work on three key themes which have helped to make the work of Harvey et al. a distinctive and innovative
geographical extension and reformulation of Marx's ideas: namely, 'the production of space', 'the production of nature' and the production of what I call 'the subject of capital'. Over the last fifteen years or so, Harvey and his co-workers have insisted that capitalist political-economy is intrinsically - rather than accidentally - geographical, and have made good on this fertile and consequential insight with remarkable originality. Building on the reinterpretation put forward in the previous two chapters, I hope to show that historical-geographical materialism is a problematic which can still powerfully illuminate the nature and causes of some of the most everyday and momentous geographical transformations of our fin-de-millenium world. For the capitalist production of space, 'nature' and subjectivity constitute a crushingly real nexus which is daily constituted and reconstituted in ways that bind the local and the global, the here and the there, the us and the them together in a world economy whose 'satanic geographies' are essential to its survival.

Although my concerns remain resolutely theoretical, the chapters which follow are pitched at a less abstract level than those of the previous Part and are leavened here and there with vignettes and examples to indicate what is at stake. Accordingly, the prose too takes on a less abstruse tone. If what follows still remains too theoretical for some, then I make no apology. For my point is to elucidate and expose the logic of relations and processes productive of space, nature and the subject in these dangerous late-capitalist times. While empirical work is, of course, absolutely vital if we are to understand the nature and diverse consequences of contemporary political-economic transformations, we need to discern the shape of the forest before we can properly appreciate what lies behind and unites the otherwise splendidly particular trees.

My first concern - that capitalism 'produces space' - is well known and perhaps the insight for which writers like Harvey and Smith are most recognised. It has inspired and been part of a wider explosion of radical economic geography - including Marxisant and post-Marxist writers like Phil Cooke, Mick Dunford, Doreen Massey, Allen Scott and Michael Storper, as well as more resolutely Marxist theorists - devoted to exploring the
intimate connections between production and its geographies at a time of momentous global and local economic reorganisation. Yet the contribution of historical-geographical materialism is, of course, hardly exhausted by these spatial thematics. This is why I turn, in the second place, to the seemingly enigmatic notion of the capitalist 'production of nature'. Although first put forward by Neil Smith a decade ago, it is a concept whose powerful implications have only recently begun to be truly appreciated. This is no doubt due in part to the fact that a concern with 'nature' has, strictly speaking, seemed to lie outside of the traditional concerns of political-economy. However, in a 1990s context of so-called 'global environmental crisis', such a restrictive conception of political-economy's subject matter is as unrealistic as it is unhelpful. In this light, the concept of the production of nature emerges as one of immense importance for any proper contemporary critique of political-economy. But it is also (as we shall see) vital for any contemporary environmentalism too. The recent explosion of interest on the Left in geography and beyond in matters environmental has all-too-often bypassed Marxism, routinely regarding it as too 'red' to be 'green'. To my mind, though, the notion of the production of nature offers an original and productive way out of the cul-de-sac of much contemporary green thinking. Finally, in chapter 7, I consider a topic seemingly even more unrelated to political-economic issues than the question of 'nature', namely the capitalist production of subjectivity or what I call 'the subject of capital'. As with the question of nature, the question of the subject has preoccupied many radical geographers in recent years (see, for example Pile and Thrift 1995). Drawing inspiration in part from the emergent field of 'cultural studies', this new work has revealed not only the complex and fractured nature of the subject but also the way that geography matters in the very constitution of subjectivity. Yet strangely, few have recognised that historical-geographical materialism - specifically, elements of Harvey's rich corpus (again) - embodies a powerful (if under-developed) account of the production of pervasive and specifically capitalist modalities of subjectivity. Again, this bypassing of historical-geographical materialism is no doubt in part due to the notion that
Marxism is, *inter alia*, too 'economistic' to cope with lofty 'superstructural' questions of identity and social subjectivity. But as I hope to show, such a one-sided view blinds us to the fact that modern subjects, whatever else they may be, are distinctively capitalist subjects who both constitute and are in part constituted by wider political-economic processes and forms.

Yet all this said, it may still seem strange to want to convene a discussion of three topics seemingly so disparate. Space, nature and the subject may appear to be poles apart, to bear so little relation to one another that to consider them together seems arbitrary and inchoate. Such a view is understandable. However, it is a peculiar fact that this view is only sustainable because the common political-economic relations animating this triptych are phenomenally invisible. What this means is that these realms really do seem to be not only separate from each other, but also external to forms of capitalist organisation, even though this is in fact not the case. It is, however, a strength of historical-geographical materialism to see these three realms as what they are, i.e. as intrinsically related within capitalism, not somehow separate and discrete as appearances - and conventional analytical thinking - would have us believe. The constitution and reconstitution of urban, regional and national economic landscapes, of 'natural' environments and even of forms of human subjectivity are thus all equally part and parcel of capitalist political-economy. But the point is that it takes an effort of theoretical labour to reveal their co-production within a common social-systemic frame.

This is arguably why the brands of neo-classical and free-market economics that are today so *de rigeur* in business and government think-tanks still work with versions of what Elmar Altvater (1993: 72) disparagingly calls a "model economy": that is, an abstract pin-head model whose notion of 'economy' is, to say the least, restricted. Once we get beyond such unrealistic notions, we come to see that capitalism *exceeds* the bounds of economy traditionally understood. This is an important point. It does not - to reiterate the claim I made above - make capitalism an insuperable meta-system. Nor does it contradict
my earlier claims that capitalism does not exhaust the space of the social. Nor, furthermore, does mean that the explanatory-diagnostic ambitions of historical-geographical materialists are, after all, exorbitant. What it does mean, though, is that capitalist relations are sufficiently pervasive to impinge upon facets of reality we otherwise think ‘non-economic’ - nature and subjectivity being the two most obvious examples of this in what follows. A failure to recognise this is, quite simply, a failure to recognise one of the central truths of late twentieth century capitalist life. Accordingly, a radical political-economy - Marxist or otherwise - that restricts its concerns to ‘the economy’ in the narrow and conventional sense of the word is as grossly misconceived as the free market orthodoxies it otherwise opposes.

At this point I should perhaps say something about my use of the term ‘production’ in the three chapters which follow. That I consider the three topics of space, nature and subjectivity under this common rubric may seem no more than a faithful repetition of a term Harvey et al. have deliberately chosen to make common currency in their work. These authors invoke the term, I think, because for them it signals very clearly the fact that under capitalism space, nature and subjectivity are all social through and through, the historically contingent products of structured social relations and practices. For all their materiality and enormous consequentiality, capitalist space, nature and subjectivity are thus only as enduring as the capitalist forms and processes of which they are medium and outcome. However, while I concur with this perhaps obvious, but still important, sense of ‘production’, I also invoke the term for another important reason which requires brief explanation.

As I showed in chapter 1, recent critics have reprimanded Marxism and Marxist geography for their narrow ‘productivism’, that is, for their supposed preoccupation with work and commodity production as if they constitute a privileged ‘region’ of social life, its dead-centre. Indeed, up until this point in this thesis, ‘production’ has been used in the narrow sense of what occurs in work and the workplace. However, given my arguments in
chapter 4, it should now be clear that this is far too narrow and restrictive a definition of capitalist production. Instead, 'production' should be seen as the wider, ramified field of relations and social forms which together drive forward processes of political-economic growth, transformation and periodic collapse. Interestingly, this richer and more expansive sense of production - which animates the following three chapters - is one put forward long ago by that maverick Marxist Henri Lefebvre. In seminal works like the *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre insisted, drawing upon the less systematic and more fluid Marx of the *Grundrisse*, that understanding production in the conventional sense belied a misguided empiricism that simply missed most of what was really important about capitalist political-economy. That Lefebvre, of all twentieth-century Marxists, should suggest this is fortuitous in relation to my concerns here: for it is, of course, his reading of Marx which all the authors I consider in the next three chapters - Merrifield and Swyngedouw as well as Harvey and Smith - have in part drawn upon to theorise the geographies that capitalism produces.²

Of course, even working with this more ecumenical sense of production, there is no guarantee that it will not be used in either a modern or traditional way to install all the meta-theoretical closures critics object to. However, as I have said, in what follows I want to build-in my reinterpretation of historical-geographical materialism's core epistemological practices and ontological claims. This means two things, which follow from my arguments in chapters 4 and 3 respectively. First, it means that 'production' is conceived here precisely in the sense that commodities are fabricated as part of a systemic and ramified set of social relations and forms which are at once structured yet open-ended. It is, as I argued, the concatenation of relations and processes which in the end really matter, not any one site or sphere. As we shall see, this broad but unclosed sense of production can enable a productive historical-geographical materialist re-reading of how space, nature and subjectivity are fabricated in late capitalist societies. Secondly, it also means that the cluster of theoretical concepts used to disclose the capitalist production of
this triad - at the centre of which are concrete- and abstract-labour - should be understood reflexively in the sense that they are thought-abstractions which reveal key aspects of a social reality they are non-identical with and which exceeds them.

I should, however, enter a proviso in light of these comments on production. The proviso is that the following three chapters - like the bulk of this thesis - are argued from the perspective of 'system-integration'. That is, they consider space, nature and the subject from the third-person perspective of the thinker-observer envisioning capitalism in terms of its systemic 'logic'. While this has the virtue of making seen otherwise broad scale and invisible processes and relations, it does mean that space, nature and the subject are only considered from one, very particular angle. I want, therefore, to register the fact that my arguments do not constitute an exhaustive survey of historical-geographical materialist work on these three topics. To take just a few examples, I do not consider Harvey's work on 'time-space compression' and the constitution of subjectivity; I do not consider Smith's work on the production of gentrified urban space with its specific class and symbolic content; and I do not consider Harvey's empirical work on Paris with its rich depiction of how class and other identities shape and are shaped by the new political-economy and geography of post-Hausmann Paris.

This brings me, at last, to the title of this Part, 'Reclaiming space, nature and the subject'. I have already explained my decision to focus on the triptych of space, nature and subjectivity. In this context, my decision to talk of 'reclaiming' them is, I hope, obvious. Rather as I sought to do for 'capitalism' in the previous two chapters, my hope in what follows is to reclaim capitalist space, nature and subjectivity from a Right who routinely denies their social production and effectivity, a contemporary Left whose general eagerness to surpass Marxism risks ignoring them, but also a set of historical-geographical materialists whose deep insights into all three dimensions can easily be made to fall when saddled to modern or traditional theoretical architectonics.
Finally, it is perhaps useful to say something about how best to read the chapters comprising this Part. Although, as I have insisted, the production of space, nature and subjectivity must be seen as co-production rather than separateness, these three concerns are nonetheless far from synonymous or homologous. For this reason, each chapter is written as a free-standing essay and each reflects the rather different vocabularies and idioms of the current debates that swirl around space, nature and the subject. As such, they can be read alone or in any order. Read together, though, the metonymic crossings between them are not hard to detect and the common themes animating each of them are, I hope, readily apparent.

NOTES

1 A view which, I think, persists in some quarters despite the innovative work and legacy of E P Thompson, Raymond Williams and others who sought to develop a 'cultural materialism'.

2 I do not intend to explore the influence of Lefebvre upon the work of historical-geographical materialists. For a wide-ranging discussion of the Lefebvre-Harvey relation though see Gregory (1994: ch. 6).
CHAPTER FIVE

THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE

The twentieth century has ushered in the discovery of deep space... and yet it is only as the century draws to a close that this fundamental discovery is becoming apparent... Deep space is quintessentially social space; it is physical extent fused with social intent.

Neil Smith (1990: 161-2)

I. Introduction: the beginning of geography

Smith's claim may, at first sight, seem both provocative and peculiar. After all, as Ed Soja (1989: 1) rightly concedes, "for at least the past century, time and history have occupied a privileged position in the practical and theoretical consciousness of ... critical social science". Or, as Harvey admits in The Urbanisation of Capital (1985b: xi), "there has been a strong and almost overwhelming predisposition [in critical theory] to give time and history priority over space and geography ...". But the seeming peculiarity (although not the provocativeness) of Smith's assertion disappears once one recalls that this asymmetry in considerations of time and space has, in recent years, been decisively rectified. For, of course, over the last decade or so, what Soja (ibid.) felicitously calls the "reassertion of space in critical social theory" has become increasingly apparent and increasingly important. In other words, the claim that "geography matters" (Massey and Allen 1984) - for so long axiomatic for critical human geographers but for too long ignored by critical theorists outside of geography - has now begun to be taken seriously across a wide spectrum of the critical human sciences.

This is more more than just a theoretical matter, of course. Although Smith's claim about the fin-de-siècle 'discovery' of 'deep space' is intended to register the recent spatialisation of critical theory, it is also a deliberate reference to momentous real world events and changes. Since the long post-war boom came to an end with the onset of global economic crisis in the early 1970s, we have seen a remarkable and clamorous reconstitution of the fabric of capitalism. The political-economic ground rules remain more or less the same, of course: accumulation for accumulation's sake, inter-capitalist
competition, the exploitation and domination of labour power, and periodic crises of over-accumulation. But as the solidities of post-war capitalism have melted into air, new modalities of capitalist organisation have slowly and unevenly taken their place. And Smith's point is that these changes have been profoundly and intrinsically geographical - as much as structural - in nature.

Smith is not simply referring here to the increasing penetration of capitalism into its last great unoccupied 'frontiers': the former USSR, the former Eastern Bloc and China. Aside from this colonisation of new absolute space, 'deep space' is also about the profound geographical reconstitution of existing urban and regional landscapes - of established relative spaces - as crisis-induced devaluation and reinvestment has proceeded with unremitting intensity these last twenty five years. In this light, Smith detects a geographical irony in Francis Fukuyama's (1989) well-known and controversial claim that the collapse of Eastern communism has marked 'the end of history'. For although market expansion into the former command economies has indeed made the 'globalisation' of capitalism (along with its political bed-fellow, liberal democracy) an increasing reality, this may in fact signal what Smith (op. cit.) prophetically calls "the beginning of geography".

For space sceptics - that is, those who remain unconvinced about the importance of space in the constitution of economic and social life - this claim may sound as hubristic as Fukuyama's announcement of history's end. But Smith's point is not that capitalism now operates within a truly global space (although he certainly agrees that capitalism is now global in reach). Rather, against this view of what Harvey (op. cit., emphasis added) calls "capitalism in space", Smith is referring to what Henri Lefebvre (1991) seminally referred to as the capitalist production of space. Thus, the geographical repatternings captured in such now familiar descriptors as the 'North-South divide' in the Britain, the shift from the 'rustbelt' to the 'sunbelt' in the USA, the decline of 'old industrial cities' in Western Europe and North America, the rise of 'learning regions' and 'new industrial districts' in the
developed economies, the faltering of the NICs and the further decline of the LLDCs are not mere reflexes of changes in the organisation of capitalism. Rather, these dynamic geographies of capital accumulation must be "construed ... as fundamental and 'active moments' within the contradictory dynamics of capitalism" (Harvey op. cit. 33).

In this light, Smith's announcement of the fin-de-siècle discovery of deep space is no mere conceit designed to justify and legitimate critical geography's preoccupation with the spatial constitution of society. The recomposition of the relative space constituted by and constitutive of global capitalism is, as Smith (op. cit. 163) avers, "crushingly real". In the enervating climate of the post-1973 world, competition between cities and metropolitan regions for jobs and capital has intensified dramatically, leading to distinctive forms of 'urban entrepreneurialism' (Harvey 1989d) and to new 'regional class alliances' (Harvey 1985c) within the Western and non-Western worlds. This is hardly an inconsequential development, because as localities compete to retain existing investment or to attract new forms of investment, there is room for all manner of reactionary particularisms and what Swyngedouw (1989: 31) calls "the resurrection of locality". There is, of course, nothing necessarily reactionary about a politics of place and community (see Byrne 1995 and Harvey 1995c). However, the line between what Massey (1993) calls a "progressive sense of place" and an unprogressive one is fine. In the West in particular, a combination of pervasive neo-conservatism, the effective dismantling of radical local government, and a hypermobile capital able to move relatively freely across space is producing a "vicious spiral of inter-territorial competition" (Swyngedouw op. cit. 41). And herein Harvey (1985c, 1995c), among others, sees room for the formation of geopolitical oppositions which could boil over into conflicts of more than just an economic kind.

It is in this theoretical and real world context that I want, in this chapter, to examine the seminal historical-geographical materialist investigations into the capitalist production of space. Strictly speaking this is, in fact, a re-examination since, as I observed in the Introduction to this Part, Harvey et al.'s innovative work on space is by now very familiar
to critical human geographers. Moreover, if Soja (op. cit.) is even partly correct, this work has also been instrumental in convincing critically minded scholars outside geography that space makes a difference. My intention, therefore, is not to simply restate well-established arguments. Rather, I aim to clarify and reinterpret those arguments.

I have two reasons for doing so. On the one side, notwithstanding the current spatial vogue on the academic Left in geography and beyond, it is arguable that vital historical-geographical materialist insights into the production of space risk being submerged in a mixture of misunderstanding and one-sided interpretation. This is true in three senses. First, as Smith and Katz (1993) have argued, far too much of the recent talk about the importance of space invokes 'metaphorical space' at the expense of 'material space'. Second, the geographical debates surrounding Critical Realism and the 'Localities projects', which have been especially important in Britain, have threatened to reduce space to the realm of the contingent, thereby under-playing its constitutive political-economic role. Finally, as part of the wider postmodern/structural/colonial sensibility now characteristic of critical human geography, it has been argued that Harvey et al. seek to reduce space to capitalist processes in an illicit claim to what Keith and Pile (1993: 7) call "spatial immanence". At the same time - and on the other side - the Right has never really treated space as anything other than a container in which events happen. Yet in a world where inter-urban and inter-regional economic competition proceeds apace such a restrictive view is highly problematic. Among other things, it encourages what Merrifield (1993a: 516) calls a "Cartesian view of place" in which the constitutive imbrication of localities worldwide with one another is ignored and their co-production within capital circulation overlooked.

In light of all this, my overall argument will be two-fold. First, I will suggest that Harvey et al. are right to insist that contemporary urban and regional production complexes are, for all their specific differences from one another, best seen as part and parcel of the capitalist production of space. Secondly, though, I will show how this
argument need not issue in a reduction of space and place to capital circulation since capitalism is always exceeded by what I call the 'differential geographies' constituting social and economic formations. The upshot, I hope to show, is that historical-geographical materialist concepts can allow us to reclaim the reality of the capitalist space economy from a Right which routinely hypostatizes and separates places, without succumbing to the kind of spatial immanence to which its critics on the Left rightly object.

The chapter is organised as follows. In the next section I offer a brief survey of recent arguments concerning the difference that space makes to the constitution of social and economic life. Then, I summarise Harvey *et al.*'s arguments about the capitalist production of space and situate them within this wider 'spatial turn' in critical theory. I then draw on Andrew Merrifield's (1993a, 1993b) critique of Cartesian views of place to argue why holding fast to the dynamics of capitalism's material production of space remains absolutely vital in the 1990s. Following this though, I turn to the work of critics of historical-geographical materialism - particularly that of Trevor Barnes (1989a, 1996) - which suggests the problems of reading space and place through Marxist theoretical lenses. I then suggest how Harvey *et al.*'s arguments on space can be re-read in a more open direction which can respect the particularities of places without losing sight of their co-production within the space of capital accumulation. Finally, I close with some comments about the necessity for what David Harvey (1973), in *Social Justice and the City*, aptly called 'the geographical imagination' and how, in light of my arguments, that imagination might look today.

II. The difference that space makes

...spatial structures cannot be *theorised* without social structures, *and vice versa* ...  
Derek Gregory (1978: 121)

It is not my intention to review in any comprehensive way the recent debates concerning what Andrew Sayer (1985) calls "the difference that space makes". The two decades of insightful work undertaken in human geography - and increasingly outside it - on the
consequential interconnectivities between 'social relations and spatial structures' (Gregory and Urry 1985) has already been well surveyed by others, notably Derek Gregory (in his Geographical Imaginations) and Soja (in his Postmodern Geographies; see also Allen [1997]). For this reason I merely want to recapitulate, very briefly, the now familiar story of critical human geography's 'discovery' of the constitutive importance of space and the pivotal place of historical-geographical materialism in that discovery.

Soja's Postmodern Geographies serves as a familiar and useful reference point here. In it he charts the pre-history of the fin-de-siècle reassertion of space in radical thinking by tracing the convoluted relations between twentieth century human geography and Western critical theory. As I noted above, the latter has conventionally prioritised time, identifying critical praxis with becoming while associating space with what Foucault (1980: 70) called "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile". Seeking to understand this subordination of space in social theory, Soja's account revolves around a series of stark, but instructive, periodisations. Returning to the last fin-de-siècle, Soja describes the rise of a "carceral historicism" (op. cit. 1) infecting both critical and mainstream social and economic theory, notably classical Marxian and neo-classical economics respectively. Although, as Soja rightly notes, the likes of Lenin, Luxemburg, Bukharin, Trotsky and Bauer displayed a greater geographical sensitivity than Marx, for whom space was largely an 'unnecessary complication', even these early post-classical Marxists shared with their erstwhile opponents - the likes of Marshall and Pigou - "visions of a[n] ... economy that existed as if it were packed solidly on to the head of a pin, in a fantasy world with virtually no spatial dimensions" (ibid. 32). At the same, Soja argues, geography - founded as a university discipline towards the end of the nineteenth century - was relatively cut off from wider social theoretical discussions. A parochial and largely empiricist discipline, and one crafted in the shadow of neo-Kantianism to boot, what Soja calls Modern Geography had, by mid-century, become "involuted" (ibid. 35). Whether the study of 'man/land' relationships (Thomas 1956), the analysis of locational patterns
(Haggett 1965), or the study of 'areal differentiation' (Hartshorne 1959), Modern Geography was disconnected from the domain of social theory, critical or otherwise. But in any case, Soja argues, even if the connections had existed Modern Geography would have been particularly ill-equipped to show that space makes a difference to the way social and economic life operates: for Modern Geography on the whole accepted the received view of space as a mere container in which events unfold on the ground.

It was not, Soja argues, until the 1960s that the precursors of what he rather confusingly terms a 'Postmodern Geography' were to be found. A Postmodern Geography, on Soja's definition, is one that puts space on an equal footing with time and which discloses the intrinsic and consequential spatiality of social formations. Ironically, the early 'postmodern geographers' were not, in the formal sense, geographers at all. Uncovering the spatial imaginaries of such disparate figures as Martin Heidegger and Antonio Gramsci from the 1930s and 40s, it is in the French Marxism of the 1960s that Soja detects the first truly emphatic spatial turn in critical social theory, particularly in the work of that idiosyncratic Marxist, Henri Lefebvre. However, because the links between Anglophone geography and French social theory were, at best, tenuous during a period when human geography was regarded as a 'spatial science', the first attempts to fashion a critical human geography in the late 1960s barely made reference to this French Marxism.

In fact, as Soja rightly notes, the breaking of Modern Geography's mid-century involution was achieved by the importation of a more or less classical Marxism into the discipline, inflected here and there with a largely unspatialised structuralism. This process of "adding Marx to Modern Geography" (op. cit. 51) was most provocatively instigated by David Harvey's *Social Justice and the City* and bolstered by the regional and national scale concerns of geographically minded Marxists like André Gunder Frank, Samir Amin and Arghiri Emmanuel. But, for Soja, this early Marxification of geography did not go far enough. With fears that over-emphasising space would lead to 'spatial fetishism' (Anderson 1973), the early Marxist geographers concluded "that space and spatiality could fit into
Marxism only as a reflective expression, a product of the more fundamental social relations of production and the aspatial (but nonetheless historical) 'laws of motion' of capital" (ibid. 56). This judgement is, I think, broadly correct. For instance, Soja is right to point to Harvey's notably cautious reception of Lefebvre in the closing pages of Social Justice, as well as the space-as-reflection-of-social structures view implicit in the early Marxist urban (e.g. Dear and Scott) and regional (e.g. Carney, Hudson and Lewis 1980) studies.

This is why the second wave of Marxist geographical studies - conducted in the late 70s and the early to mid 1980s - moved more towards achieving what Soja (ibid. 56) calls a "provocative inversion": that is, the process of adding geography to Marx. In this regard, he rightly takes the middle works of Harvey and the early works of Neil Smith to be especially important markers towards (in his terms) a postmodernised geography. Both The Limits to Capital and Uneven Development, in rather different ways, represented innovative and important attempts to insert space into the heart of Marx's historical-materialism. By implication, they also represented insightful demonstrations of how and why space was vital to capital accumulation. But, for Soja, even these texts did not far enough: they represented, in his terms, 'late Modern' rather than truly 'Postmodern' geographies because "historicism ... [was still] shielded from a rigorous and systematic critique" (ibid. 67).

I find this a peculiar claim, and will explain why in the next section. I also doubt whether, at the time Postmodern Geographies was written, Marxist geography had had quite the impact outside the discipline Soja supposed. Nonetheless, Soja's commitment to taking space seriously was an important one (and, despite flights of theoretical fancy, remains so: see Soja 1997). Indeed, in the intervening decade the incipient 'spatial turn' in critical geography and critical theory which Postmodern Geographies both pre-empted and encouraged has, in many ways, come to pass. But though this spatial turn may seem grounds for celebration among critical geographers, its theoretical consequences have
included wider currents of critical theory - one thinks, for example, of the spatialised theorising of Giddens, Jameson, Deleuze and Guattari and those others contributing to the discourse (rather than merely discipline) of geography (Gregory 1995: 1) - giving some credence, a decade on, to Soja's argument that a 'provocative inversion' has occurred (see, for example, Benko and Strohmayer 1997).

This spatial turn has yielded some important and insightful work. It has also been almost exactly coincident with the decline of Marxism in geography and beyond, and with the rise to prominence of 'cultural studies' which, despite its Marxian origins, draws its theoretical inspiration more from feminism, gay and lesbian studies, green theory, and ethnic and 'racial' studies than from historical-materialism. In itself, this is no bad thing of course. But - and this is my second point about the theoretical ambivalences of the recent spatial turn in critical geography and critical theory - as Smith and Katz (1993) observe in an astute analysis, it may inadvertently be leading to an over-emphasis on what they call 'metaphorical' as opposed to 'material space'. For all the rich geographical vocabulary to be found in many a critical geographical or cultural studies text, Smith and Katz argue that, in the currently favoured language of 'positionality', 'location', 'movement' and 'situatedness', there is often a largely unexamined metaphorical usage of space at work. There is nothing necessarily wrong with metaphor, of course (see Barnes and Duncan 1992; Gibson-Graham 1996: ch. 5). But Smith and Katz's point is that insufficient attention to the materiality of social space may be contributing to a theoretical and political lacuna in our collective critical thinking about that space.²

With all this in mind, I now want to turn to the work of Harvey, Smith, Swyngedouw and Merrifield on the capitalist production of space. My argument, in the section which follows, will be three-fold. First, while I will agree with Soja that space does indeed 'matter', I will argue that he is wrong in his assessment that Harvey et al. do not take space seriously enough. Second, I will, as a corollary, suggest that space must be seen as more than contingent. Finally, I will also argue that Harvey et al. seek to theorise an
arguably been both ambiguous and paradoxic. This has two dimensions. On the one hand, despite the translation of Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* in 1991, the kind of 'strong' view of the importance of space held by Soja has not been articulated with any real consistency by Marxist and Marxisant geographers working on urban and regional political-economy. I am not referring here to historical-geographical materialists who, as I will argue shortly, certainly have held to this strong view of space. Rather, I am referring to that wide range of geographical political-economists influenced by Bhaskar's Critical Realism as imported into geography by Andrew Sayer (1984 [1992]). Peter Saunder's *Social Theory and the Urban Question* (1981) had already indicated the space-scepticism of critical realists at the urban level. What Sayer's (1984) *Method in Social Science* and his controversial essay 'The difference that space makes' (1985) did was to generalise this scepticism by arguing that space, at all geographical scales, was only important in a contingent sense. In other words, for Sayer space should not be meaningfully considered at either the theoretical or the ontological level, for the undoubted spatiality of socio-economic processes only mattered in terms of the empirical outcomes of those processes. In turn, this argument was echoed in sometimes explicit, but mostly implicit, forms in the influential 'Localities projects' in the UK, which generated a set of heated and well-known controversies in *Society and Space* and *Antipode* about the importance of space in post-73 urban and regional restructuring.

So it is that, twenty five years after critical human geographers first started to treat space as more than simply a matrix in which social relations unfold, the difference that space makes remains a deeply contested issue among radical economic geographers. And yet, this fact notwithstanding, talk about the spatial constitution of society is, as I said above, far more broad based than it has ever been before. This is most obviously true in human geography where, as Marxist geographies have come to be complemented and contested by other modalities of critical geography, the spatiality of (for example) gender, 'race' and ethnic relations has become a central concern. But the spatial turn has also
insistently material space. My overall point will be that the space produced by capitalism
remains today absolutely central to its creatively destructive operation. The implication is
that the various current critical attempts to supercede Marxism in general and historical-
graphically calls capitalism's "satanic geographies".

III. The production of space

... in the hundred years since the writing of Capital, [capitalism] ... has succeeded in achieving
'growth'. We cannot calculate at what price, but we do know the means: by occupying space, by
producing space.

Henri Lefebvre (1976: 21)

Since the publication of Social Justice and the City, the space produced by capitalism has
been an absolutely central preoccupation of historical-geographical materialists. The phrase
'the production of space' was coined by Lefebvre. However, in Anglophonic geographic
and non-geographic circles it is Harvey and his co-workers who have arguably done the
most over the last two decades to show why space is both produced by - and consequential
for - capitalism. And this concern with space's social production has involved a decisive
move beyond the rather tentative view of the importance of capitalist space expressed in
Harvey's first engagements with Marxism in the early 1970s.

While it would be wrong to say that Marx's political-economy was entirely aspatial,
it would be fair to say that its "lively spatial implications ... were rarely developed" (Smith
1984: 81). Like so many other nineteenth and twentieth century social and economic
theorists, Marx "usually treat[ed] ... capitalism as a closed system. External space relations
and internal spatial organisation apparently play no role in shaping temporal dynamics"
(Harvey 1985b: 33). The term 'temporal dynamics' is important here, because time -
specifically, the historically specific form of abstract time to which I referred in chapter 4 -
is, as its name suggests, a key dimension in Marx's historical-materialism. What can it
mean, then, "to insert space and geography back into the argument?" (ibid.).
The answer, not surprisingly, is rather complicated. In what follows I will condense whole set of arguments drawn from *The Limits to Capital, The Urbanisation of Capital* and several of Harvey's essays (Harvey 1985c, 1988), from *Uneven Development* and several of Smith's essays (1986, 1988a, 1988b), and from some of the recent papers by Swyngedouw (1989, 1992) in order to fashion a response. Since, to my mind mind at least, most of the existing summaries of Harvey et al.'s work on the production of space (e.g. Barnes and Hayter [1992] pp. 649-50; Gregory [1989] pp. 73-75; Soja [1989] pp. 51-60) tend, for all their usefulness, to only discuss particular parts of the arguments that have been made, I want here to present a rather more comprehensive summary. To simplify, Harvey et al. examine 'the geography of capitalist accumulation' (Harvey 1985b: 32) at two related levels: at the general historical level (capitalism in general) and, secondly, at the specific level of the post-73 shift to a regime of what Harvey (1988) calls 'flexible accumulation'.

**The geography of capital accumulation**

In relation to the former, what is interesting is that historical-geographical materialists have not sought to subordinate time in Marx's work in favour of space, but to put both dimensions on an *equal* footing. Indeed, both Harvey and Smith are adamant that the temporal dimension of capitalism - and of Marx's theoretical anatomisation of capitalism - cannot be overlooked in a rush to assert the importance of geography. As Smith (1984: 81) observes, "In *Capital* Marx was concerned primarily with value: its measurement by labour time, the origin of surplus value, the accumulation of value in the form of capital". Echoing this, virtually all of Harvey's various arguments about the production of space (Harvey 1982, 1985b chs. 1, 2 & 8; 1985c, 1988) begin by first recapitulating Marx's argument concerning a process of capital circulation and accumulation which is "clearly temporal in nature" (Barnes and Hayter 1992: 649). As I observed at length in chapters 2 and 4 - and as the early chapters of *The Limits to Capital* most comprehensively demonstrate - Marx's political-economy depicts an inherently contradictory system in which production is
growth orientated, based on the exploitation of labour power and impelled by inter-capitalist competition. The standard form of the circulation of capital,

\[
LP \\
M \longrightarrow C \quad \ldots \quad P \quad \ldots \quad C' \longrightarrow M + m \longrightarrow \text{etc.}
\]

\[
MP
\]

(where \( M \) is money, \( C/C' \) commodities, \( MP \) means of production, \( LP \) labour power and \( m \) profit), thus describes a process in which the temporal dimension is fundamental since the reduction of socially necessary labour time in commodity production is the overriding objective. The contradiction here, of course, is that the technological dynamism and displacement of labour-power (the source of value) that this form of capital circulation engenders leads to periodic crises of overaccumulation in which surpluses of capital and labour power can exist side by side. As Harvey (op. cit. 12) puts it, "Crises are [thus] the 'irrational rationalisers' within the capitalist mode of production". They are, moreover, ineluctable: inter alia, they form part of the very 'logic' of capitalism itself. What, then, is the relevance of geography to all this?

Abstract time and capitalist space

At first sight, integrating space into Marx's argument seems either theoretically destructive or else interesting at best but, at worst, largely irrelevant. The destructiveness stems from the common-sense habit of regarding geographical space as the realm of the concrete and particular, the variegated real-world arena within which social and economic processes work themselves out on the ground. The upshot, as Harvey has long noted, is that inserting space into the theoretical propositions of any social or economic theory has "the awkward habit of paralysing that theory's central propositions" (Harvey 1985b: xi). In this sense, as Harvey (1985c: 144) avers, "Marx was not necessarily wrong to prioritise time over space" in his political-economic analysis. At the same time, even when one acknowledges that
capital circulation and accumulation cannot, in reality, occur on the head of a pin, space seems little more than "a mere inconvenience, a barrier to be overcome" (ibid. 145) insofar as it acts as a potential drag on the largely aspatial growth logic described by Capital, the Grundrisse and Theories of Surplus Value.

However, it is precisely in overcoming the one-sided views of geographical space as simply a drag on the seemingly non-geographical logic of capitalism and as simply the realm of the concrete and the particular that Harvey et al. have shown systematically why space matters fundamentally to the course of capitalist development. Moreover, from the historical-geographical materialist perspective, the consequentiality of space has everything to do with the temporal requirements of capital circulation. To begin with, Harvey argues, capitalism requires a 'rational landscape' which both reflects and, more emphatically, materially enables a relatively crisis-free process of capital reproduction. As he (1985b: 190) puts it, "It is impossible to imagine [the capitalist] ... material process without the production of some kind of 'rational landscape' within which the accumulation can proceed". This 'stable' and 'rationally organised' capitalist space economy has two dimensions. On the one hand, production must be centralised in specific places: "obviously, capital and labour power must be brought together at a particular point in space for production to proceed" (Harvey 1985c: 145). Places - cities, towns, urban centres and metropolitan regions - thus "function as centres of accumulation and production ... the workshops of capitalism" (Barnes and Hayter op. cit. 649). Through the fabrication of what Harvey (1985b: ch. 1) terms the 'built environment for production' (e.g. factories) and 'the built environment for consumption' (e.g. shopping malls), a distinctive geography of production emerges atop the pre-existing geography of production inherited from earlier periods. However, since places are more than simply built environments, the overall result of this differentiated clustering of productive activities over time is to produce what Harvey (ibid. 139; ch. 6) calls a "structured coherence" within different urban regions, which "embraces the forms and technologies of production ..., the technologies, qualities
and quantities of consumption ..., patterns of labour demand and supply ..., and of physical and social infrastructures ..." (Harvey 1985c: 146).

What we see, then, is that for capital accumulation to successfully occur, capital must become 'fixed' in places and urban regions. However, at the same time "capital circulation is obviously not confined to those regions, and this means that capital accumulation must also depend upon time-space coordination between regions" (Gregory 1989: 73, first emphasis added; see also Gregory 1994 ch. 6). This is why so many of Marx's fragmentary comments on space revolve around a consideration of the transportation industry and the construction of a material landscape of communication connecting different places and regions so that commodity distribution and exchange can occur (Harvey 1985b: ch. 2). So it is that, aside from a portion of capital becoming fixed in place, another portion must also be fixed in transport infrastructures linking places.

As Harvey (ibid. 44) notes in his influential essay 'The Geography of Capitalist Accumulation', "The location theory in Marx (if we may call it that) is not much more specific than this ... ." But it is specific enough to generate a fundamental insight: namely, that capitalism "depends upon the production of a differentiated and integrated space-economy" (Gregory op. cit.). To quote one of Harvey's (ibid. 43) better-known claims, "Capital thus must represent itself in the form of a physical landscape created in its own image ... to facilitate the accumulation of capital". This sounds rather structuralist-functionalist, of course. But once one understands that Harvey is deliberately theorising system-integration from the third-person perspective of the thinker-observer, then his language is not quite as problematic as it might at first sight seem. And it is here that we can begin to talk about the production of space rather than just production in space. For the upshot of these Marxian geographical insights into the differentiated and integrated space economy of capitalism is that they get us away from thinking of political-economic processes as simply working themselves out in a pre-existing space which somehow acts as
a ontologically benign 'container'. As Smith (1984: 85) puts it in his lucid philosophical discussion of the production of space (ch. 3) in Uneven Development,

The notion that things happen 'in space' is not just a habit of thought but one of language too, and yet in its appeal to absolute, natural space it is anachronistic, even nostalgic, and a barrier to a critical understanding of space ... [However], by its actions ... [capitalist] society no longer accepts space as a container, but produces it; we do not live, act and work 'in' space so much as by living, acting and working we produce space.

In other words, the production of space becomes a vital channel by and through which capital circulation and accumulation occurs.

If this still begs the question of what we actually mean by 'space' in this context, then Smith goes on to offer a two-part answer. First, he insists that the problem with a traditional notion of absolute space is that it both severs space from political-economic processes and renders it 'natural' and pre-social. This is why he prefers to talk about the capitalist production of relative space. Relative space is social through and through and, against the dualistic mode of thinking which would separate society and space in cause-and-effect mode, represents the "unity of space and society" (ibid. 77, emphasis). But in what does this socially produced relative space consist? And how can it represent the unity of capitalist process and spatial form? Smith's answer - which is both disarmingly simple and which undercuts hoary philosophical debates over how to specify space as a separate 'dimension' of existence - is that space should be seen as a commodity (ibid. pp. 81-83).

As a commodity, space is a constellation of use-values pulled together in place and dispersed between places which are at the same time exchange-values. Of course, at some level all commodities have spatial properties and dimensions. But the particular use/exchange-values whose spatial properties have preoccupied historical-geographical materialists are those which take the form of fixed capital, those relatively permanent and long lasting physical investments in the landscape through which the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of other commodities necessarily occurs. This
relative permanency makes fixed capital investments special. So too does their typically large cost and their typically long amortisation times, which entails the freezing of large portions of capital in the built environment for considerable periods. All this is not to say that it is only these fixed capital commodities which constitute space. For instance, as the notion of 'structured coherence' outlined above indicates, the clustering of activities produces a differentiated and integrated landscape in which built environments, labour markets, consumption patterns and so on all territorially 'hang together', making places and the connections between them more than just conglomerations of fixed capital assets. But the historical-geographical materialist focus on fixed capital formation and the production of physical landscapes has the advantage of focusing attention squarely on the fact that, as a commodity, space is produced from within and as part of capitalism's quest for surplus value. In short, it is one 'moment' within the dynamics of capital accumulation, not separate from or irrelevant to those dynamics.

In turn, this yields a fundamental theoretical insight, one which has allowed historical-geographical materialists to overcome the one-sided view of space as simply the realm of the concrete and the particular. Harvey (1985c: 144) perhaps phrased the issues at stake best when asked: "Is it possible to construct a theory of the concrete and the particular in the context of the universal and abstract determinations of Marx's theory of capitalist accumulation?". His answer - and that of Smith in Uneven Development - consists of arguing that space is both concrete and particular and abstract and 'universal' at the same time. As different sets of use-values in different places, capitalist space is always differentiated and specific. But, to the extent that those use-values become exchange-values within a wider process of capital circulation they also take on abstract qualities tied to socially necessary labour time as abstract-labour. As Smith (op. cit. 81-2) puts it, "For value to become the universal form of abstract-labour ... different concrete-labour processes in different places must be brought together in the [world] market". And it is this duality inherent to the material qualities of space which, for Harvey and Smith, allows
questions of geography to be incorporated into Marx's political-economy without the paralysing effects spatial considerations have traditionally had on social-theoretical propositions.

The materiality and consequentiality of produced space

To summarise so far, Harvey and Smith build space into Marx's political-economy to show that it is a necessary medium for capitalism (not a mere inconvenience) and that it is much more than simply the realm of the concrete and the particular. And yet, all this said, one thing is still not entirely clear. For even if space can be shown to be actively produced by capitalism in the sense that historical-geographical materialists mean it, does this produced space really matter to the nature and course of capitalist accumulation? Is it causally consequential? Or is it simply a necessary spatial integument for what are still ostensibly temporal and fundamentally aspatial process of capital circulation and accumulation? Historical-geographical materialists' affirmative (and well-known) answer embodies two moments: the importance of produced space in the 'normal' functioning of capitalism and its importance during periods of economic crisis and restructuring. Under 'normal' conditions, produced space acts for Harvey and Smith - and more recently Swyngedouw - as both a material enablement and as a barrier to capital accumulation and thus becomes the site of a extraordinary political-economic tensions. For Harvey these tensions revolve around capitalism's impulse to, in Marx's memorable phrase, 'annihilate space by time'. Given a space economy in which trade occurs between spatially distanciated production centres, Harvey shows that capitalists will consistently seek to reduce what he (op. cit. 37) calls 'the socially necessary turnover time' of capital, that is, the time taken from producing to actually selling a commodity. The contradiction here is that the transportation network facilitating commodity movement between places becomes, in time, a major barrier to attempts to revolutionise that network. This means then, that there is a geographically constituted tension between what Brenner (1997: 1) calls "fixity and motion" within the
capitalist world economy. As Harvey (ibid. 43) crisply puts it, "The very production of this [transportation] landscape, so vital to accumulation, is in the end antithetical to the tearing down of spatial barriers and the annihilation of space by time". For Smith, in a rather different formulation of the argument, capitalism embodies opposed tendencies between what he calls 'differentiation' and 'equalisation'. The impulse to equalise the conditions of production stems from capitalism's growth logic, in which the search for new geographical sites and forms of capital investment is central. In other words, geographical expansion is built into the very concept and nature of capital. But, inter alia, this equalisation is strictly impossible since new investments are always place-specific - and routinely entail partial or complete, and equally place-specific, devaluations of earlier investments in the landscape in other locales. Consequently, Smith argues that the dialectic of equalisation and differentiation resolves itself in concrete forms of uneven development at all geographical scales. Finally, Swyngedouw (1992), in a variation on Harvey's and Smith's themes, has sought to theorise space as a force of production within capitalism with 'causal powers' attached to its territorially variegated materiality in facilitating and impeding the circulation and accumulation of capital.

All of this is important. In slightly different ways, Harvey, Smith and Swyngedouw each avoid 'spatial fetishism' without, at the same time, lapsing into what Smith (1984b: 93) calls "reverse fetishism" where space becomes a mere reflex of more fundamental (aspatial) processes which ontologically and causally out-rank them (on these issues see the debate between Browett [1984] and Smith [ibid.]; see also Harvey [1997b]). But, as Harvey et al. show, it is at moments of economic crisis that space takes on a special importance. This is not just because during such crisis-periods, the annihilation of space by time, processes of uneven development and the contradictions of space as a productive force all sharpen and accelerate. At the same time, the production of new and the devaluation of older built environments become particularly important means as strategies to actively stave off and avoid the (ultimately ineluctable) consequences of crises. Harvey's
arguments have been especially influential here and they are sufficiently familiar not to need to dwell on them. Put simply, Harvey (1985b: 12-13) identifies three types of crisis: partial crises (which affect a particular sector or region), switching crises (involving a major reorganisation of capital flows, either in the form of sectoral or geographical switching crises) and global crises (which affect most sectors and regions across the globe). His point is that the latter two forms of crisis tend to induce the search for what he famously calls a 'spatial fix' for the excesses of capital which cannot be put to productive use under prevailing economic conditions. And the reconstitution of old - and the production of new - urban regions becomes especially important here as capital is 'switched' (and there is considerable historical evidence for this, as Harvey shows) from the 'primary' to what Harvey (op. cit. 6) calls the 'secondary circuit of capital' as a way of deliberately facilitating The Urbanisation of Capital (ibid.) as a means of tying up capital surpluses. Geography thus acts as a partial 'solution' to crisis conditions by being a material medium to literally fix capital in space (and, since the amortisation times of fixed capital assets are long, in time).

The problem, of course, is that in conditions of generalised crisis affecting multiple economic sectors and multiple cities and regions the amount of capital being sectorally and geographically switched is so large that ultimately economic crisis can only ever be postponed rather than averted altogether. And it is here that the tensions evident in a space economy organised according to opposed forces of agglomeration in place and dispersal over space can become particularly acute. For as cities and regions seek either to defend existing jobs and investment in place or else search for new ones, inter-territorial competition becomes for Harvey, Smith and Swyngedouw writ-large across the global space of capitalism (see Figure 4). What Harvey (1985c) calls, in one of his essay titles, 'The geopolitics of capitalism' stems from the imperative of places to retain some semblance of coherence in situation where someone must, in economic terms, ultimately lose. For this reason what Swyngedouw (1989: 31) calls 'the resurrection of locality' and
Figure 4  Fundamental tensions in the landscape of contemporary capitalism (adapted from Gregory [1989] p.74)

AGGLOMERATION  

PRODUCTION OF SPACE

Time space co-ordination within regions: 'structured coherence' of production

THE LOCAL

- Uneven development
- Capital switching
- The annihilation of spacing time

POWER OVER SPACE

Intra-regional class struggles and class alliances

MONOPOLY

THE NON-LOCAL

Inter-regional relations of domination and subordination

COMPETITION

DISPERsal

Time space co-ordination between regions: circulation of capital
what Harvey (1995c) calls a 'militant particularism' of place (built proactively around 'growth coalitions' or else reactively around place-bound sentiment) come to particular - and potentially dangerous - prominence during periods of sustained stagflation (see Figure 4).

The geographical and geopolitical transition to a regime of 'flexible accumulation'

When we turn to Harvey et al.'s assessment of our current conjuncture we find, not surprisingly, that many of these general themes are given a more concrete inflection. There is no question here of establishing the veracity of the language of the Regulation School in relation to the post-1973 world. That both Harvey (1987b; 1988; 1989a) and Swyngedouw (1989; Moulaert and Swyngedouw [1992]) favour the work of Lipietz, Aglietta, Boyer and others as a meso-level framework to ground their more abstract arguments is, of course, hardly uncontestable and the whole debate over whether the terms 'Fordism' and 'flexible accumulation' are appropriate ones with which to discuss the post-73 economic transition in the West remains unresolved. Here, it is enough simply to note that Harvey and Swyngedouw's deployment of Regulationist ideas is concerned to show how the onset of stagflation in the early 70s which marked the end of the long post-war boom also marked the beginning of a period of dramatic geographical change and heightened geopolitical tension.

In particular, both authors point to the fact that the turn towards various 'flexible' technologies and modes of organisation as a response to the rigidities of Fordism, has gone hand in hand with the search for new spatial fixes. As part of this, as places have been devalued and new industrial districts have emerged - in other words as the creative destruction of space has proceeded - Harvey and Swyngedouw (and Smith, in a non-Regulationist idiom) have argued that attempts to gain power over space have taken on new importance. As what Harvey (1985b: 128) calls 'class alliances' form at the metropolitan level - one thinks, for example, of Manchester's Scott-Stringer growth
alliance or Schaefer's Baltimore - then, as we have seen across North America and Western Europe these last two decades, often aggressive forms of 'urban entrepreneurialism' arise as these class alliances become caught between "the stagnant swamp of monopoly controls fashioned out of the geopolitics of domination [and the] fires of open and escalating competition with others" (Harvey 1985c: 159). Out of all this Harvey (*ibid.*; 1982 ch. 13), developing a comparison with the aftermath of the Great Depression of the 1930s, draws a rather apocalyptic conclusion about our *fin-de-millenium* crisis-ridden capitalist world: namely, that despite the fact that seemingly different places are in fact locked into economic competition by virtue of their *common* implication in a system of capital accumulation, that competition may ultimately lead to armed conflict and war *between* regions and nations, the most complete form of place-devaluation of all.

**IV. Space, place and the Cartesian worldview**

> When the power of synthesis vanishes from the lives of people and when the antitheses have lost their vital relation, it is then that ... (meta-theory) becomes a felt need.
> Adapted from G W F Hegel (1977: 91)

From all of the above three things should, I hope, be readily apparent about the historical-geographical materialist view of space: first that space is taken to be insistently material, second that space is taken to be far more then merely contingent, and third (contra Soja) that space is therefore taken be absolutely central by Harvey *et al.* to their own analyses of capitalism. In short, just as the production of space is taken by historical-geographical materialists as, *ontologically* speaking, one active and vital 'moment' in the dynamics of capital accumulation, so too is space seen to enter and reconfigure Marx's political-economy at the *theoretical* level. The importance of these points cannot be gainsaid. But it is not enough simply to state them and hope that those on the Left who invoke space as either metaphor or as contingent will somehow be won over. For two key barriers remain which arguably threaten to attenuate and even undermine historical-geographical materialist arguments about the production of space: namely, the current hegemony of
what Andrew Merrifield (1993a: 517) calls "Cartesian modes of thinking" and problems inherent to historical-geographical materialist arguments themselves. In this section I dwell on the former before, in the next section, moving on to the latter.

*The hypostatisation of place*

Merrifield's (*ibid.*, 1993b) recent work is instructive here. Without wishing to posit overly mechanical relations between political-economic change and modes of both expert and lay thought, in two recent essays on 'space and place' he argues that the last two decades have witnessed the dramatic and widespread resurgence of a Cartesian 'worldview' within academia, government and civil society. Cartesian thinking, he argues, is characterised by an atomistic ontology in which the world is constituted as the sum of ostensibly separate parts, and by a reflectionist epistemology which takes the immediate and the sensuously particular as exhaustive of the real. Analytical and disaggregative, for Merrifield the Cartesian worldview is so seemingly 'common-sensical' as to seem natural. Indeed, so resurgent has it been these last few years that one finds elements of it even in critical theoretical circles (as in the sometimes Cartesian boxes of Critical Realist philosophy) and even in the field of Marxism (as in so-called Analytical Marxism).

All this has a geographical dimension, because Merrifield's key claim is that the Cartesian view issues in a *hypostatisation of place*, that is, the idea that places are fixed and unique collections of things and people with no necessary relation to processes taking place over larger geographical scales. This view, he argues, can be seen in the kind of place-bound boosterism or defensiveness so characteristic of mainstream urban and regional politics these last two decades. But, he continues, it can also be seen in geography and cognate academic disciplines. He is not simply referring to here to humanistic geographers' well-known concern with place and the particularities of place-experience (e.g. Seamon and Mugerauer 1989). He is also referring to erstwhile 'critical' geographical work, like the Localities Projects (Cooke 1989) and the so-called New Regional
Geography (Johnston et al. 1990) which, for him, smack too much of the 'areal differentiation' view of place. In light of all this, Merrifield's (1993a: 516) conclusion is that "there has been ... a relative neglect of the basic ground rules from which many theorists and researchers construct their understanding of place". In particular, he argues that the prevailing Cartesian view of place - aside from being consonant with the geopolitical tensions of the current political-economic conjuncture - "has precluded the formulation of a dialectical approach to the question of place ...".

By 'dialectic approach' Merrifield means, of course, a Marxist - and a specifically historical-geographical materialist - approach. This has an ontological and an epistemological side. In contrast to Cartesian thinking, Merrifield argues that the dialectical world view of Marx is distinguished by a relational ontology in which, as Bertell Ollman (cited in Merrifield ibid. 517) puts it, "each part is viewed as incorporating in what it is all its relations with other parts up to and including ... the whole". The distinguishing feature of this ontology is that it prioritises "processes, flows, fluxes and relations over the analysis of elements, things, structures and organised systems" (Harvey, 1996: 46). In place of dualities and separations, therefore, this world view looks for relations and unities. Epistemologically (though Merrifield says little about epistemological matters) it is distinguished by a rejection of naive mirror metaphors and empiricism, insisting instead that attempts to register the real connections between what may appear as separate entities requires an effort of theoretical labour to produce concepts of that relationality, concepts in a subtle, non-mimetic theory of knowledge (Merrifield op. cit. 518). 3

This anti-Cartesian approach to the world has important consequences for the theorisation of space and place, and the bulk of Merrifield's account tries (in part through a critique of Nicholas Entrikin's [1991] Cartesianism) to specify what those consequences are, particularly at the ontological level. Turning to the late Marx, Merrifield (ibid. 520) argues that 'place' be seen as the medium and outcome of processes embedded within the
larger "global capitalist whole" - for which Merrifield uses the shorthand 'space'. This does not mean that space is somehow more abstract or transcendent over place: rather, they both "have a real ontological status since they are both embodied in material processes ... ". However, to the extent that "capital fixity must, of necessity, take place somewhere", then place can be seen as "a specific form emergent from an apparent stopping of, or as one specific moment in the dynamics of capitalist social space". Place, then, is "simultaneously a thing and a process" (ibid., 521). However, this 'fixing' of capitalist processes in place is itself reciprocally consequential for those processes as they operate over space, because place 'inneracts' with space "in a dialectical unity" (ibid., 520). As Merrifield (ibid.) puts it,

To this extent, the global capitalist system does not occur solely in some abstract sense; it has to ground itself and be acted out in specific places ... The space of the whole thus takes on meaning through place and each part (i.e. each place) in its interconnection with other parts (places) engenders the space of the whole.

In this dialectical view, then, the 'distinction' between space and place must "be conceived by capturing how they melt into each other rather than reifying some spurious fissure" (ibid.). However, the space-place relation is not simply about material processes associated with the hard logics of capital. For at the same time the material landscape, "as a thing in place ..., becomes imbued with meaning in everyday place-bound social practice" (ibid.) Place, in other words, is the chief scale and site of everyday life, "the terrain where basic social practices - consumption, enjoyment, tradition, self-identification, solidarity, social support and social reproduction, etc. - are lived out". Place is thus simultaneously an objective material product as well as an arena for qualitative experience. This arena, Merrifield rightly insists, is not a tabula rasa "upon which ... broader capitalist (economic) forces unfold, for place-specific ingredients and the politics of place are not innocent and passive in the formation of overall capitalist social space" (ibid. 522). Specifically, induced material transformations of place can incite all manner of local
resistance from those living and working there, for example against capital flight (e.g. see Harvey and Hayter [1993] on Cowley, Oxford), against the attempts of capital to "forge place in its own exchange-value image" (ibid.; e.g. see Harvey, [1985b: ch. 4] on the Paris Commune), or as a means of capturing investment (e.g. see Harvey [1989d] on 'growth machines'). Summarizing this view of place as the copresence of both 'objective' and 'subjective' forces, he sets the stage for the final part of his argument:

from a dialectical viewpoint these qualities are different moments of the same unity. They should not be grasped, as I earlier argued contra Entrikin, as the unification of two different realms. The basic problematic here lies in understanding the mode of determination between space and place and, specifically, how the two realms are mediated. Reconciling the way experience is lived and acted out in place, and how this relates to political and economic developments on a global and national scale remains a most challenging concern for theoretical endeavour (ibid. 522)

Merrifield takes up that challenge through a consideration of Henri Lefebvre's work. For Merrifield (ibid. 523) Lefebvre's project is to construct a "unity theory of space", turning on a heuristic distinction between conceived-, lived-, and perceived-space. Conceived space (or representations of space) are those hegemonic representations through which space is represented as "a deracinated space ... of dispassionate 'objects' rationally 'ordered in space'" (ibid. 525). Lived-space (or representational space) is the space of everyday life which, Merrifield suggests, conceived space seeks to codify and rationalise. Spatial practices (or perceived-space) in a sense mediate this conceived-lived relation as they encompass the routinised ways in which everyday life literally takes-place. Adapting Lefebvre, Merrifield's key point, interestingly, is that under contemporary capitalism space is always represented in a way that severs it from the realm of the lived, espace vécu, explaining why "the Cartesian atomised world view is deeply ingrained in popular consciousness" (ibid. 526). In other words, for Lefebvre "the battle becomes the moment of struggle between conceiving space through representation and living place through actual sensual experience ..." (ibid. 525). The counter-revolutionary implications of this
ideological schism is its inability to show how the global whole depends on the 'parts' for its maintenance.

Two important issues emerge from this. First, although the conceived expresses a specific representation of space that separates it from the lived (place), it is "actualised materially only in place" (ibid., emphasis added). Second, this ideological dualism of space and place is mediated by spatial practices which, paradoxically, at the same time actually forge space and place into a dialectical unity. But precisely herein lies the potential to overcome the space-place dualism within everyday life by showing that spatial practices in place in fact enable us to "recognise that the political power of representational space over lived space is not a detachment of differentiated forces" (ibid. 526, emphasis added). That is, Lefebvre's political project pivots on developing spatial practices that challenge the hegemony of the whole by "perceiv(ing) ... of how the whole is in fact constituted" (ibid.). But note that such insurgent spatial practices must also be launched from place. "This is why", as Merrifield insists, "place (actually daily life) has to be the starting point of theoretical and political analysis". But there is a difficulty here, namely that "political practices must be organised around place in form yet extend in substance to embrace space" (ibid. 527), a process fraught with difficulty and contradiction, as Harvey (1995c) and Herod (1991, 1995) show very well. The challenge is thus to constitute a politics of space that links the two in a way that stresses their dialectical unity not their ideological separation, a politics in which creatively 'jumping scales' up to and including the global scale is vital (Smith 1993; Swngedouw 1997d, 1997e).

Envisioning the non-local

Merrifield's dialectical approach is clearly not intended to offer insights at the concrete political level. However, its contribution - at least as 'practical' - is to offer a broad ontological map on the basis of which the production of space and place can be defined in a counter-hegemonic fashion. Indeed, despite the rather over-drawn comparison between
Cartesian and Marxian views of the local/non-local relationship, I would argue that Merrifield's account - in a geographical echo of and corrective to Susan Buck-Morss's arguments - is best seen as an attempt to envision the capitalist space economy. As a corollary, it can also be seen a forceful assertion of what I am calling the meta-theoretical imperative. It uses the 'power of synthesis' to re-recognise the local-global relation as a correlation of dialectical unity not fractious separation.

At a time of global economic restructuring and geopolitical rearticulation these are indispensable moves. And here - despite Merrifield's appeal to Marx, Ollman and especially Lefebvre for theoretical inspiration - the absent presence animating his account becomes particularly obvious: the work of Harvey, Smith and Swyngedouw. For just as Harvey et al. show that apparently separate places and locales are in fact internally related within the social-systemic framework - the differentiated and integrated space - of global capitalism, so too does Merrifield insist that Cartesian views of place dissociate the indissociable. In particular, Merrifield's arguments usefully contest not only Cartesian views of place so common on the Right, but also those on the Left whose concern with 'difference' and 'particularity' threatens to fetishise the local against the perceived universalisms of the global. Notable here are the more extreme versions of post-colonialism which seem to regard all attempts by 'Western' theory to make sense of the non-Western world as a violation of 'the Other'. While we must indeed heed the plea to attend to the cultural politics of theory and to the risks of making it 'travel' (Said 1984), theory which simply gives up the challenge of representing and making claims on others becomes truly "emasculated and powerless" (Harvey 1989b: 4; cf. Deutsche 1991: 12; Dirlik 1994). Accordingly, the capacity to 'see' - and to insist on - the geographical connections between the here and there is vital if any broader project to resist, rather than regressively embrace, capitalism is to be fashioned.4

V. The spaces and places that difference makes
... for geography to make a difference - politically and intellectually - it must be attentive to difference.

Derek Gregory (1995: 414)

So far so good. Except that Merrifield's arguments, and the historical-geographical materialist work on the production of space which lies behind them, have been censured for reducing space and place to flows of capital and value. The criticism here is that historical-geographical materialists are guilty of what Keith and Pile (1993: 7) calls "spatial immanence", that is the notion "that at each historical moment space [and place] is dominated by one [produced] set of immanent ... [processes]". Thus, notwithstanding its value in allowing us to 'see' how and why space and place are co-produced within the tense dynamics of capital accumulation, the work of Harvey et al. is nonetheless viewed as envisioning an objectionably monoplanar geography. This argument is prosecuted in very general terms in Keith and Pile's (ibid.) Place and the Politics of Identity. But it is in Trevor Barnes's (1989a, 1996: ch. 2) recent work that one finds this criticism applied specifically to the work of historical-geographical materialists (see also Gibson-Graham 1996: ch. 11).

Barnes situates his arguments within the wider contemporary critical geographic concern for "difference, contingency, and the particularity of place and period" (1996: 53). This does not mean he wishes to revert to Cartesian views of place as splendidly particular and unique. Rather, reacting to the postmodern/structural/colonial critiques of 'modern' Grand Theories, Barnes seeks a third way between the antinomies of Cartesian and Marxist geographical views of place and space: a third way which, without hypostatising place, can nonetheless not "reduce ... [place] to something less than it is" (ibid. 54). His animus is ranged against what he calls 'essentialist' approaches to space and place. Drawing upon the work of Richard Rorty, Barnes regard's 'essentialist' approaches as both ontologically and epistemologically flawed. By appealing to master-causes or key explanatory 'essences', the ontological problem is two-fold:
First, by definition essences are unaffected by the thing they explain. The value of beginning with essences stems precisely from their being brought in from [the] outside ... to provide order and explanation.; they represent the Archimedean point from which all "real" explanations originate. Second, essences are invariant across time and place. This must be the case, otherwise they not be a bedrock on which to rest explanation (ibid. 55).

Corresponding to this, essentialist approaches also rest upon 'mimetic' epistemologies whose claim to validity depends, precisely, upon their supposedly innocent mimesis of ontological essences but which in fact "are unable to provide a justification for that method other than in terms of the method itself ..." (ibid. 56).

Barnes relates this critique of essentialist approaches to historical-geographical materialism in two stages. First, he argues that Marx's labour theory of value functions in an essentialist way. Quoting Diane Elson (1979) to the effect that "Marx's theory of value ... is not some small or dispensable part of [his] ... investigation of capitalism; it constitutes the basis on which that investigation takes place" (Barnes op. cit. 57), Barnes argues that labour values function in Marx in the two ontological senses as lying beneath and outside that which they explain and as being transhistorically invariant. Second, he then turns to the work of Harvey and Smith which I discussed in section III below to conclude that "despite the innovative and sophisticated account that Harvey and Smith present, space and place are understood ultimately in terms of the ebb and flow of the single essence of labour value ... In short, differences within places, and differences among places, are comprehended by reducing them to 'a particular form of the same "jelly" - general abstract labour' (Georgescu-Roegen 1968: 264)" (Barnes op. cit. 60).

Barnes's argument is undoubtedly sincere. Accordingly, his recommendation of an anti-essentialist - or what he calls 'contextualist' - approach (based on the work of Laclau and Mouffe, Mirowski and Resnick and Wolff) should be seen as a serious injunction for political-economic geographers to forge "a non-reductionist, nonessentialist view of space and place" (ibid. 78). And yet, this said, his specific assessment of historical-geographical
materialist conjugations of value and place/space is not so much 'wrong' as drastically one-sided and, ironically, itself reductive and essentialist. Let me explain.

As I showed at considerable length in chapter 2 in relation to *The Limits to Capital*, it is possible to read the work of authors like Harvey as instanciating a set of 'modern' (and what I called 'traditional') ontological and epistemological commitments which suture social life around flows of capital and value by envisioning a global but 'closed' totality of political-economic relations. Likewise, Barnes is right to detect in Harvey's and Smith's writings on the production of, and the connections between, space and place the risk of a certain 'essentialism' insofar as flows of value and capital undoubtedly are central to these authors' geographical visions. Furthermore, an even cursory look at Merrifield's claims, notwithstanding their other virtues, seems to suggest the correctness of Barnes's view. After all, even though he claims that the dialectical worldview is open-ended, nowhere does he make good on this epistemological claim and, in his ontological assertions about space-place, Merrifield constantly invokes the language of 'totality' and 'unity' with seemingly little reflexivity. In light of all this, then, where Barnes errs is not in his criticism but in unthinkingly assuming that his reading (and I stress the term *reading*) is the 'correct', the best or the only one. In fact, as I now want to argue, building on my arguments in Part II, it is possible to read Harvey *et al.* on space and place in ways Barnes and other like-minded geographical critics would actually sympathise with without dispensing with the explanatory apparatus offered by key Marxian concepts like value and the like. In other words, then, I shall argue that it is possible to envision the space economy - to insist on the internal relations between seemingly disparate, but in fact co-produced, places - *without* seeing space and place as only or primarily the products and integral moments of capitalist processes alone.

VI. From plenary to differential geographies

The task is thus to produce a nonessentialist theory of social space [and place].

*W. Natter and J-P Jones III (1997: 149)*

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Barnes recommendations for a 'contextual' geographical political-economy might be described as part of a wider concern with the study of differential geographies. I adapt this phrase from Lefebvre (1991: 52) and intend it to signify that, ontologically, any social formation is constituted in and through what Keith and Pile (op. cit. 22) call "multiple spatialities", spatialities (spaces and places) different in type, multiple and intervallic, incapable of being convened within a single or what might called a plenary geography. But, as Keith and Pile (op. cit.) and Natter and Jones III (1997) acknowledge, not only can no one theory convene a discussion of these differential geographies at once, but the very thought of trying to capture these geographies within a single theoretical frame (however ecumencial and reflexive) threatens to re-install the kind of cognitive certainty and ontological essentialism to which Barnes so strenuously objects. For this reason, Keith and Pile (ibid.) argue that we must learn to live with what they call "ambivalent epistemologies" and "ambivalent ontologies" in any collective critical project to understand the differential geographies constituting social formations at the end of the twentieth century.

This is an important claim. What it means is not that existing theoretical frameworks - like historical-geographical materialism - which examine the social constitution and effectivity of space and place should be abandoned. Instead, it is an invitation to develop epistemological and ontological tools which can at once make 'strong' claims about how space and place are socially made and related and yet remain vigilant about the other geographies which exceed their field of vision. In this respect, it strikes me that Barnes misses an opportunity to uncover another problematic within the historical-geographical materialist work he admonishes: a problematic which insists on the material and consequential production of space and place within contemporary capitalism and yet which, at the same time, remains acutely alive to the other geographies it does not and cannot make seen.
Epistemologically this oversight is perfectly understandable. As chapter 3 showed, a considerable effort of reinterpretation is required to pick upon and systematically draw out the non-modern and non-traditional epistemological elements to be found in the work of authors like Harvey. But once those elements have been worked into a coherent and defensible epistemological position - a position I tried to adumbrate in chapter 3 - it becomes possible to read historical-geographical materialist concepts as possessing something of the ambivalence Keith and Pile advocate. In relation to the production of, and relations between, space and place, concepts like 'uneven development', the 'spatial fix', 'structured coherence' and 'the annihilation of space by time' become seen less as unreflexively calling-forth a plenary geography of capital and more as both/and concepts which seek to describe and explain that geography and its importance without supposing it is the dead-centre of the multiple geographies of social life.

But it is at an ontological level that the one-sidedness of Barnes's interpretation becomes most apparent. To begin, Barnes has a peculiar conception of value. Even on a modern/traditional (or, in his term, 'essentialist') reading of historical-geographical materialist work on space-place, value can hardly be regarded as an 'essence' in Barnes's sense of the term. At one point, quoting Rorty (1979: 375), Barnes regards essences as "distinctly knowable things, knowledge of whose essences provide the master-vocabulary". But, in relation to Marxian value, such an understanding is surely misplaced. For while value may originate at a specific site - namely, the workplace - it is precisely not a 'thing' which grounds political-economic life. Rather, value is a social relation between people manifested in relations between people and things (produced space and place included). To thus talk of value as an explanatory 'essence' is thus to miss the fact that value implies a whole chain of social relations from production (narrowly understood) to distribution, and from exchange to realisation (in short, 'production' in the more expansive sense in which I explained it in the Introduction to this Part). Accordingly, it is also to miss the fact that
space and place are not simply 'read off' in historical-geographical materialist accounts, but are integral to the nature and operation of value relations and capital accumulation.

Nonetheless, even with this broader conception of value in mind, Barnes's ontological criticisms might still reasonably apply. The 'essence' now might not be value in Barnes's sense but value in the sense of a seemingly ubiquitous 'substance' which produces and relates spaces and places and provides the generative motor for their period reconstitution, especially during crisis periods. But it is here my arguments in chapter 4 become important - and it is here too that Barnes's failure to make any meaningful distinction between value and abstract-labour becomes particularly problematic. Let me explain.

In chapter 4, of course, I put tremendous emphasis on abstract- and concrete-labour in Marx's political-economy in order to argue for a reconsideration of what constitutes of 'core' of capitalism - and by implication the theoretical 'core' of historical-geographical materialism. I sought to shift attention away from restrictive and orthodox notions of capitalism as ultimately reducible to the exploited efforts of a working class meta-agent to argue instead for a richer and less 'closed' conception. In that conception capitalism emerges as a crisis-ridden 'system' which both dominates and exploits a radically heteroclite working constituency and each of whose various moments - at the centre of which are abstract- and concrete-labour - are materially essential. What has all this got to do with historical-geographical materialist notions of the production of space? In my view a great deal.

First, the notion that produced space is a vital and efficacious 'moment' within the overall logic of capital accumulation is strongly consonant with the expanded view of capitalism's core that I argued for earlier. Produced space (and place) become here not mere reflexes of supposedly more fundamental or 'essential' processes but a part and parcel of those processes in a way that flattens ontological hierarchies and epistemological privileges. Nonetheless, this view offers no guarantees against seeing place and space only
in terms of capital flows, as I noted above in relation to Barnes's narrow conception of value. But if we talk of the production of and relations between space and place in terms of abstract- and concrete-labour rather than value alone, then things arguably look rather different.

The obvious reason for saying this is because my focus on the duality of labour in chapter 4 allowed me to see capitalism as structured but also open-ended. When this aspatial argument is transposed into a geographical register it means that produced and inter-related places are both diverse and similar at the same time. Far from being reduced to less than they are, the differences between and within places are not effaced but understood as being brought into relation by virtue of 'universal' processes which transcend, are partly constituted by and in part constitute places. But I also focus on the duality of labour because Harvey (1985b), in an oft-overlooked but crucial claim, has made great play of the centrality of this duality in relation to capitalism's produced geography. The differentiated and integrated space economy of capitalism, he argues, is "fundamental because it is only through [it] ... that we can give flesh and meaning to those most pivotal of all Marxian categories, concrete- and abstract-labour". From the perspective I have developed in chapter 4, these categories are 'pivotal' in this context, not because they suture space and place around a singular process. Instead, they are vital because through them we can see how different places can be fractiously unified without supposing that these unifying processes exhaust the particularities of place. Harvey (ibid. 45) is worth quoting at length here in a passage that critics like Barnes symptomatically overlook:

The processes of formation of the world market, of spatial integration, of ... the geographical concentration of production ... are ... fundamental to understanding how a concrete labour process acquires abstract, universal qualities. For the geographer this must surely be one of Marx's most profound insights. For it not only puts the study of space relations and geographical differentiation into the heart of Marx's theorising but it also points the way to a solution to the problem that has for so long bedeviled the geographical imagination: how to make universal generalisations about the evident unique particularities of space. The answer lies, of course, not in philosophical speculation but in a study of exactly how the processes of capital circulation bring the unique qualities of human action in given places and times into a framework of universal generality. And that, presumably, what exactly what Marx meant by that stunning conception that bears repeating: 'Abstract wealth,
This is indeed a stunning insight. In the terms of the ontological reinterpretation I am seeking to put forward here at issues in a both/and view of the geography produced by capitalism: a geography at once firmly imbricated in capitalist processes, but a geography at once heterogeneous, local and diverse despite this ineluctable imbrication.

VII. The geographical imagination

... the 'geographical imagination' ... enables the individual to recognise the role of space and place in his (sic.) own biography, to relate to the spaces he sees around him, and to recognise how transactions between individuals and between organisations are affected by the space which separates them.

David Harvey (1973: 24)

Harvey's classic description of the 'geographical imagination' came as a stirring call to recognise that daily existence depended upon both face-to-face social relations forged in place but also on distanced social relations stretched across space. Written on the cusp of a sustained period of global economic crisis, it was also prophetic. I say this because when, almost two decades later, Harvey (1990) returned to the theme of the geographical imagination, he did so in order to resist what he saw as the resurgence of place-bound (and Cartesian) thought and action coincident with the post-73 economic and geographical restructuring. With a new millenium looming (and millenial rhetoric abounding), Harvey's call for a geographical imaginary at once local and global is exemplary and remains as relevant as ever. And if I have sought in this chapter to make much of the material importance and the co-production of capitalist space and place, it is precisely because envisioning the geographically constituted economy of capitalism is a political, as much as a theoretical, imperative if working constituencies worldwide are not to turn on each other in the ongoing competition for jobs and investment.

But at the same time, Harvey's invocation of the geographical imagination in the singular perhaps betrays the potential one-sidedness of an historical-geographical
materialist imagination. In practice we need, as Gregory (1995: xi) argues, to think in terms of geographical imaginations in the plural. In this respect, my arguments over the way capitalism structures the heterogenous, while hardly designed to capture these imaginations or the differential geographies in which they are embedded, are intended to serve at least one useful purpose: namely, open up the kind of vision about the capitalist space economy the work of Harvey et al. allows us to acknowledge these other imaginaries without, at the same time, losing sight of how these imaginaries are all at some level caught within this intrusively integrated and dispersed economy.

NOTES

1 I am thinking of course, of the key influence on the field's early development of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall.

2 Lest I be misunderstood I am not suggesting that all invocations of metaphorical space are inherently flawed. Indeed, as Smith and Katz rightly note, one cannot discuss material space without some kind of metaphorical connotation coming into play at the same time. More emphatically, Gibson-Graham (1996: ch. 5) argue persuasively that the use of spatial metaphor can actually open our imagination to ordinarily opaque and non-hegemonic spatial practices and material spaces.

3 I want to register here Doreen Massey's (1993) very suggestive recent arguments about what she calls a 'progressive sense of place'. Like Merrifield, Massey wants to see place dialectically and in processual terms, but she argues for a more complex view in which places are loci of multiple relations and ties of different efficacy, intensity and significance.

4 There are, of course, complex questions of both theoretical and ontological scale to be resolved and worked through here. There has, despite Neil Smith's repeated encouragement, been relatively little systematic exploration of the latter issue, with the signal exception of Andrew Herod's (e.g. 1991, 1995) work on the scale of labour struggles. However, some considerable attention has been paid to the former issue (see, for example, Harvey [1995c], Cox and Mair [1989] and Graham and St. Martin [1990]).

5 This ambivalent attention to differential geographies has affinities to the work of a number of other geographers, such as - and despite the obvious theoretical differences - Philo's (1992) spatialised consideration of Michel Foucault's corpus.
CHAPTER SIX

THE PRODUCTION OF NATURE

What is nature?¹
Kate Soper (1995: i)

I. Introduction

Nature, it seems, has become one of the privileged subjects of millenial angst. Barely a day passes when some new, or not so new, intervention in nature is denounced as being destructive, immoral, or - if one prefers fashionable mantras - 'unsustainable'. From the Greenhouse Effect to water pollution, from tropical deforestation to Dolly the sheep, and from genetically modified soya to the Human Genome Project, 'nature' is on the agenda as never before. This heightened concern over human transformations of nature is no doubt due in large part to a specifically late twentieth-century chiliasm. With the fin of this siècle coinciding with the start of a new millenium, apocalyptics abound. For instance, it is not hard to see how the title of environmentalist Bill McKibben's best-selling lament, The End of Nature (1989), traded (deliberately) on a mixture of secular romanticism and melancholy evocative of nothing so much as a biblical millenialism in which humanity has, once and for all, fallen from grace. The god of Nature is thus irrevocably lost, just as so many contemporary theologies warn that humanity is soon to be irrevocably lost to God.

If the recent outpouring of concern over local and global natures were no more than a secular eschatology then we could, perhaps, be forgiven for diverting our critical attention to more pressing issues. But there is, of course, much more to the current round of nature talk than just this. For behind it are a series of what Joni Seager (1993), in a deliberately laconic formulation, calls 'Earth follies': that is, a set of quite real, pressing and often dauntingly complex environmental problems operative at the local, national and even global scale. The result, sadly, is that talk of an 'environmental crisis' - or what Mike Davis (1994) pungently calls 'ecocide' - has long since passed into platitude. Indeed, when
the matter of nature impinges upon the consciousness and policy of even the world's superpowers - as it did at the 1992 'Earth Summit' and again at the recent UN Kyoto Conference on Climate Change - then one knows that something serious is afoot.²

In some respects there is, of course, nothing new here. Environmental problems, human interventions in nature and environmental concern have long been a feature of capitalist and non-capitalist societies. Yet there is arguably something new about the scale and seriousness of human transformations of nature at the end of the twentieth century. For example, playing on Michel Aglietta's well-known periodisation of the Atlantic economies, Andrew Ross (1993: 95) has described the post-1973 era as a new "regime ... of environmental life". In a thoughtful essay on the politics of preservation, Cindi Katz (1998) too notes an historical transition in the relation to nature, a transition from an era based on the pursuit of an "extensive nature" - an unappropriated nature open to exploitation and possession - to an "involuted nature", that is, a nature remade, pulped, recycled and ever more intimately penetrated and manipulated. Likewise, drawing on Martin O'Connor's (1993) work, Arturo Escobar (1996: 56) has spoken of a shift towards a "postmodern form of ecological capital" (in contrast to a modern or Fordist form) in which nature is increasingly 'enterprised up' for accumulation. The interpretive differences between these authors are interesting. But, these differences notwithstanding, what is perhaps most striking of all is that their diagnoses of our current engagements with nature share one basic common denominator: for each in specific ways point to the importance, power and perhaps even pre-eminence of capitalist production in consequentially reconfiguring the global use and abuse of nature at the fin-de-siècle.

This capitalist 'production of nature' will be the subject of this chapter. First proposed by Neil Smith (1984) and since developed by him (Smith 1996a, 1998), David Harvey (1996, 1997a) and Erik Swyngedouw (1995, 1996, 1997), this seeming quixotic notion, I will argue, is of profound importance in understanding nature at the end of the twentieth century. But it is a notion which is easily misunderstood. An outrage to those on
both the Left and the Right seeking in different ways to 'protect' nature from human predation, the notion of nature's production can all too easily be interpreted as unacceptably 'productionist', theoretically one-eyed, and anthropocentric/Promethean: productionist in that it seems to reduce human-nature interactions to capitalism alone, while over-stating the latter's transformative power; theoretically one-eyed in that it ignores the consequential, 'non-capitalist' ways in what nature is 'socially constructed'; and anthropocentric/Promethean in that it is too focussed on social relations and social practices, thus failing to take nature's creative destruction and its effects sufficiently seriously. Given the current post- and anti-Marxist tenor of the debate over nature within geography and without, my intention is to show why none of these criticisms need necessarily apply. Specifically, the burden of my argument will be that this powerful historical-geographical materialist notion of nature's production under capitalism is one which deserves to be at the very heart of any contemporary critique of political-economy and any contemporary environmental thought and politics. However, in order to contextualise this argument I need to begin by saying something about the dominant modalities of response to the current 'crisis of nature'.

II. From ecocentrism to technocentrism: the fetishism of nature

... it is precisely the nature of fetishism, I suppose, that things are not always what they seem.

Neil Smith (1996a: 52)

It is possible to distinguish two broad responses to our current ecological predicament, the second hegemonic, the first important but more emergent. On the one side, the last two decades have witnessed the meteoric rise of 'ecocentric' modes of thought and action. Dazzling in their myriad local and global permutations, ecocentric approaches share a commitment to placing nature and environment on at least a par with humanity (see Dobson 1990). What is more, they have become increasingly important and influential. From Greenpeace's (temporarily) successful campaigns to ban commercial whaling to its recent efforts against the EU patenting of human genes, from the New Age protests against
Britain's Newbury bypass to the Western Canadian Wilderness Committee's fight to save Clayoquot Sound in British Columbia, and from Earth First's critiques of China's new Three Gorges Dam to the militant anti-vivisectionism of Britain's Animal Liberation League, ecocentric thought and practice is enjoying an unprecedented popularity and power. This is particularly so on the political Left, especially in Western Europe and North America where green politics now constitutes one of the leading edges of Leftist activism both within the academy and without. In many respects this is a salutary development. Among other things, it has enabled a fundamental critique of the capitalist appropriation of nature to be brought to wider public, governmental and even business attention - most eloquently, perhaps, in the 'social ecology' of writers like Murray Bookchin and André Gorz. Critical of the existing social and economic arrangements through and by which nature is violently appropriated, these and other ecocentric thinkers - especially those at the 'deep green' end of the spectrum - advocate the fundamental restructuring of society and economy along more eco-friendly lines.

This capsule characterisation of the ecocentric response to our present 'environmental crisis' throws into relief very well the central features of the other, more dominant, and contrasting current response, one which can be described as broadly 'technocentric'. Although established economic and political interests have, kicking and screaming, been forced to recognise the seriousness of contemporary human interventions into nature, their practical responses have been carefully circumscribed. Reluctant to tamper too deeply with existing political-economic arrangements, the global movers and shakers have preferred 'technical' and 'managerial' solutions to the problems of nature as we approach a new millenium. Examples abound. They include - to take some well known cases - debt-for-nature swaps, 'carbon taxes' geared to combatting Greenhouse warming, ITQ systems in the management of pelagic fisheries, the CITES convention on the trading of endangered species, the cathartic languages of 'sustainable development', and the equally anodyne discourses of 'ecological modernisation'. Notwithstanding their obvious
differences, these and other examples of 'establishment environmentalism' are characterised by a studied refusal to question capitalism as an over-arching political-economic system in which nature has become a hyper-commodified instrument of accumulation. To be sure, technocentric responses have been effective and, practically speaking, remain among the few plausible alternatives for actively changing our current regimes of eco-accumulation. Indeed, discussing what she calls 'free market environmentalism' - that is, the gamut of approaches that use market instruments to alter the economic logic of ecological usage - even so stern a critic as Robyn Eckersely (1993) concedes the value of technological solutions. Nonetheless, it still remains the case that establishment environmentalism is about the amelioration of states of affairs, not the transformation of political-economic structures.

Perhaps the most striking example of all here is to be found in the so-called 'new genetics', whose most ambitious arm is the vaunted Human Genome Project. With science becoming inextricably intertwined with big business (the term 'biotechnology', apparently, was coined on Wall Street), even our own bodily natures have become fair game for medical transformation and commercial appropriation. This is not, inter alia, a bad thing. But, as critics like Richard Lewontin (1994) have shown, the possibility of biotechnology companies patenting and owning gene technologies and even genes themselves promises a corporeal harvest which may know no limits in the absence of proper institutional controls. That such institutional controls are likely to be circumscribed by established political-economic interests has recently been suggested by Hilary Rose (1998), who worries that the existing bodies regulating human genetic research and practice - such as ELSI in the USA (the Ethical, Social and Legal Implications committee of America's arm of the HGP) - are disturbingly immune to social criticism.

The differences between the ecocentric and technocentric approaches to nature are important and should be respected. In particular, although by no means all ecocentrism is Leftist, the considerable portion which is stands as an extremely important social counter-
principle to a hegemonic technocentrism. Indeed, to the extent which the latter is part of a broader neo-conservatism which marks even putatively moderate regimes like Clinton's America and Blair's Britain, left ecocentrism is vital to the continued existence of a broader cultural and political Left today.

Yet this said, for my purposes what is most interesting is not what separates the ecocentric and technocentric approaches, but what they have in common. For it is arguable that both, in different ways, fetishise nature. I borrow this term from Neil Smith (1996a: 39), for whom it signifies a fundamental category mistake grounded in the ways things appear to be. In particular, he argues that nature fetishism in capitalism is constituted by an "impossible, contradictory" dual-notion of nature as, on the one hand, external to society and yet, on the other hand, in some senses a universal which encompasses society - a dual-notion which for Smith simply misses what capitalist nature is really all about. The idea that nature is external to and ontologically separate from society is such a common-place in modern cultures that one barely pauses to question it. Indeed, it is because it is such a basic cognitive template that one finds it inhabiting the otherwise widely divergent examples ecocentric and technocentric thought and practice. For instance, when juxtaposed, the exhortations to 'save nature' one routinely finds in deep green environmentalism and the languages of 'acceptable impact' one finds in that emblematic technocentrist tool, the Environmental Impact Assessment, both externalise nature in order to protect it from a supposedly separate, predatory humanity. Likewise, the contradictory notion of a universal nature - a nature of which humanity too is a part as a 'natural' species - is also widely held and also animates both eco- and technocentric practices. From Gaian holism to the moral managerialism of Al Gore's The Earth in Balance (1992) to ecotheological objections to the bodily 'invasions' of biomedicine, one finds an external nature sublimated to a super-ordinate universal nature supposedly capable of setting both material and moral limits to humanity's transformations of the earth and itself.
This double-edged nature fetishism is extremely problematic. For by positing nature as either external or as a universal, both ecocentrism and technocentrism constitutively miss the fact that capitalist political-economic processes have long since rendered such notions obsolete. We are thus confronted with a deep irony in the 1990s. On the one hand, as we approach a new millenium, discourses predicated upon external and universal conceptions of nature are proliferating (and Ross [1994] has brilliantly analysed a whole range of them in his indicatively titled *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*). Yet, on the other hand, the fact remains that fin-de-siècle nature is less than ever external or superordinate to humanity. Instead, nature is more than ever before a produced nature, that is, a 'second nature' socially produced by capitalism. That this does not seem to be the case is not surprising. For rather like the 'ordinary' commodities whose fetishisation Marx made so much of, the fetishism of nature occurs by virtue of the fact that the processes producing nature are largely unseen, general and abstract. This is what allows so many ecocentrists to pretend that nature can still be conceived as a separate ontological and spiritual realm which is inviolate; and this too is what allows so many technocentrists to foster the illusion that environmental problems are but 'blips' in an otherwise separate, well-functioning system which can be 'corrected' locally.

With all this in mind let us then try to put some flesh on the bones of the Marxian claim that capitalist nature is 'produced'. I begin, not surprisingly, by considering Neil Smith's (1984) original and seminal formulation of this argument. Emphasising the signal importance of Smith's argument, I also point to key areas of weakness which have opened the door to interpretive misunderstanding. So it is that I seek to develop and refine the production of nature idea, by drawing upon the reinterpretation of capitalism put forward earlier as well as the more recent contributions on nature's production put forward by Harvey, Swyngedouw and, not least, by Smith himself.

**III. The production of nature**
Once we begin to speak of people mixing their labour with the earth, we are in a whole world of new relations between people and nature and to separate natural history from social history becomes extremely problematic.

Raymond Williams (1980: 76)

As is well-known, Marx failed to offer a systematic theory of nature and environment under capitalism. Reflecting and contributing to the wider tendency of Marxian and non-Marxian political-economy not to consider the matter of nature, Marx's scattered speculations on the subject hardly amounted to a coherent account. It was thus left to later commentators - first and most notably Alfred Schmidt - to comb his works for insights and attempt to piece them together. Schmidt's (1971) brilliant *The Concept of Nature in Marx* showed that Marx's account of capitalist nature had two sides: on the one hand, a critique of representations of 'nature' within bourgeois societies, and on the other, a fragmented theory of nature's creative destruction under capitalism. Let me take each, briefly, in turn.

For Schmidt, it was Marx who should be credited with first identifying the dual-notion of nature of which I made mention in the previous section. Together, the various bourgeois representations of nature as resolutely external to society (a 'first nature') and, in contradiction, as universal, were for Marx as hegemonic as they were dissembling. Drawing out Schmidt's account of Marx, Smith (1984) identified the cognitive and political implications of this dual representation of nature - a representation which, as I suggested, underpins both the 'save nature' rhetorics of contemporary ecocentrics and the 'manage nature' discourses of technocentrics. For more than just fetishising nature, this representation - according to Smith (*ibid.* 1) - constitutes nothing less than an "ideology of nature". Positing nature as external, Smith argued, is doubly ideological: first, it renders non-human objects and processes intractable barriers to which humans must as some point submit; and second, it denies any social relation to nature.³ At the same time, Smith continued, the assumption of universality is also counter-revolutionary because it implies that social relations are as immutable as natural processes themselves.
Against this problematic ideology, Schmidt showed that Marx's own concept and
theory of nature were quite different. First, at the most general level Schmidt showed that
Marx insisted on examining the relations between environment and society, thus avoiding
the schism between them without collapsing the latter into the former as in the monistic
doctrine of universal nature. As Smith (ibid. 18) observed, "nature separate from society
has no meaning ... The relation with nature is an historical product, and even to posit
nature as external ... is absurd since the very act of positing ... requires entering a certain
relation with nature". More specifically, Schmidt saw in Marx a dialectic between the two:
"nature is mediated through society and society through nature" (Smith ibid. 19), a
complex metabolic process which Marx centres on the labour process, the point at which
society systematically engages with nature. But in addition to these rather general
propositions, Schmidt, secondly, also identified in Marx arguments for a specifically
capitalist appropriation of nature as labour value is placed on environmental goods as part
of a political-economic system predicated on class relations, competition and
accumulation.

Schmidt's argument, while timely, has since been charged with two major
limitations. First, Smith (ibid. 23-24) has provocatively argued that "incredible as it
sounds, Schmidt ends up providing us with one of the most elaborate accounts of the
bourgeois concept of nature. In Schmidt too there is an external conception of nature ...
and a universal conception ... ." Following Adorno and Horkheimer (1972), Schmidt ends
his treatise with the complaint that, despite himself, Marx's vision of a socialist
transformation of environment is guilty of the 'domination of nature.' But for Smith this
concept of domination connotes, in its very language, the externality and universality that
are the hallmark of the bourgeois conceptions. In short, in his attempt to re-emphasize the
realm of nature in Marx's oeuvre, Schmidt ironically underplayed the role of social
relations and social forms in constituting nature. In the second place, Schmidt's account of
the Marxist conception of nature is extremely abstract, and even his comments on use-
values and exchange-values do not approach the kind of concrete analytics that Marx sought in *Capital*.

This is why Neil Smith's *Uneven Development* was such an important statement. Although often thought of purely as an excursus on the subject indicated by its title, the book was as much an anatomisation of capitalist nature as anything else. More specifically, Smith pushed debate forward with his thesis about the *production of nature* under capitalism. As he (1984: xiii-xiv) readily conceded, this thesis

> sounds ... quixotic and ... jars our traditional acceptance of what had hitherto seemed self-evident ... it defies the conventional, even sacrosanct separation of nature and society, and it does so with such abandon and without shame.

Nonetheless, it is of the utmost importance. First, it gets beyond the external and universal conceptions of nature, registering the redundancy of conceiving of nature as a pristine entity, untouched by human hand - conventionally known as 'first nature.' Second, it rightly points to the *internal* relations between society and nature: political-economic projects are invariably ecological projects and vice versa (Harvey 1996: ch. 8). Third, and more emphatically, it points to the historical substitution of a 'first nature' for an entirely new and socially produced 'second nature'. Finally, it powerfully historicizes human relations with nature and thus opens up the politics and possibility of the transformation of both nature and society (see also Smith 1996a).

On the basis of this general proposition about nature's 'production', Smith (1984 ch. 2) then went on to present one of the most sophisticated Marxist theorisations of nature's production under capitalism. Moving with increasing historical-geographical specificity from 'production in general' to 'production for exchange', he argued that it is 'capitalist production' that has inaugurated a qualitatively new relationship with nature. Accordingly, in *Uneven Development* Smith spells out the theoretical structure and logic of this relationship in some detail by elucidating Marx's core political-economic categories. Having already commented on Smith's basic economic model in chapter 4, there is, for the
moment at least, no need to revisit it. It is, however, worth commenting on Smith's development of the model in specific relation to the question of nature. There are several important things to highlight here.

First, Smith was at pains to show that under capitalism nature becomes a commodity like any other and is thus first and foremost an object and instrument of accumulation. Accordingly, his notion of a specifically capitalist production of nature alerts us to how capitalism constructs and reconstructs whole landscapes as exchange-values under the imperatives of profit and competition. This is exemplified well by recent work on the production of agrarian regions (Fitzsimmons 1986; Marsden et al. 1986a&b; Watts 1989, 1991), but most forcefully, perhaps, in William Cronon’s marvellous Nature's Metropolis which, despite being non-Marxist, effectivey puts several of Smith's theses to work in making sense of the transformation of the mid-West and the making of Chicago (see Antipode 1994). Secondly, as importantly, for Smith this production of nature was not merely an optional aside to capital development but fundamental to it: it is a key 'moment' in the overall circuit of capital expansion. Third, Smith also insisted that in the late twentieth century the capitalist production of nature is a fundamentally global process. Thus, if capitalism signals a qualititative shift in the social relation with nature, it also marks a quantitative shift as "capital stalks the whole earth ... in search of profit" (Smith op. cit. 54). From biodiversity prospecting in tropical forests to the search for minerals in Antarctica, nature today simply cannot escape the capitalist-form of valuation. Finally, Smith also tied the production of local and global natures into the profoundly geographical tendency for capital to develop unevenly. As the title suggests, one of the key arguments of Uneven Development is that capitalist development pivots on a dialectic between geographical equalisation and differentiation, a dialectic resolved in practice into concrete patterns of uneven development. What this means, in terms of capitalist nature, is that not only is its production uneven but that formerly profitable sites of nature's production are routinely left to languish as capital chases new investment opportunities. Overall, the effect
of these key insights was to define a powerful over-arching critical research programme in which “the major [political-economic] issue ... becomes the question of how nature is (re)produced, and who controls this process of (re)production in particular times and places” (Whatmore and Boucher 1993: 167).

Smith's novel adaptation of Marx's political-economy to the question of nature remains as important today as when first articulated over a decade ago. But it has taken a long time to impact on debates within and outside geography concerning nature at the millenium. This is no doubt due in part to the fact that *Uneven Development* was and still is routinely regarded as more about the production of space than of nature (Gregory 1995). But a more important reason, one suspects, is that it is only in the last five to seven years or so that the question of nature has really become a central focus for the human sciences. Previously considered the preserve of the natural and environmental sciences, the dawning awareness of the seriousness of human interventions in and on the environment has catapulted the matter of nature into the heartlands of debate in sociology, economics, anthropology and the like. In human geography this is reflected in the recent emergence of a vibrant research programme on the political-economy of capitalist nature with three major components: a 'First World agrarian political-economy' of advanced agriculture (for a review see Marsden *et al.* 1996), a 'Third World political-ecology' focussed on food production in developing societies (for a review see Bryant and Bailey 1997 ch. 1), and a more diffuse 'political-economy of resource use' which stands in opposition to mainstream resource management (for a review see Emel and Peet 1989). In each case, the production of nature is shown to occur in different modalities, at different scales and with different - but always important - effects.

If the tendency in these cases - and indeed in the case of Smith's initial statement of the argument - has been to see nature as largely synonymous with the 'environment', there are still other important avenues of inquiry. In particular, the production of nature argument can be extended to take account of the new biomedical practices which
interpellate both animal and increasingly human bodies as commodities. Indeed, Harvey (1997a) has recently suggested that the human body now be seen as a 'regime of accumulation', indicating the degree to which natures previously thought beyond manipulation are now the subject of the most intimate political-economic interventions.7

However, for all the power and importance of the production of nature argument, since it was first proposed by Smith several serious objections have come to light. This means that if the continued relevance of the thesis is to be established then some further explanation - and perhaps even emendation - is required. I want now to deal with these objections in turn, by drawing upon the arguments put forward in Part II as well as the recent refinements suggested by Harvey, Swyngedouw and Smith himself. My intention is to show how the production of nature thesis can be refashioned in order to retain its critical relevance to our late-capitalist times. For today capitalism is still what Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) half a century ago called a "racket in nature". Accordingly, we need, more than ever, the theoretical tools to critically understand it as such.

IV. The production of nature?

If we take seriously the centrality of labour in the relationship with nature, then we need to begin to think in terms of the social production of nature.

Neil Smith (1996a: 49)

The first objection is perhaps the most obvious: that the production of nature argument is "productionist". This has at least two dimensions. The first is that contemporary transformations of nature supposedly pivot on what occurs in 'production' alone. The point here, of course, is that production is understood in the narrow sense, as being synonymous with work, the labour process and the like. On this basis, historical-geographical materialism is thus impugned for a reductive, explanatory 'essentialism' (Peet and Watts 1996: 28-30). To be fair, there is some evidence for such a view in Smith's original formulation of the argument. For instance, at one stage he (op. cit. 48, emphasis added) describes the structure of capitalist relations which drive nature's production as "derivative of the specific class relations of capitalism", as if all else is erected upon these 'basal'
relations. However, as I argued in chapter 4, I think it is possible to detect in Smith's basic economic theory hints of a much wider, less reductive sense of 'production'.

Interestingly, in a recent reflection on the relevance of his arguments over a decade on - 'Nature at the millenium: production and re-enchantment' - Smith (1998: 281) has indicated as much. As he puts it,

The complaint that 'the production of nature' squeezes our theoretical and political comprehension ... into much too narrow a "productionist" framework is precisely the target of, as much as a common response to, this move. Such an aversion to production springs in part from a sincere conviction that there is much in the world beyond production but it equally emanates from a misguided empiricism that allows "production" none of the liberal expansiveness currently associated with, for example, "culture". It restricts production to those acts of manual ... individual labour rather than social accomplishment, and the making of objects rather than productive consumption by subjects. Whatever the uses of such a narrow conception of production, it makes better sense to follow Marx's ... more complicated and nuanced analysis.

This is, I think, an important and intriguing claim. I say intriguing because Smith does not expand further on what this wider sense of 'production' actually entails. However, a vital clue to what he has in mind can be found early on in the essay from which the above extract is taken. At one point Smith (ibid. 279-80, emphasis added) avers that "the intent was to insist that social labour lay at the heart of our comprehension of the social relation with nature, and in so doing the emphasis on production is consistent with ... a broader perspective". I emphasise the phrase 'social labour' here for obvious reasons: for it is precisely by focussing on this structuring moment of capitalism that one avoids empiricist, individualist and even narrowly class definitions of production. This deserves considerable emphasis, because Smith's emphasis on labour both in and since Uneven Development as the flashpoint for the capitalist production of labour can easily be mis-interpreted. On my reading at least, it does not designate the transformation of nature in the proximate sense of work on it; rather, it signifies the way that such proximate or concrete-labour on nature is mediated as and by abstract-labour on the world market.
This insight regarding labour was, of course, the burden of my argument in chapter 4. There, recall, I suggested that 'capitalism' is less about production in the narrow sense, or class relations or exploitation, and more about a system of ramified social relations in which abstract- and concrete-labour play a pivotal role in exploiting and dominating a radically heterogeneous working constituency. For this reason, I argued that one of capitalism's distinguishing features is that it unifies the otherwise diverse, making it a globally structured but open-ended system. This argument, I think, fits very well with Smith's notion of the production of nature. I say this not just because in both Uneven Development and again recently, he accents the importance of social- or abstract-labour. I say it also because in another recent reflection on nature's production, Smith (1996a: 49) makes the following important, but easily overlooked claim: "nature", he argues, "... is not much of a Marxist category". What, I think, he means by this is that the very notion of a singular nature (produced or otherwise) only in fact becomes a practical reality in the capitalist era. Put differently, it is only by virtue of the generality of social labour that otherwise diverse and plural produced natures are brought into a common social-systemic frame as commodities. Therefore, it is only possible to talk about nature 'as such' in the historically specific sense that capitalism brings these diverse and contrasting local natures into relation. To say that nature is not much of a Marxist category, therefore, is to say it is not much of a Marxist category when used in the conventional, unreflexive sense to designate an external or universal nature which is putatively singular.

With 'production' understood in the expansive sense suggested here, it thus becomes possible to see Smith's production of nature argument as an attempt to expose and map the largely invisible relations animating the making and remaking of capitalist nature. 'Defetishising nature' is therefore not about arguing that nature is reducible to some economic base or to class relations traditionally understood. Rather, it is an argument for seeing nature(s) as actively appropriated and transformed by humans within an historically
specific system of production which exploits and dominates a diverse, worldwide working constituency constitutive of it.

This speaks to the second dimension of the "productionist" criticism: that nature is produced 'all the way down'. The charge here is that Smith's arguments seem to embody a hyper-productionism, in which nature becomes a tabula rasa for capitalism. This concern has been raised by myself (Castree 1995) and by Cindi Katz and Andrew Kirby (1991: 26), picking up on such objectionable comments as the following by Walker and Page (1991: 283, emphasis added) on the production of agro-industrial regions: "Midwestern industries developed themselves through an evolution of productive capabilities that owed nothing to nature and everything to regional social arrangements, human capabilities, technological advances, and divisions of labour yielding powerful external economies". However, notwithstanding Marxist geographical arguments of this kind, it is not, in fact, the case that Smith's arguments somehow efface the materiality of nature. Indeed, it would, by definition, be peculiar indeed for an historical-geographical materialist to do so. In this light, Smith was not suggesting that capitalism 'produces' nature in the sense of, to take an extreme example, determining how trees grow; we know that water, sunshine and chlorophyl have everything to do with that. Although the portmanteau term 'production' seems to imply that capitalism determines every aspect of the natural world as it transforms it - right down to each particle of natural stuff - Smith (1984: 58-9) was careful to note that nature's materiality could not be ignored. The way he did this, though, was interesting and important. For his appeal was not to the materiality of nature, but to the materiality of produced nature. This may seem a picayune point. However, to speak otherwise is to revert to either external or universal conceptions of a non-social nature, with all that that implies. In this sense, then, the notion of nature's production squarely acknowledges that nature possesses a real materiality - capitalism cannot transform nature willy-nilly (notwithstanding even the extraordinary transformative powers of
contemporary biomedicine and biotechnology) - but insists that it is the materiality of a second, not 'first nature'.

Overall, then, the "productionist" charge is by no means as powerful as it seems. And yet there is one respect in which, I think, it does apply - at least to Smith's original formulation of the production of nature argument. For despite Smith's important insight concerning the materiality of produced nature(s), his account failed to actively theorise that materiality. While perhaps understandable in a text where Smith was first and foremost seeking to explain the geographically world-changing capacities of capital, today it is essential that the materiality of produced nature is more than simply acknowledged: for many of our current environmental ills are precisely about how nature(s) materially react(s) back upon the very capitalist processes that produced it/them. This is a question I will return to presently. But first I need to deal with a second charge against the production of nature argument.

IV. Nature: production versus construction

[An] immense profundity of thought is contained in commonplace turns of phrase.
Charles Baudelaire (1862: 12)

If the production of nature argument has seemed open to the criticism of productionism, it also seems open to the charge that it is theoretically one-sided or exclusivist. What this means is that it focuses on capitalist production (however understood) at the expense of other modalities of nature's remaking. For, of course, the contemporary 'production' of nature(s) is as much a question of ethnicity, 'race', national identity, sexuality and gender as it is of capital, and involves multiple actors whose motivations are not reducible to an instrumental political-economic logic. This is the insight that drives such wonderful, synthetic works as those authored by Haraway (1991, 1997) and Ross (1994), who both trace the complex intertwinings of commodification with the cultural logics of racism, nationalism, sexism and gender discrimination. Accordingly, for all its other insights, the production of nature thesis can seemingly be reproved for a congenitally restrictive
explanatory vision, congenital because redolent of Marx's failure to see nature in anything other than capitalist terms.

There are stronger and weaker versions of this criticism. The strong version sees the production of nature argument as being, in fact, cognitively *complicit* with these other modalities of nature's making. This is the argument Gillian Rose (1993) has put forward in her *Feminism and Geography*, where she suggests that Marxism in geography is routinely implicated in a gendered mode of theorisation which, among other things, problematically feminises both 'nature' and 'landscape'. The weaker version of this criticism simply states that Marxism's ignorance of non-capitalist constructions of nature limits its explanatory and political relevance (on this see Katz and Kirby *op. cit.*). Whichever view one favours, they both cast into light the importance of the recent turn, in geography as well as outside, to examining what is fashionably called the 'social construction of nature'.

As Neil Smith (1998: 276) notes, "When in the early 1980s, theories of 'the production of nature' first crystallised ... a broader social constructionism was beginning to seep into the theoretical air of the English speaking academy". Over a decade on, the notion that nature is 'socially constucted' is so *de rigeur* as to be a common-place. In geography, reflecting as much as contributing to intellectual shifts outside the discipline, this examination of nature's construction has comprised two moments. The first is a broadly 'discursive constructionism', inspired by the aggressive development of an interdisciplinary field of 'cultural studies'. Drawing theoretical inspiration from cultural theorists and philosophers like Derrida, Foucault and Heidegger, rather than from politcial-economists, several geographers have shown persuasively that nature is not merely apprehended through power-laden economies of meaning and signification, but that discourse has a 'materiality' which makes it much more than just a 'filter' (see Anderson 1995; Burgess 1992; Henderson 1994; Rose 1993; Willems-Braun 1997). As such, nature becomes a representational prism for a gamut of gendered, racist and sexist practices. The second strand of work on nature's construction is a less discursively focussed 'artifactual
constructionism', indebted to a field which has enjoyed a new-found prominence almost equal to that of cultural studies, namely critical 'science studies'. Inspired by authors like Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and Donna Haraway, the argument here is that nature is as much a material as discursive construction, but one co-produced out of specific engagements between a 'lively' nature and powerful forms of human practice which normalise and regularise the way nature is apprehended and appropriated (an argument put forward in geography by Demeritt 1994, 1996, 1998b, 1998c).

If such constructionist arguments are now so familiar that they fail, any longer, to startle and surprise us, their subversive potential should certainly not be underplayed. As even Smith (ibid.) concedes, they have arguably been "the paramount vehicle in the 1990s for rendering nature complicit with social history ... ." As such, they are an important part of what Willems-Braun (1997: 25) calls a "reflexive environmentalism" which shares with ecocentrism an opposition to technocentric approaches but which importantly - unlike ecocentrism - disavow attempts to 'speak for' a supposedly pristine nature in need of protection. More generally, this kind of critical constructionism - for that is what it is - also amply demonstrates the necessity for and relevance of non-Marxian theoretical and political tools, and represents a powerful exemplification of the insights generated by new critical geographic paradigms of the feminist and anti-racist variety.

And yet for all the power of these social constructionist arguments, their rise to prominence bares an uneasy relationship to the historical-geographical materialist notion of nature's capitalist production. On the one hand, they clearly complement as much as extend this Marxian argument. I say complement, because at the most general level both the constructionist and productionist arguments agree that 'nature' must always be understood within power-laden human practices. On the other hand, however, the current fashionability of social construction of nature arguments on the Left has partly been bought at Marxism's expense. I noted earlier that the production of nature argument took a relatively long time to penetrate debates on nature even within, never mind outside, human
geography. To the two reasons for this that I suggested, I can now perhaps another: for it is arguable that the popularity of social constructionist arguments have actively fed into the wider anti-, or at least post-, Marxist sensibility on the geographical Left of which I made so much in the introduction to this thesis. To this extent, they have perhaps diverted attention away from the power and importance of the production of nature thesis.

This claim should not be over-stated, and I do not intend that it be so. It goes without saying that any critical theory of nature - indeed of any aspect of contemporary economy, polity and society - cannot be based largely or solely on Marxian concepts. But then again, as the 1990s fades into the dawn of a new millennium, the capitalist production of nature remains a defining moment of our world and one whose study and contestation must necessarily loom large in any contemporary environmentalism as much as any radical political-economy. However, there is one final objection to the production of nature argument to be addressed if this latter claim is to truly hold-good.

V. The nature of produced nature

Though you drive nature out with a pitchfork, she [sic.] will still find her way back.
Horace (1972: 24)

The third complaint about the production of nature thesis is perhaps, given our current (so-called) 'global environmental crisis', the most pressing of all: that it is too anthropocentric and indeed 'Promethean'. The general version of this objection is that such Marxist arguments are constitutively unable to be 'green' because they are always already too 'red' (i.e human-centred and specifically class-based). However, there is also a more specific version of this argument which applies with especial force to our contemporary era: namely, that Marxian arguments like Smith's are unable to contribute to an effective understanding of our current environmental (and corporeal) problems. This is a complaint I have already referred to by a different name, when I concluded earlier that while Smith's original arguments did appreciate the materiality of (produced) nature they did not actively theorise that materiality. In the 1990s, this is no longer tenable. For the range and
seriousness of environmental issues is such that their causes and consequences must be properly diagnosed and dissected.

The failure of most versions of Marxism to deal effectively with both the general and specific version of the anthropocentric/Promethean criticism is well-known. Indeed, it is the root cause of much of the fabled antipathy between 'reds' and 'greens', with the latter regarding the former as relatively indifferent to nature's plight and as overly preoccupied with human emancipation (for surveys of 'red-green' relations see Eckersley [1992: ch. 4] and Lewis [1992: ch. 4]). From what I have said so far, there may seem little in Smith's original formulation of the production of nature thesis that permits an effective riposte to this dim view. Indeed, that formulation seems especially anthropocentric in that the suggestion is not merely that nature is *appropriated* by humankind but *produced by it*. Accordingly, for all its other virtues, historical-geographical materialism may seem to share with other Marxisms the sin of being at some level *eco-blind* or even *anti-ecological*.

This is a strong (not to mention loaded) claim. It is, however, one I want to resist. To be sure, in Smith's original arguments nature appears primarily as a "standing-reserve" (to borrow one of Martin Heidegger's [1977: 18] evocative phrases) for capital. Additionally, even his more recent commentaries on nature gesture little towards a Marxian project of what Kate Soper (1996) calls 'greening Prometheus'. And yet, I would argue that when suitably modified and amended, there is nothing in the production of nature thesis which is necessarily eco-blind or anti-ecological. More than that, I would also suggest that this thesis is 'ecological' in a way which yields explanatory and political advantages other 'green' problematics (some of them also Marxist) cannot yield. Fortunately, I do not have to make good on both these claims alone. For, building on Smith's earlier ideas, the recent writings of David Harvey and Erik Swyngedouw provide some useful resources for developing an ecologically sensitive notion of nature's production under capitalism. But before I can consider their work and its suggestiveness in updating and amending the production of nature argument, I need first to say something
about another new body of Marxist scholarship which has also tried to make Marx's critique of political-economy more a critique of political-ecology: an 'ecoMarxism' associated with the likes of Elmar Altvater, Ted Benton, Reiner Grundmann and James O'Connor.

**EcoMarxism**

While the policing of disciplinary boundaries is the least of my concerns, it is nonetheless disappointing that the first sustained efforts at articulating an 'ecoMarxism' have not come from those Marxists working in a discipline - geography - one of whose defining themes is human-environment relations. Until Harvey's and Swyndedouw's recent interventions, few Marxist geographers (never mind historical-geographical materialists) had said much about how Marx's work could be made more 'eco-friendly' and less anthropocentric. It has thus been left to others - notably sociologists and radical economists - to pursue the project of 'greening Marxism'. Simplifying, this greening has operated at two levels. At the most general level, there have been attempts to describe and explain Marx's anthropocentrism and his relative neglect of the environmental implications of capitalist development (e.g. Benton 1989; Grundmann 1991). Secondly, at a less abstract level, there have been theoretical attempts to specify more precisely the ways in which Marx's political-economy can be fashioned into a critique of political-ecology. In particular, ecoMarxists have suggested that capitalist principles of economic organisation have a specific liability to destroy their own resource/environmental base. There have been three notable statements of this argument. One is Altvater's (1993, 1994) dual-thesis that discounting the future routinely leads to resource over-exploitation, while the removal of individual commodities from their eco-systemic context frequently entails a hidden, because unvalued, cost to those wider ecosystems; another is Benton's (1989, 1991) argument about the 'naturally mediated unintended consequences' of capitalist production; and a third is O'Connor's (1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1997) well-known argument about the 'second contradiction' of
capitalism in which the natural 'conditions of production' are unvalued and thus liable to cause what he calls "underproduction crises".

It is not my intention to assess the cogency of these rather different ecoMarxian arguments here. Rather, I want to briefly highlight the general strengths - but as importantly, the weaknesses - of these attempts to green classical Marxism in light of Smith's formulation of the production of nature argument. The strengths are readily apparent: for each author attempts, firstly, to theorise the ways in which capitalism is ecologically destructive and in so doing, secondly, to theorise the nature of nature itself. Altvater, for example, regards the 'interface' between economy and ecology as an uneasy conjunction of two distinct 'systems' possessed of different logics and rhythms. Echoing Smith's focus on social labour, he (1993: 188) sees the dual character of labour as central to "grasping economic processes at once as transformations of values (value-formation and valorization) and as transformations of materials and energy (labour process, 'metabolic interaction' between man [sic.] and nature". With use-values and concrete-labours thus tied to the logics of exchange-value and abstract-labour, Altvater suggests that nature becomes swept up in an economic system with which it is inherently contradictory. Drawing upon the thermodynamic notion of 'entropy', he (ibid. 192-204; 1994) suggests five dimensions of this contradiction: that economic accumulation is quantitative in impetus (growth for growth's sake), where nature is qualitatively differentiated and complex; that economic rationality is based on linear notions of time and space, where nature has its own temporalities and spatialities that, if ignored, can undermine ecosystems; that capitalist principles of organisation assume the reversibility or circularity of economic processes, whereas the transformation of ecosystems may be irreversible; that the capitalist imperatives of profit, in tandem with the time horizons imposed by interest rates on investments or borrowing, often compel rates of resource usage out of line with natural cycles of renewal; and that what is 'rational' in capitalist economic terms may not at all be 'rational' for the sustenance of the environment. Of course, it would be possible to argue
with the details of Altvater's notions of the nature or nature - for instance, his rather traditional notion of ecology has been questioned of late by a so-called 'new ecology' stressing disequilibrium, catastrophe and chaos as ecosystemic norms (see, for example, Botkin [1990] and Zimmerer's [1994] summary). But the point is that he and the other ecoMarxists cited, do attempt - unlike Smith - to explain the why and what of capitalism's destruction of nature(s).

There is, however, a downside to this ecoMarxism. And it is here that, once again, the strengths of the production of nature argument shine through. For arguably, these recent attempts to 'green Marxism' threaten to install notions of an external nature which we should, quite rightly, resist. To this extent ecoMarxism risks becoming cognitively complicit with views of nature on both the Left and the Right which it otherwise opposes. The case should not to overstated, but Altvater's and O'Connor's arguments, in particular, suggest an external nature with its own logics and rhythms, which capitalism 'upsets', 'destabilises' or 'intrudes into'. The kind of imagery is, I think, problematic. Not only does it suggest that economy and ecology are ostensibly separate but somehow 'interfacing' with each other, but it inadertently underplays the deeply transformative power of capitalist interventions into nature. Interestingly, though, Benton's work points towards a more accurate and persuasive view of economy-ecology interactions. For instance, in a critique of neo-Malthusian thinking - a classic case of the notion of an 'external nature' being used to justify social sanctions against supposedly profligate or irresponsible groups in society - he (Benton 1989: 79) puts forward a subtle argument for a specifically Marxian notion of 'natural limits':

\[
\text{since natural limits are theirselves theorised ... as a function of the articulated combination of specific social practices and specific complexes of natural conditions ... what constitutes a general natural limit for one such form of nature/society articulation may not constitute a limits for another.}
\]

The motif of 'articulation' here suggests Benton's desire to move away from dubious notions of an external nature. And yet arguably even Benton's is still a limit case of
external nature thinking, since the articulation metaphor, for all its semantic richness, still at some level implies the meeting of two different spheres.

Indeed, what is interesting is that none of the recent ecoMarxist authors talk in terms of the production of nature under capitalism. For all their proper attention to capital's anti-ecological tendencies and to the environmental consequences of those tendencies, they fail to situate both issues in relation to nature's production. For environmental problems and the like do not arise out of the abuse of a first nature. Instead, they arise out of the material processes by which nature is produced and thereby creatively destroyed. Seen like this, ecoMarxist work and Smith's original argument have something to learn from each other: for the real task in making classical Marxism and historical-geographical materialism less eco-blind is to theorise the creative destruction of an emphatically produced nature.

The production and ecology of nature

Such theorisation has in part been the burden of Harvey's and Swyngedouw's recent writings on nature. Both authors have sought to make historical-geographical materialism less eco-blind by examining closely the ecological possibilities and problems associated with the capitalist production of nature. Following Smith, both authors insist that nature must be understood as a social product. Quoting Marx and Engels, Harvey (1996: 184) argues that the "antithesis between nature and history is created [only when] the relation of man [sic.] to nature is excluded from history" and coins the term "created ecosystems" (ibid. 185) to capture the way this duality of political-economic and ecological change issues in the production of new ecologies. Likewise, in his recent work on the political-ecology of water in Spain and Ecuador, Swyngedouw (1996a, 1997a, 1997c) talks of "socio-nature" in processual terms as the unity of political-economic and ecological change. In the case of both authors, these conceptual vocabularies yield two advantages. Like Smith - and unlike ecoMarxists - they stress the inextricable synthesis of social forms
and of nature(s) achieved under capitalism: neither is external to the other. In addition, unlike Smith and like the ecoMarxists, these vocabularies emphasise the equally important materiality of capitalism and the nature(s) it produces. Although capitalism may be the key driving force of ecological change in the twentieth century world, the natures produced have a material efficacy which simply cannot be ignored.

Between them, Harvey and Swyngedouw theorise the materiality of these produced natures in ways which together positively extend Smith's original argument as much as they do the ecoMarxist arguments of non-geographers Altvater et al. On the one side, Harvey (ibid. 155, 183) argues that there is something anti-ecological about capitalism in the sense that "the contradiction[s] between social and ecological change can become highly problematic". Although seemingly redolent of separate spheres thinking, the point here is that the contradictions are not external but internal to the created ecosystems which are the material consequence of capitalist transformations. Seeing environmental problems from this perspective, Harvey builds them into the heart of historical-geographical materialist thinking, without reverting to the ideologies of nature which threaten to animate recent ecoMarxist scholarship as they have long animated ecocentric and technocentric thinking. But this notion of 'produced environmental problems' can also be taken further. For, on the other side, it leads us away from the pessimism and naivety that inhabit much current thinking on the Left about capitalism's environmental degradation by emphasising that capitalism is as much about creativity as it is destruction. This has two further implications for thinking about the materiality of produced natures. The first, stressed by Swyngedouw (ibid.) in his empirical inquiries into the construction of modern water systems, is that these material natures actively sustain modern capitalist societies in their current form. More 'eco-friendly' modes of practice will therefore be less about returns to 'nature' and more about finding ways of maintaining constructed ecosystems in less ecologically and socially harmful ways. Secondly, this implies that any attempts to dismantle those ecosystems in favour of more 'natural' regimes is unrealistic and
potentially problematic. As Harvey (ibid. 185-6) puts it, "a reworked form of 'second nature' ... cannot be allowed to deteriorate or collapse without courting ecological disaster not only for the social order that produced it, but for all species and forms that have become dependent on it".

These are important arguments and hold out the promise of refining the production of nature argument in ways that are relevant to the environmental concerns of the late twentieth century. That there is still much theoretical work to do goes without saying, and Smith in particular has yet to address full-on the issue of the materiality of produced nature. Nonetheless, the relevance, power and promise of a historical-geographical materialist inquiry into capitalist nature is clear.

VI. The theory and politics of produced nature

Let me conclude with some comments on how the qualified defense and reinterpretation of Smith's original arguments presented here impacts upon our understanding of historical-geographical materialism as a theoretical enterprise and reconfigures its wider relevance to contemporary Marxism and the Left. In some senses the notion of the production of nature has always held out the promise of giving historical-geographical materialism a wider theoretical and political appeal than one would expect given the critique of Marxism in geography these last ten years. I say this because even on a modern reading - where Smith's arguments are seen to be firmly grounded in traditional notions of class and production (narrowly understood) - the question of nature moves attention away from class and production (narrowly understood) per se in order to focus on how capitalism consequentially transforms the natural world in which people worldwide are daily embedded. However, I think that theoretical and political appeal is extended considerably by the reconsideration I have put forward here. Let me explain.

Drawing upon the arguments put forward in chapter four, Smith's more recent commentaries on nature's production and the recent political-ecological writings of Harvey
and Swyngedouw I have sought to offer a double-headed theoretical-explanatory reinterpretation of the production of nature argument. First, by refusing to define production in the restrictive sense of class and the labour process, I have sought to widen and reconfigure it to include capitalism in all its moments as a structured but open-ended political-economic system based on the domination and exploitation of a putative working constitutiency. With abstract- and concrete-labour - rather than class - at the centre of this system, the production of nature becomes a key component of capital accumulation. Second, building on this, I have also sought to show how the materiality of produced nature can and should be more actively theorised within the historical-geographical materialist canon. In addition to these two theoretical-explanatory interventions, the arguments presented also take forward those of chapter three, again in two ways. On the one side, the venerable Marxian concepts Smith, Harvey and Swyngedouw use to examine nature's production allow us to see the phantom-like value relations which link myriad local natures worldwide into a global political-economy which affects far-flung peoples and places. On the other hand though, in keeping with the epistemological reflexivity argued for earlier, these concepts are neither exhaustive nor cognitively exorbitant.

The overall effect, I hope, is to show that today an analysis of the production of nature deserves a central place in Left thinking in geography, and indeed outside it too, not least in the debates on ecoMarxism. Such an analysis would not exhaust radical inquiries into nature and the environment, but it would have several things to recommend it. First, it addresses arguably the only processes which today transform nature on a global scale: those associated with capital accumulation. Second, its explanatory relevance thus extends to myriad peoples and place worldwide. Thirdly, though, that relevance is not predicated on the view that those peoples are a putative and privileged class agency nor is it based on the idea that the production of nature is ultimately a reflex of production narrowly understood, as if the latter is an essence or bedrock. Instead, the problems and possibilities of nature's creative destruction become important in their own right and the concern of a
radical heterogenous 'constituency' which sustains and exploitative and dominative system which drives that creative destruction forward.

In this latter sense, a reinterpreted historical-geographical materialist inquiry into nature's production feeds into a politics of nature which must surely appeal to the Left in geography and beyond. For, in the first place, it suggests a genuinely common basis for a radical politics of nature which has the potential to include activists from all manner of places and of all manner of social identities. Moreover, in the second place this would be an emphatically anthropocentric politics, one based on the sober recognition that capitalism long ago destroyed the basis for any effort to campaign for 'nature in itself'. A green politics - and there are many examples - which fails to recognise that we cannot not be anthropocentric in our nature politics threatens to install romanticism and naivety in equal measure. The advantage of an amended production of nature argument is that this anthropocentrism need not be Promethean and neither need it be tied to spurious notions of humanity as a class (or any other kind) or unity. Instead, it is an anthropocentrism which argues that the task is not to return to nature but to produce it in ways that are as ecologically as they are socially sustainable.

NOTES

1I pose this question as a head-quote for two reasons. The first, and most obvious, is that this chapter seeks to problematise common-sense notions of nature through the notion of the 'production of nature'. But I also pose it because the question of nature is plainly too complex to be exhausted by the considerations offered here: see Castree (forthcoming a).

2And, of course, some politicians have made the question of nature a personal project, most notably US vice-President Al Gore. His book The Earth in Balance (1992), replete with all the apocalyptic strains of more radical environmentalism, nonetheless narrates the causes of and solutions to the 'environmental' crisis through a homely mix of lay theology and Whitehouse managerialism.

3Neo-Malthusian thinking has drawn long and successfully upon this ideology of an external, immutable nature which imposes 'limits'. For a recent incarnation see Garret Hardin's (1996) Living Within Limits.

4It is ironic that Cronon abjures Marxian concepts since his account of Chicago and the Great West is perhaps the most brilliant existing empirical exemplification of nature's production.

5Even 'environmental crises' can be profitable: what commercial opportunities, one wonders, will the melting
of the Antarctic ice sheet yield as the rock underneath is exposed?

6For a review of both bodies of work in relation to the production of nature argument see Braun and Castree (1998) ch. 1.

7See also the work of Adele Clark (1995) on this matter.

8I do not want to get drawn into boundary disputes over the semantic differences between and similarities of the terms 'production' and 'construction'. At one level they do, of course, overlap. But I would insist that both terms also carry different sedimentations of meaning, and that the historical-geographical materialist preference for 'production' is suitably evocative of an array of meanings the term 'construction' cannot begin to capture.

9An interesting exception is some of the new work on 'political-ecology' which combines Marxisant insights into the political-economy of environmental change with post-structural insights into discourses of the environment. See, for example, Moore (1996).

10With the possible exception of 'artifactual constructivists', this worry about Marxist approaches to nature could also be said to apply to 'social construction of nature' advocates, most of whom pay little attention to the material and moral questions surrounding the use and abuse of nature.
CHAPTER SEVEN
THE SUBJECT OF CAPITAL

Since the critical power of Marxism was tied to the necessary and sufficient negativity of the proletariat, this power has withered with the emergence of the "other" revolutionary subjects - the ones we inadequately summon through the term "new social movements". The critical theory of society has splintered in its practitioners' efforts to embrace these new "subjects" and, as a consequence, has been politically paralysed ... [T]he political Right has capitalised on this paralysis, recasting political discourse in its terms and appearing to address the need for revolutionary subjectivity by empowering people to unleash the economic forces that actually enslave them.

John Mowitt (1988: xiii)

I. Introduction
Although I hope to question Mowitt's common-place assumption that Marx's theory of the subject is his theory of class by another name, his assessment of the current 'state' of the subject is, I think, broadly correct. Consider the following situation. As is well known, over the last two decades, various neo-liberal and neo-conservative regimes in Western Europe, North America and beyond, have set about systematically dismantling the Fordist-Keynesian arrangements that helped sustain the long post-war boom. This dismantling has, of course, been ostensibly an economic and a political project, entailing the advocacy and implementation of deregulation, free market economics and the like. As such, it has also been an ideological project (and a largely successful one in countries like Britain and the USA), one involving the questioning of taken-for-granted ideas and assumptions and their replacement by new social norms and mores. However, what is less often appreciated - but becoming increasingly clear - is that the neo-liberal/conservative turn has also been all about the very reconstitution of subjectivities, what Paul Heelas (1991: 72) calls "reformations of the self". Thus, more than merely generating a set of ideas and beliefs to complement political and economic changes, the neo-liberal and neo-conservative project has reached into areas normally thought separate from, or beyond the reach, of 'mundane' political-economic imperatives. When Margaret Thatcher (1987) (in)famously declared that "There is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women", she was therefore prefiguring the resurrection of what Abercrombie et al. (1986) sardonically
called 'sovereign individuals of capitalism'. This observation may at first sight seem banal - what, after all, could be more natural and less contestable than to say that people are 'individuals'? But it is this very obviousness which is problematic, since the specifically capitalist forms of individuality currently enjoying a largely unalloyed hegemony are far from natural, still less uncontestable (Haworth 1994; Heelas and Morris 1992). In fact, they are part and parcel of a resurgent 'enterprise culture' (Keat and Abercrombie 1991), in which both producers and consumers are interpellated as free, equal and relatively autonomous subjects with the right to and power of self-determination.

Now consider this. Over the last decade or so, one of the leading and most productive questions for critical research in human geography and other social sciences has been that of subjectivity. Predicated on the notion that the subject is a social construction, this anatomisation of subjectivity has been coincident with, and contributed to, the wider 'cultural turn' in the human sciences. It has also, as I observed in chapter 1, coincided with a relative decline of interest in radical political-economic research in general and in Marxism in particular. This has been no bad thing, since it has usefully illuminated the heretofore obscure and multifarious ways in which subjectivities are made and remade - often unconsciously, frequently coercively and invariably as effects (or reflexes) of social power. In any case, the question of subjectivity "has traditionally been an area which Marxist theory has found relatively uninteresting - especially more orthodox, economistic Marxism" (P. Smith 1988: 4) - unless, of course, one chooses to consider Marx's discussions of 'class' as amounting to a theory of subjectivity. This paucity of Marxian investigations of subjectivity has seemed especially true in human geography, where most forms of overtly Marxist inquiry have focused on familiar political-economic topics like uneven development, urban and regional restructuring and the like.¹ Accordingly, the recent proliferation of geographical studies which seek to 'map the subject' (Pile and Thrift 1995) - that is, to show how geography matters to the constitution and reconstitution of subjectivities - have been very strong on detailing the social and cultural mechanisms
through which subjectivity is geographically constructed. Indicative here is Pile and Thrift's (ibid.) recent collection *Mapping the Subject*, in which - as if to prove the putative irrelevance of political-economy and of Marxist geographies to such a 'non-economic' question as that of subjectivity - no contributions by Marxist or Marxisant geographers are to be found. Instead, the sources of theoretical inspiration range from Foucault's histories of subjectification to Lacanian psychoanalysis, while the politics range from feminist to anti-racist to anti-heterosexist.

In light of all the above consider, thirdly, this: that as the 'sovereign individual of capitalism' has become an increasingly central modality of subjectivity in the post-Fordist, post-Keynesian order, the academic Left has had very little of weight or moment to say about it, *despite its current preoccupation with the question of the subject*. We thus have a peculiar situation in which, as critical social scientists have discovered, disaggregated and (to use Paul Smith's [ibid.] evocative vocabulary) 'dis-cerned' the subject, the Right has effectively rethought and indeed remade subjectivity in ways that many of those social scientists have yet to fully register. There are several reasons behind this apparent paradox (and I will outline some of them in due course), but they do not alter the fact that a critical investigation into the current production of distinctively capitalist forms of individuality is urgently required.

What has any of this do to with Marxism, let alone the subject of my reinterpretive efforts in this thesis, historical-geographical materialism? The answer is a good deal. I say this for two reasons. First, as several commentators have pointed out (Sayer 1991; P. Smith 1988: ch. 1), the later Marx's political-economic writing arguably contains a nascent, under-developed theory of the subject. I am not, I hasten to add, referring to his understanding of class as a key 'subject-position' within capitalism which is assumed within the economic 'base' (and, in any case, even if I were I have tried to argue that class is less a single subject-position than a common positionality in relation to processes of capital circulation and accumulation). Rather, as we shall see, the locus of subject-
formation in Marx's theory lies elsewhere, though still firmly within the ambit of capitalist social forms and relations. If there is thus reason to focus on the later Marx as a theorist of subjectivity, there is even more reason to examine subjectivity in relation to historical-geographical materialism. For it will be my suggestion that in David Harvey's (1985a) *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* one can find a geographical theorisation of what I will call 'the subject of capital'. This theorisation - which builds on and extends Marx's - has largely been overlooked by geographers on the Left. And yet, in light of the discourses and practices which currently invite subjects to consider themselves as individuals *qua* individuals, this oversight is unfortunate. An interrogation of Harvey's theorisation of the subject of capital may, therefore, offer the critical resources to contest those interpellations which incite "human beings to identify their self-experience [as individuals] with the image of that experience that comes for them in the discourses [and practices] emanating from the ... [dominant] apparatuses" (Mowitt *op. cit.* xiv).

What makes these interpellations especially consequential, and particularly insidious, is their *generality*. The processes which 'hail' subjects as subjects of capital are neither local and idiosyncratic, nor are they ephemeral and contingent. Rather, they are historically specific and materially efficacious processes associated with the ramified field that is 'capitalism'. This is why an interrogation of the distinctive forms of subjectivity they produce is so important. This is why the ignorance of these forms on the non-Marxist Left in geography and beyond is so problematic. And this is why a consideration of Harvey's theorisation of the subject of capital is arguably so long overdue.

And yet establishing the relevance of Harvey's theorisation is by no means straightforward. There are three reasons for this. One is that it is a largely speculative atheorisation, and in this sense, as we shall see, it is not argued with the kind of rigour animating a text like *The Limits to Capital*. Another is that it also a rather abstract and suggestive theorisation. But a third reason, more importantly, is that Harvey's approach to the question of the subject can be read in one of two ways. On the hand, it can be seen to
be animated by a set of modern/traditional thematics which render it of dubious value to any wider Leftist project to contest the social construction of subjectivity. However, it is also the case that Harvey's theorisation contains a set of important observations which render it surprisingly consonant with current approaches to subjectivity on the Left of geography and other human sciences. But it is only by drawing these observations out clearly, and counterposing them to the modern/traditional thematics which also infuse his theorisation of subjectivity, that this consonance can be made fully apparent.

The argument proceeds in three stages. I begin with a brief summary and appreciation of the burgeoning critical literature on subjectivity in social theory, cultural studies, human geography and beyond. I do so because, by throwing into relief the current critical consensus on how best to approach the subject, it usefully contextualises what I go on to say about Marx's, and particularly Harvey's, theorisation of the subject of capital. In particular, it indicates which aspects of that theorisation ought productively to be drawn out and built upon as part of a wider critical interrogation of subjectivity. I then move on to a summary of Marx's largely implicit theorisation of the subject, and highlight a series of problems with its associated with modern/traditional thematics. Finally, I show how Harvey's inquiries into the subject of capital extend and elaborate Marx's insights. I suggest, first, that for all their other qualities, these inquiries repeat in a geographical register the problems of Marx's theorisation. But, moving on, I conclude that a set of non-modern/traditional thematics suggest an altogether more productive reading of the subject of capital, one with a potentially wide relevance to critical theorists of subjectivity and one which can strongly contest capitalist forms of individuality.

II. Questioning 'the subject'

... the "subject" will be broken down and will be understood as the term inaccurately used to describe what is actually the series or the conglomeration of positions, subject-positions, provisional and not necessarily indefeasible, into which a person is called momentarily by the discourses and the world he/she inhabits.

Paul Smith (1988: xxxv)
De-naturalising and socialising the subject

Although, as I have noted, the question of the subject current enjoys a prominent place within the domain of critical inquiry, it is hardly a new preoccupation. On the contrary, Smith (op. cit. xxvii), exaggerating only slightly, argues that the subject has enjoyed a "privileged position" within the discourses of twentieth century critical theory. For example, psychoanalysis, existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism, Critical Theory and, more recently, post-structuralism and feminism, have each been centrally concerned with the question of the subject and have each sought to differentiate themselves from prevailing paradigms by offering new conceptions of subjectivity. This centrality of the subject has arguably arisen for two reasons. The first is its obvious importance as a topic of analysis. Not only is it about who people are (or think themselves to be) and how this affects their actions in the world and towards others - a fundamental concern if ever there was one. It is also about social power, social subjection, and the social determination of subjects as this rather than that. But if this first reason why the question of the subject has occupied the heartlands of critical-theoretical debate is a good one, then the second is far less compelling. For it concerns the fact that the question of 'the subject' is so promiscuous, indeed protean, that it has proved impossible to not impinge upon it in some way, shape or form. The notorious definitional slipperiness of the term 'subjectivity' is indicative here. As Smith (op. cit. xxxiii) laconically observes, "The word 'subject' is not without its equivocity". Is it a shorthand for that which is opposed to 'the object world'? Is it synonymous with the 'individual' (a term which is itself polyvalent and ambiguous)? Does it signify the domain of the inner mind, as opposed to the public realm of events and actions? Or does it refer to one who is subject to putatively external forces and thus at their behest? When the question of the subject is expansive enough to call forth all of these questions, and ambiguous enough to yield positive answers to each of them, then it is not
surprising that it has been such a preoccupation of twentieth century critical (and also mainstream) thought.

These definitional problems aside, the current heightened preoccupation within critical science with the question of the subject can trace it origins back (so the story goes) to Freud, Nietzsche and (depending one who you read) Marx. For it was this triptych who first problematised accepted Enlightenment notions of subjectivity. Since Freud disclosed the unconscious, since Nietzsche disclosed the constitutive power of grammar, and since Marx disclosed the historical production of classes, "the subject" has hung "perilously between the quotation marks which both protect and threaten it" (Oliver op. cit. 178). In the canonical philosophical works of the Enlightenment West - those of Descartes, Locke and Kant - the subject was, of course, a cogito, standing in relation to the world as its source, its product or its dialectical partner. This philosophical notion of the monadic, unified self - undivided and whole - had its real world analogue in the discourses and practices of bourgeois society, in which the doctrines of universal rights, equality and liberty hailed persons as self-determining selves. The contribution of Freud et al. was to shatter this myth of the natural, self-sufficient subject. On the one hand, the subject was de-naturalised and seen as historically contingent. At the same time, it was also socialised, that is, shown to be in part the product of wider, and often subtle and diffuse, social forces, relations and discourses: in short, the subject was now seen as socially constructed.

In the twentieth-century, these fundamental insights have animated the very different, but equally germinal, investigations into the subject to be found in everything from Saussurean and post-Saussurean linguistics, to post-Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, to the post-structuralism of Derrida and Foucault, to contemporary critical feminisms. In this light, the denaturalisation and socialisation of the subject inaugurated by Freud et al. has proven radically liberatory (at least in the realms of academic debate and theory). For not only has it inspired a relativisation - and thus contestation - of hegemonic
forms of subjectivity. It has also thereby fed into arguments that subjects might refuse, revalorise or even reconstitute the subjectivities assigned to them.

Traditional Marxian notions of the proletariat are often taken to be emblematic here, in part because of the absolute centrality of Marxism within twentieth-century critical debates in Western Europe, North America and beyond (although, as I have said, I rather doubt that Marx's fragmentary account of class really amounts to a - or the - theory of subjectivity in his work). By showing that class was a social construction, Western Marxisms enacted a double-move. On the one side, they destabilised the seeming 'naturalness' of class identities, and showed them to be the medium and outcome of structural forces associated with a specific form of political-economic organisation. But on the other side, apart from being thus critical of class identities, these Marxisms also, in a seeming paradox, affirmed them. This was not, however, an affirmation based on acceptance, but a strategic affirmation in which class identities were to be used to forge a movement against capitalism.

But, whatever its other virtues, this class identarianism was itself, of course, to turn out to be rather perilous. To begin with, it was often based on a peculiar contradiction in which it effectively reinstated a model of the subject it otherwise opposed. Reflecting a dichotomy in Marx's own work, it vacillated between an anti-naturalism and antihumanism in which class consciousness was seen as historically specific and socially ascribed as much as individually made, and a sort of 'historical naturalism', if you like, in which a stable, coherent, common and 'authentic' class identity was to be achieved by workers (witness, for example, the 'exchanges' between Althusserians and E. P. Thompson). In turn, as is well known, this ironically fed into a politics of exclusion in which the affirmation of class identity effectively marginalised other equally legitimate facets of social and individual identity.

It was this situation that, in part, instigated a new wave of investigations into subjectivity that has culminated in today's preoccupation with the question in the cultural
and social sciences. Reflecting on their experience of radical thought and practice in the 1960s and 70s, lapsed Althusserians Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) authored what has in many ways become the charter document for a new radical theory - and politics - of subjectivity and identity. Their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* launched a coruscating critique of what they called 'class essentialism'. Trawling their way through the twentieth century Marxist canon of Lenin, Kautsky, Gramsci and the like, Laclau and Mouffe argued that radical subjectivity had been consistently sutured around, and reduced to, class. As Calhoun (1994: 14) puts it in another context, "There is al[ways] ... the risk that the 'social constructionist' story will become a social determinism ...", and Laclau and Mouffe showed how Marxisms had, ironically, 'fixed' subjectivity just as the bourgeois societies they were criticising had done. Although, as I asserted in chapter 1, their critique of Marxism arguably threw the baby out with the bathwater, Laclau and Mouffe's has nonetheless rightly become a significant intervention. Theoretically, three innovations stand out. First, they multiplied and disaggregated the subject of social insurgency. The critique of class identarianism should, they argued, unshackle myriad other social identities. But, in turn, they insisted (building on the works of Derrida and Lacan) that each of these multifarious identities had 'constitutive outsides', meaning that they were all necessarily partial and incomplete. Secondly, this fed into a critique of the supposed adequacy of any radical theory to capture subjectivity in all of, or its 'essential', moments. To use Mowitt's (*op. cit.* ix) apt description, Laclau and Mouffe's critique of Marxian class identarianism showed how "the subject functions within disciplinary structures of knowledge to provide their adherents with an alibi for the consistent inadequacy of disciplinary self-reflection". Finally, rather than lapse into a shapeless theoretical and political pluralism, Laclau and Mouffe argued that a new socialism be built around strategically selected 'nodal points' in which common identities can be self-consciously assumed and fought over against established interests and powers.
This vision of a 'radical democracy' for the late twentieth century, as many commentators have pointed out, reflects - and lends theoretical legitimacy to - the proliferation of so-called 'new social movements' in post-Fordist, post-Keynesian era and the current vogue for 'identity politics'. Both developments have been immensely important, and it is no mistake that they first blossomed in the one Western country where Marxism had never quite had the hold over radical thought and politics it enjoyed elsewhere: the USA. There, the New Left responded to and called for the articulation of new oppositional voices, including the women's movement, gay and lesbian movements, Afro-American movements, Chicano, Asian, youth and counter-cultural movements, and so on. Over two decades on, these and other movements are increasingly well-represented in radical thought and practice - in Europe and beyond, as well as in North America. In theoretical terms, enormous progress has been made in dissecting the way subjectivities, now in the plural, are multiply made, enforced, rejected and contested. Accordingly, the theoretical names which today command attention in relation to the subject are not those of Marx and Marxists, but the likes of Irigaray, Spivak, Butler, Kristeva, Bourdieu, hooks and Foucault.

But there have been problems. To begin with, some have suggested that the articulation (and even celebration) of these multiple new identities has issued in a hypostasis of difference and the reinstallation of what Harrison White (1992: 1) calls "categorical identities". As Christina Crosby (1992: 130) remarks, "differences' now work more or less as 'identity' did before". Secondly, this has led some to worry that Leftist identity politics has lapsed into what Charles Taylor (1992: 6) calls a "soft relativism" in which all identities and subjectivities are, a priori, taken to be of equal weight and importance. Cosy as this equality sounds, it threatens to issue in an "I'm OK, you're OK" approach to the subject - as Rey Chow (1992: 104) calls it - in which "complete in-differentiation and in-difference result" (Natter and Jones III 1997: 145, emphasis added). Thirdly, there have also been concerns that the new theories and politics of identity revert
to a voluntarism, in which individuals and groups discover and recover supposedly essential identities in acts of seeming self-wholeness and self-possession (Calhoun 1994). Finally, it has been suggested that, despite appearances, the way recent theorists of subjectivity 'do theory' is strangely similar - in its cognitive certainty and full-bloodedness - to that of the earlier theorists, like Marxists, they ostensibly depart from (Fuss 1989).

If these criticisms reflect worries that the subject and theories of it still remain too essentialist and centred, another set indicate that, for all their other virtues, those arguments which 'decentre' of the subject have proceeded too far. This issue has become especially acute in debates within feminism, where post-structural and post-modern feminists have brought the category 'woman' into question, while others still insist that laying claim to it as a common identity is politically vital (Bordo 1990; Hartsock 1989-90). This, in turn, has fed into a wider concern that the current de-construction of the subject has threatened to dissolve it altogether. The subject, it has been argued, is now so fractured, and so much the product of multiple anonymous forces, that it is becoming increasingly impossible to talk about, let alone locate, a subject of resistance at all (Gitlin 1994).

The fractal subject, strategic theory/dis-cerning the subject, dis-cerning theory

Though occasionally exaggerated, many of these points have been well taken. In recent years they have inspired several attempts to retheorise subjectivity in ways that can negotiate some of the antinomies between the subject which is wholly centred and that which is wholly decentred, the subject which is putatively natural/non-social and that which is given over entirely to its historical/social formation, and the subject which possesses a key identity to trump all others and that which is so multiple as to appear schizophrenic.

Three emblematic, but also particularly arresting and fruitful, contributions are those of Laclau (1990), political theorist Kelly Oliver (1991), and literary theorist Paul
Smith (1988). All these authors take three crucial things as axiomatic, the first two concerning the subject, the last one concerning how to theorise the subject. The first axiom is that "all subjects arise at a temporally shifting intersection of multiple interpellations. In effect, one is the subject of race, gender, and class discourses [etc.] as they are disproportionately activated by different ... media" (Mowitt op. cit. xiv). What this means, then, is that subjects do not possess one or other 'key' identity, but are each called into several different subject-positions at different times, in different contexts and with different consequences. This insight guards against either a natural or a social essentialisation of subjectivity, but it also takes seriously the multiplicity and the contingent 'fixity' of identities in particular situations. It also feeds into a second key axiom, one well summarised by Donna Haraway (1991: 193), which is that "there is no way to 'be' simultaneously in all, or wholly in any, of the privileged (subjugated) positions structured by gender, race, nation and class ... The search for such a 'full' ... position is the search for the fetishised perfect subject of oppositional history". This is an important double-edged claim. For it indicates that specific identities must constantly be assumed - and fought over - but that they can never be adequate or exhaustive. Together, thirdly, both these axiomatic claims about the subject rebound on any attempts to theorise the subject. For we should recall that theories of the subject are themselves constructed by subjects. Inter alia, this means that, today, any given critical theory which accents a given subject-position or form of identity must acknowledge the constitutive inadequacy and partiality of its own categories.

It may seem odd to cite Laclau in the context of these several claims. After all, his work with Mouffe has often been seen as partly responsible for some of the problems with recent investigations into identity and subjectivity that I listed. But, as I have said, their project was never simply one of celebrating the proliferation of identities or calling for a panoply of discrete identity theories to supersede Marxism. Indeed, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* rejects the kind of ontological separatism of positing different groups
with distinct identities, and argues for the overdetermination of subjectivity such that putatively different subjects who adopt a given identity at one point, will at another perforce join together in struggle as they assume other subject-positions. As if to prove the point, in his *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, Laclau further refines these earlier arguments. In particular, his development of the concepts of 'articulation', 'contingency' and 'antagonism' offers him a vocabulary with which to skillfully argue that all identities are 'pierced' by their "constitutive outsides", an insight which both legitimates but also problematises their foundational usage for any radical politics (see Diskin 1994).

Oliver (*op. cit.*) proposes something along the same lines, but she does so through the powerful and suggestive metaphors of the "fractal subject" and "strategic theory". Her argument begins with a critical appreciation of Derrida and Foucault's contribution to recent debates on the subject. In different ways, both authors announce the 'death of the subject' insofar as they insist that subjectivity is the product of relatively anonymous grids of semiotic differance and power-knowledge respectively. Oliver appreciates the theoretical and political value of this argument. For it indicates that there is always a 'risk' in basing any critical project on a given identity: a risk of accepting the very categories and dividing practices that give rise to that identity in the first place, and which give rise to the illusion of the (now insurgent) subject as a self-possessed, integral and centred plenitude. But Oliver (*ibid.* 191) also worries that these arguments evacuate the subject and abandon agency: "On the one hand, conceiving of subjects as social constructions allows us both to explain our complicity with our own oppression and avoid the naturalisation of the subject ... [But o]n the other hand, it makes it difficult to imagine how we can escape this structure which has constructed us". For her (*ibid.* 185-6) "What we need, then, is a theory of 'the subject' which does not eliminate the possibility of oppressed people organising their emancipation and, at the same time, does not naturalise 'the subject'".

Her 'solution' is to think of 'the subject' as fractal. This has both an everyday and a specialist meaning. It means, first, that the subject is fractal in the sense of being a non-
homogenous constellation of subject-positions or what, using a Deleuzian vocabulary, Oliver calls 'subject-effects'. But this still does not circumvent the problem of 'total' social constructionism: for the subject is here still determined, only now by multiple determinations rather than just one or two. This is why Oliver's second usage of 'fractal' is so important and suggestive. Drawing on chaos theory from physics, it describes determinant, yet unpredictable, systems. For Oliver (ibid. 188), this notion may help us "imagine how we can talk about agency without supposing a transcendent unified subject as its cause". Because, for her, persistent and repeatable social determinations are subject to different 'initial conditions' and 'perturbations' over time and space, they leave room for divergent effects and responses. As I say, this physical analogy is very suggestive, but regrettable. Oliver does say enough to make it more than that. Nonetheless, the general understanding of the subject it yields directly impacts upon the understanding theorists of subjectivity must now have of theory. Older senses of theory in which the 'true' nature of radical subjectivity was sought after must now, on Oliver's account, be abandoned and, in their place, a more tactical and modest notion of 'strategic theory' emplaced:

This project does not simply involve creating a new theory which better describes the status of "the subject" than other theories. It is not a matter of formulating the true "metaphysics of the subject". It does not answer the question "what is the subject?" This project must involve a new kind of theory altogether. It must call into question, by its very formulation, the power structure of traditional theory-making. Perhaps it asks the question: how to use the subject?

This brings me, thirdly, to Paul Smith's (1988) comprehensive (and much under-rated) survey of theories of the subject in the humanities and social sciences: for it too presents an original and productive way out of some of the impasses of current debates on the subject. For him, older theorisations of the subject, but also those associated with newer identity theories, together 'cern' the subject. This little used word plays on two English verbs, to cern and to cerne. The former means 'to accept an inheritance or a patrimony' and Smith uses it to indicate the way most theories of the subject abstract it
from its enabling conditions of existence. As Calhoun (*op. cit.* 26) puts it, this entails an "abstraction from the concrete interactions and social relationships within which identities are constantly renegotiated, and in which individuals present one identity as more salient than other", and a denial of the mutliplicity of subject-positions individuals are invited to embrace in the course of their existence. In turn, this is authorised by a theoretical manoeuvre captured by the verb 'to cern', meaning 'to encircle' or 'to enclose', and which describes "the way theoretical discourse limits the definition of the human agent in order to be able to call him/her the 'subject'" (Smith *op. cit.* xxx, emphasis added). Against these moves, Smith proposes to dis-cern the subject, a project which necessarily entails the simultaneous dis-cerning of theory.

Like Laclau and Mouffe and Oliver, Smith seeks an understanding of the subject as multiply (rather than singly) interpellated and as socially constituted, but not so sternly interpellated and constituted that all identities are inherently compromised and radical agency non-existent. But how to achieve all of these things without resorting to notions of the self-determining subject? Smith's answer is important and novel. If, he asks, subjective identities are socially constructed through and through and if, therefore, agency cannot reside in supposedly self-activating individuals or groups, in what circumstances can subjects choose to struggle over particular aspects of their identity? Clearly, the activating dynamic of agency cannot come from outside the social and cultural process; but on the social constructionist model there seems little room inside it either. In the face of this, Smith ingenuously argues that agency "is a form of subjectivity where, by virtue of the contradictions and disturbances *in and among subject-positions*, the possibility (indeed actuality) of resistance ... is allowed for" (Smith *ibid.* xxxv, emphasis added). In other words, then, Smith "does not theorise a subjective moment outside interpellation that could serve as the fulcrum of resistance, but rather a conflict within the social practices of interpellation that, when understood as the social articulations of the constitutional instability of the subject, can be theorised as society's perpetual production of resistance to
itself" (Mowitt *op. cit.* xv). In effect, then, Smith exploits the unrealised potential of the argument that subjects are always multiply interpellated. For him it is the non-homogeneity - the tensions and slippages - between subject-positions which produces cognitive dissonance and allows subjects the opportunity for critical self-reflection and agency. The innovative result is that he gains a theory of resistance that neither "resorts to a metaphysics of voluntarism, nor appeals to a teleologically designated subject of history" (*ibid.*).

In sum, Smith's, Oliver's and Laclau's contributions represent something like the current 'state of play' in critical theorisations of the subject (for related contributions see Bradley [1996], Flax 1994] and Rajchman [1996]). If I have dwelt on them at some length, it is because the ideas they articulate are important. And yet, despite this importance, there has been one conspicuous absence in much of the recent debate on the subject. For however illuminating, supple and subtle the substantive claims and the deployments of theory, most of the debate has rather ignored the specific forms of subjectivity associated with capitalist forms and relations. It is almost as if, having critiqued the class subject of orthodox Marxisms, the question of 'the subject of capital' has been thought to be exhausted. As I shall show, that is certainly not the case. But first, and by way of a conclusion to this section, let me now briefly indicate what all of this has to do with geography.

*Geography and the subject*

This is not the place to offer a comprehensive survey of the new, and not so new, geographical work on the subject. It is enough to note that much of this work has broadly reflected - but also extended - the debates on subjectivity to which I have been referring. Like other social sciences, post-war human geography worked, often unthinkingly, with naturalised and de-socialised - not to mention essentialised - models of the subject. The rational economic actor - *Homo economicus* - of location theory in particular, and spatial
science more generally, was perhaps the most notorious example (Barnes 1988), and, of course, soon spawned a series of 'new models of the self' (Pile 1993). But key here were not the arguments of Marxist geographers, but those of humanistic geographers, who objected to the dessicated and abstracted subject of spatial science and sought to 'humanise' the subject. In this sense, debates on the subject in human geography differed from those in the other human sciences. The reason, I think, is because Marxist geographers never put forward a particularly strong reading of the subject: instead, they devoted their critical energies to exploring topics like industrial restructuring, urbanisation and so on. To the extent that a Marxist geographical theory of the subject existed at all, it was usually (and predictably) associated with class. This said, though, Marxism's entry into the discipline was crucial in socialising many of the foci of geographical research, and it is not surprising that the first critiques of humanistic geography's model of the subject should come from authors sympathetic to Marxism, if not themselves full-blooded Marxists. The advocates of structuration theory, like Derek Gregory (1981) and Nigel Thrift (1983), sought a middle ground between structural determinism and the voluntarism and individualism they saw infecting humanistic geography, and in so doing opened up new and productive avenues of inquiry into the subject (Gregory 1982; Pred 1987). Together, by the mid-1980s, these and other developments were beginning to contribute something distinctive to the debates on the subject. This is why I say that geographical work on the subject extended, as much as it reflected, wider debates on the subject in the human sciences. For geographers made it increasingly apparent that the constitution and reconstitution of subjectivity was intrinsically bound up with space, place and landscape.

This was a vital insight. But by the early 1990s it was becoming increasingly clear that geographical work on the subject suffered the twin problems of 'cerning' the subject in one way or the other and of succumbing to what Keith and Pile (1993: 7) call "spatial immanence". The former problem entailed an insufficient appreciation and exploration of the multiple sources and forms of subjectivity. The latter entailed an equally restrictive
view of space as a singular - rather than complex and manifold - medium, cause or dialectical partner of subject-formation. This is why the recent surge of interest in the subject in human geography in the 1990s has, once again, drawn upon and extended the wider recent debates on the subject. Accordingly, attention is now being paid to the complex colligation of dominant subject positions in society, and the range of theoretical frameworks being drawn upon is wider (Duncan 1996; Natter and Jones op. cit.; Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 1995). Accordingly too, despite the penchant for using ill-defined spatial metaphors in these new, more sophisticated examinations of the subject (Smith and Katz 1993), geographers have begun to show the real complexity of the spaces, places and landscapes in which subjects are interpellated and in which they can embrace and/or contest those interpellations (Keith and Pile ibid.; Pile and Thrift 1995).

But despite these valuable geographical insights into subject formation and resistance, the debates within critical geography still share one unfortunate thing in common with the wider theoretical field they have drawn upon and extended: an ignorance of what I am here calling 'the subject of capital'. It is thus time to take a look at that subject as it is theorised in David Harvey's Consciousness and the Urban Experience. I begin though, appropriately, with a look at the inspiration for that theorisation: the later Marx's often muted comments on the subject.

III. Marx and the subject

Even despite attempts with varying degrees of success and validity ... to introduce a theory of subjectivity into Marx's analyses of capitalism ... orthodox Marxism still by and large holds to a view of the ... 'subject' which installs it as an abstraction, fit only to be assigned a class and thence to be superceded by the processes of history.

Paul Smith (op. cit. 4)

Smith's assessment, as I hope to show, is only partly correct because one-sided. If I have objected to the widespread assumption that Marx's 'theory' of the subject is synonymous with his analysis of class it is for two good reasons. The first is that the later Marx's
substantive comments on class were notoriously sparse and, indeed, often contradictory. As such, they can hardly be counted as amounting to his 'theory of the subject'. True, Marx talked a good deal about class in both his 'theoretical' writings, like *Capital I*, and his 'empirical' writings, like *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. However, nowhere did he present a fully elaborated, substantive, definitive account. Thus, despite its absolutely central place in his work (and that of most of his twentieth century epigones), one finds Marx's category of class more often invoked than adequately theorised at anything but the most abstract level. The second reason for objecting to the presumption that Marx's theory of the subject is exhausted by his class analytics, is that it misses a whole set of other claims about the subject which are to be found in his mature political-economy. Yet in fairness, the failure to detect and fully appreciate these other claims is understandable. After all, was it not Marx himself who (in)famously assigned questions of 'social consciousness' to the 'superstructure' in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*? And if, as many twentieth century Marxists have been wont to argue, the superstructural realm is 'relatively autonomous', is it not surprising to find that few have discerned a non-class theory of subjectivity in the seemingly 'basal' preoccupations of Marx's pre-eminent text on 'economics', *Capital*

What can it mean, then, to talk of a non-class theory of the subject in the later Marx and in, of all places, his supposedly economic texts? As those (few) commentators who have sought to answer this question have shown, the answer is two-fold: it means, first, to talk of Marx's theory of *commodity fetishism*, and, second, his related theory of the *capitalist individual*. Together, both theories bring the question of the subject within the extended scope of Marx's political-economic concerns. And together is it this conjunction between commodity fetishism and the production of historically specific modalities of individuality which, as Amariglio and Callari (1993: 188) put it, defines "the peculiar subjectivity of capitalist social formations".
To talk of commodity fetishism in the context of the subject may sound strange for several reasons. One is that, with the exception Lukács and certain members of the Frankfurt School, few commentators have associated Marx's notion of fetishism with a theory of subjectivity (Mepham 1979). Secondly, the more obvious foundation for a non-class Marxian theory of the subject has usually been thought to involve the notion of 'ideology' (Barrett 1991: ch. 1). This complex and ambiguous notion has a canonical place in Marx's works, of course. But what is interesting is that the term rarely appears in Marx's mature political-economy. Indeed, what is doubly interesting is that, in the course of his writings, the more Marx invokes the fetishism motif the less he talks about ideology, suggesting that the former comes to occupy the previously central place of the latter in his work (Eagleton 1991: ch. 3). One possible reason for this, as I will presently show, is that Marx's notion of commodity fetishism entails a proactive theory of subject formation.

But if these comments assuage concerns that commodity fetishism is irrelevant to Marx's theory of the subject, they do little to address the seeming peculiarity of linking fetishism to the question of individualism. After all, Marx is not known for seeing individuals as anything other than bearers of class traits and, likewise, twentieth century Marxists (with the notable exception of Peter Leonard [1984], Lucien Sève [1978] and Robert Tucker [1980]) have had little to say on the topic. Things look still less promising when one takes a conventional look at the role of the individual in relation to commodity fetishism in Capital I. For what one seems to find is that the individual is taken for granted and, as such, untheorised. What I mean here, is that Marx seems to assume exchange between what Amariglio and Callari (op. cit. 203) call "naturally constituted ... individuals" whose only place in the analysis is to be befuddled by fetishistic 'surface appearances'. This, clearly, hardly amounts to a theory of the individual - or to taking individuality seriously. However, the lack of such a theory in the later Marx is more apparent than real. Although at times muted, that theory has been effectively drawn out by several recent commentators. These commentators have accented the connective imperative between
commodity fetishism and the active and consequential production of individuality in specifically capitalist - and thus historically specific - forms (Amariglio and Callari ibid.; Sayer 1991; Williams 1988; see also Taussig 1980). It is to their work and that theory that I now turn.

'The subject of capital'

It is conventional among both Marxists and their critics to see the theory of commodity fetishism as a theory of mis-representation. With relations between people appearing as relations between things (commodities), capitalism is seen to "produce its own misperception" (Callinicos 1985: 131). Accordingly, the theory of commodity fetishism is taken to be an exercise in developing "the necessary 'sight' that one must possess to pierce the vapours, to comprehend and unravel the mysteries" (Amariglio and Callari op. cit. 202). All this is, I think, indisputable and I said as much in chapter 2. But what has been less often noted is that the theory also allows one to 'see' something more than just the social relations animating surface appearances. For rather than taking the otherwise mystified individual of exchange at face value, it also arguably describes "the fantastic process that creates the reality/myth of the 'individual' [in the first place], the form of subjectivity that is continually shaped by and, in turn, shapes market relations" (Amariglio and Callari ibid. 203, emphasis added). This is an important claim, so let me elaborate.

The question of 'the individual' is a complex one. So natural does it seem to talk of individuality that we may forget that it is, at some level, a social construction. Likewise, it is easy to overlook the fact that there are different kinds of individuality associated with different social processes and societies (Thrift 1987: 402). In this light, Marx's critique of fetishism refers to the development of specifically capitalist forms of individuality associated with particular social relations and forms. To get a sense of what is at stake here, it is worth recalling Marx's oft-repeated claim that in the pre-capitalist world individuals are only "individuals in a particular determination" (Marx, quoted in Sayer 1991: 57). In
other words, for Marx individual identities "are given with their position within a community" (Sayer ibid.). Accordingly, "Society'... does not appear as something which is separable from individuals" (ibid.). Consider, by way of a stark contrast, Marx's assessment in the Grundrisse of what happens to individuality under capitalism:

"ties of personal dependence, distinctions of birth, education etc. (all the personal ties that at least appear as personal relationships), are in fact broken, abolished. The individuals appear to be independent ... appear to collide with one another freely and to exchange with one another in this freedom (Marx 1973: 100)."

The contrast is, of course, greatly over-drawn and caricatured. But Marx is here clearly trying to indicate the way "the individual is now conceivable, as a subject, independently of social contexts" (Sayer op. cit. 58).

What does this have to do with commodity fetishism? And why (if at all) is it significant? For Marx, arguably, commodity fetishism is not just about the exchange of commodities which dissemble. Rather, commodity exchange actively interpellates individuals as individuals of a certain kind. Exchange is thus not between individuals existing a priori. Rather, exchange gives rise to, but is also in turn dependent upon, individuality of a certain kind. It is this kind of individuality Marx is referring to in his comparison of capitalist and pre-capitalist societies above. And it thus follows that individuality is neither ignored, naturalised nor rendered epiphenomenal in his work. It is, on the contrary, vital for the reproduction of capitalist social relations insofar as it is central to the routinisation of commodity transactions.

In Capital I, Marx (1976: 280) expresses the ties between exchange and individuality like this:

"The sphere of circulation or commodity exchange ... was in fact a true Eden of innate human rights. What alone here reign are freedom, equality, property and Bentham. Freedom! For buyer and seller of a commodity ... are determined by their free wills. They contract as free persons born with equal rights"
... Equality! For they relate to one another only as commodity possessors and exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property! For each disposes only of his own.

What Marx is pointing to here is the institution of an epochal modality of individuality. I say epochal, because as capitalist relations and forms have become increasingly global over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries they have entailed the generalisation of a specific subject-position: namely, one which invites people to see themselves as individuals simpliciter in the realm of economic action. This subject-position, which is so familiar as to seem 'normal', cross-cuts age, gender, 'race', nation and culture. In turn, as the above passage indicates, it is characterised by two related features: equality and freedom (Sayer ibid.; Amariglio and Callari op. cit.).

Capitalist exchange as we know (and as I indicated in chapters 1 and 4) is, inter alia, the exchange of equivalents. But this is more than a nominal exercise. As Marx (1973: 174) put it, "The act of exchange ... is both the positing and the confirmation of the subjects as exchangers". More specifically, exchange invites "agents ... to view each other as equal" (Amariglio and Callari ibid. 211). Therefore, although exchange may involve a certain kind of inequality, namely, the differing amounts of goods or money the exchangers bring to the transaction, this inequality does not involve the status of the exchangers themselves. On the contrary, the exchangers are cast as exact equals in any transaction. As Sayer (op. cit. 60) puts it, "Just as the material specificity of use value is effaced in exchange value, so are the differential material circumstances of real individuals ignored in this fictio juris who is the ideal subject of ... [capitalism]". Likewise, exchange interpellates exchangers as seemingly free individuals. As Marx (op. cit. 175) observed, "Neither [exchanger] forcibly takes possession of the property of the other; each disposes of it voluntarily ... With th[at] ... the complete freedom of the individual is posited". Overall, then, subjects as individuals do not for Marx arrive in exchange pre-constituted. Rather, "the exchange of exchange values is the real productive basis of all equality and freedom" (Marx ibid. 176, emphasis added). Of course, this is to exaggerate considerably. Notions of
individual freedom and equality in capitalist societies are built up out a much wider set of practices and discourses than are to be found in exchange alone. But Marx's central point is that commodity exchange is a far from passive process in relation to the individuals who enter into it.

If, in relation to subject-formation, all this appears to hypostatise commodity exchange or to treat it as a realm *sui generis*, then it is only because it is for Marx dissembling. In practice, therefore, we find that the process of exchange forms but one part of Marx's reading of the subject of capital. For he insists on connecting the individuality engendered in exchange to a much wider set of processes and relations: namely those invisible ones that together lend capitalism its systemic and relatively coherent qualities as a way of political-economic life. In effect, this constitutes an attempt to socialise the subject of capital, to see it as a constitutively *social individual*. But what makes this socialisation interesting is this: the very invisibility of the wider field of relations constitutive of the individual mean that *that individual is unable to grasp the nature of its own sociality*. In pre-capitalist societies, sociality was for Marx relatively immediate and face-to-face. Under capitalism it is not that this sociality is any less than it was before. Rather, it is that it takes an increasingly mediate form, namely as the production, distribution, exchange and sale of commodities on a world market. In this sense, then, under capitalism "personal dependency is replaced by universal dependency" (Sayer *op. cit.* 63).

This insight is significant for Marx's notion of the subject. It suggests three paradoxical things. The first is that the supposedly sovereign individual of capitalism is in fact the opposite. In reality it arises out of social relations appearing as thingly relations and is thus intrinsically social and non-sovereign. Secondly though, because the capitalist individual appears to itself and to others as individual, non-social and sovereign, then, equally, wider domain of social relations which are in fact constitutive of it *also appear to be external*. In Marx's (*op. cit.* 17) words, "the various forms of the social nexus confront
the individual as merely a means towards his (sic.) private purposes, as external necessity". 'The social' thus appears extrinsic to the individual under capitalism, when in fact it is intrinsic. As Sayer (ibid. 65) aptly puts it, it therefore follows that "The sovereign individual of capitalism ... emerges ... as a paradoxical creature, whose splendid isolation is the basis for modern society actually becoming ... a reality *sui generis*. Together, and thirdly, both of these points indicate a deep irony: that the apparent free and self-determining individual of exchange is in fact ostensibly *unfree and constrained*. What Marx (op. cit. 100-1) means here is individuals are in fact 'objectively limited' "by relationships which are (apparently) independent of him (sic.) and self-sufficient". With commodity volumes, prices and so on determined by relatively anonymous processes of value production and realisation in an exploitative, dominative and crisis-prone system, individuals are thus far from being free and equal. Indeed, to the extent that most capitalist subjects are sellers of their own labour-power, they are hailed as individuals in the one transaction that should otherwise disconfirm their apparent freedom and equality.

Condensed as all this is, it is, I think, an effective summary of the later Marx's reading of the subject (for more see the references cited above). It is an arresting, if abstract, reading and one which should have a very contemporary resonance for our *fin-de-siècle* neo-liberal and neo-conservative world. Sceptics, of course, might object that the effect is simply to *reduce* subjectivity to economics. This complaint is an understandable one. For the arguments above do "forge ... a dramatically immediate link between capitalist productive activity and human consciousness, ... the economic and the experiential" (Eagleton *op. cit.* 88). But it is also, I think, an objection which is misplaced. For the point of thinking of 'the subject of capital' in terms of commodity fetishism and the hailing of individuals as individuals is to call into question the very distinction between 'economy' and 'subjectivity' that authorises this objection in the first place. In this light, it is worth noting that those theorists who would seek to autonomise the social and the cultural
realms, and undertake investigations of subjectivity on this basis, fall into the opposite trap of denying the relevance of political-economy altogether.

**Problematising 'the subject of capital'**

But this said, there are problems with Marx's notion of the subject of capital and it is not hard to detect them. Most obviously, Marx cerns the subject and sutures it around capitalist relations and forms. At best, the subject of capital is both a capitalist individual *and* a class subject. But, in any case, in both cases the subject exists solely within the domain of capital: other subject-positions are simply not considered. Secondly, the capitalist production of individuality cannot occur solely through exchange and related political-economic processes. As Marx was well aware, the subject of capital is also produced through cultural norms, the law, state practices and so on, all of which would have to be taken into account in any proper theorisation. Thirdly, my chosen appellation, the subject of capital, is entirely appropriate because on Marx's account subjects simply take on an ascribed subject-position. This is clearly unrealistic and, fourthly, speaks to a need to examine more closely the point of interaction between individuals and the forces which address them as such.

Finally, and perhaps most troubling of all, Marx's theorisation of the subject of capital expresses what Smith (*op. cit.* 11) aptly calls the "problematic of a 'double reality'". Let me quote Smith further to tease out his meaning here:

... Marx does two things. First, he valorises the real ... conditions of existence, ... which is fundamental to his analyses of capitalism. This real is the lived real ... But, second, Marx also proposes another and more "truthful" real - that which lies beneath the forms and appearances of the first real' in other words, it is actually hidden in the first real ... (*ibid.* 10-11).

What Smith is indicating here, in the context of the present discussion, is that ultimately the subject of capital is a subject of 'false consciousness'. Marx never used this term, of course, but it correctly summarises his view - for which there is overwhelming textual
evidence - that one reality - that of surface appearances and forms - is less truthful and less 'real' than the processes behind them. On logical, not to mention ontological, grounds this hierarchical and doubled notion of truth and reality is clearly unsustainable. It also generates two further implications. One is that there is an identity or subject-position 'underlying' this false consciousness - that associated with class, of course - which is somehow more real and more important. The second, is that individuality emerges as a real, but purely negative and disabling mode of subjective being: it merely conceals political-economic truths.

I made a good deal of this rather dim view of 'surface appearances' in chapter 2, and in chapter 4 I sought a certain revalorisation of these appearances in my re-reading of Marx and of capitalism's core. Yet what is so striking about Marx's account of the capitalist individual is that it actually comes very close to such a revalorisation itself. For as I have presented it, the subject of capital is not merely one of capitalism's Erscheinungsformen. Rather, it is a materially efficacious moment in the processes of capital reproduction and as much a cause as an effect of those processes. In this sense, the above understanding of the subject of capital can, with some emendation, be seen to complement very directly the arguments of chapter 4. For it is a form of subjectivity which, through both its role in exchange and its perception of 'society' as external to it, actively sustains capitalism as a global, exploitative and dominative system.

With all this in mind I can now turn, at last, to Harvey's theorisation of the subject. As we shall see, Harvey inherits many of the problems I have pointed to. However, he also achieves two important things. First, he points to several interesting solutions to these problems, solutions which evade a modern/traditional tendency to cern the subject and see it as the false subject of a hierarchised double-reality. Second, it shows that the subject of capital is, intrinsically, a geographical subject. Let me explain.

IV. Harvey, consciousness and the urban experience
Capitalism these last two hundred years has produced ... not only a "second nature" of built environments ... but also a ... [new] human nature, endowed with a very specific sense of time, space and money ...

David Harvey (1985a: 35)

It is a little noted fact that Harvey's wide-ranging work impinges on the question of subjectivity. This is most obvious his second Study in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanisation, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (1985a) - although clearly not obvious enough, since this study, though oft-cited, is generally not regarded as a study of subject-formation (this, despite the term 'consciousness' in the volume's title). The essays which comprise the book can be roughly divided between those which are ostensibly theoretical and those which are ostensibly empirical, the latter including the long essay on 'Paris, 1850-70'. It is the theoretical essays which will preoccupy me here, particularly 'Money, time space and the city' and 'The urbanisation of consciousness'.

*Money, time, space and the city*

Despite this essay's title, its concerns lie less with the city and more with the other three topics named. Harvey's (1985a: 1) aim is to lay bare "the forces that frame the ... urban experience under capitalism". In this regard, as we shall now see, his preoccupation with money, time and space builds in interesting - and geographical - ways on Marx's account of the subject of capital.

Harvey begins by rehearsing Marx's narrative of the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist modes of sociality: "Bonds of personal dependency are thereby broken and replaced by 'objective dependency relations' between individuals who relate to each other through market prices and money and commodity transactions" (*ibid.* 3) Like Marx, Harvey regards this capitalist individual as an historically specific construction. Like Marx too, he regards it as materially efficacious, rather than effanescent. And, again like Marx, he observes the paradox that this individual - despite its "liberty freedom and equality backed by laws of private property, rights to appropriation, and freedom of contract" (*ibid.*
4) - is in fact in a state of 'objective bondage' due to "power[s seemingly] external to and independent of [it] ..." (Marx, quoted in Harvey *ibid.* 3).

But this is where Harvey begins to extend Marx's account. For he places great emphasis on one of these seemingly external powers: money. This emphasis is well placed and, indeed, has characterised most of Harvey's work as a Marxist. Money, of course, is the 'universal' representation of abstract labour as socially necessary labour time. As such, it is different from the common crowd of commodities. And for Harvey this difference is what makes money so special and so consequential. On the one hand, money "becomes the real community" (Marx *ibid.* 2) because, uniquely, it represents the entire world of social labour in people's pockets: "The world market ultimately defines the 'community' of exchange interactions, and the money in our pocket represents our objective bond to that community ..." (Harvey *ibid.* 11). But, on the other hand, because it does not appear to be what it really is, it takes on a seemingly autonomous power as something separate from and external to those who must perforce use it. As such, it is for Harvey (*ibid.* 3) a "concrete abstraction" with real power in relation to subject-formation and social practices. That power is two-fold. First, money calls forth a certain kind of individualism because it is both the medium of exchange and also a private, rather than public, possession. Second, at the same time, it reinforces this individualism because it is the one commodity which confers on its owners the same capacity to buy other goods and services. In other words, its indifference to inter-personal differences allows it to summon exchangers as ostensibly free and equal persons.

Money, then, has for Harvey a real materiality - because of its duplicity - in engendering individualism. But matters do not end here. On the contrary, because of money's inter-connections with other moments of the capitalist social process, it is implicated in more than just the interpellation of subjects as individuals. This is where Harvey turns his attention to time and space. As I argued in chapter 4, modern clock time is an historical invention and one closely associated with the rise of capitalism. Harvey sees
things this way too, and draws upon the seminal works of Le Goff and E. P. Thompson to argue as much. His point is that as capitalism has expanded there has been a "tightening of the chronological net", one associated with "achieving the necessary coordinations for profitable production and exchange over space" (ibid. 9). The connection with money is vital here, of course, because money is nothing other than the representation of socially necessary labour time. Money is thus central, historically and today, in establishing clock time as a real force in society, one which is most pressingly felt by workers in the length of the working day and its knock-on effects in the realms of family and leisure time etc. This is why Harvey regards time, like money, as also a concrete abstraction. The corollary conclusion is that individuals are powerfully framed by a dimension, time, whose nature and functioning seems external to them, but which is in reality an externalised form of their own labours to the extent that time is related to money. As with money, this has double-edged consequences. On the one side, money can be used to command time and so enhance individual freedom. Indeed, this is enhancement is so significant that, as Harvey rightly observes, the struggle over time and its apportionment, has been a central point of struggle by capitalist individuals. But on the other side, those who command a lot of money - namely, those in positions of ownership and power - can use time against others, particularly workers, making it a form of social power as much as the money behind it.

Likewise, Harvey argues, money is intimately tied to space. The connections here are perhaps at first sight less clear. As Lefebvre (1991) has argued, the hegemonic 'illusion of transparency' is that space is an obvious, neutral and passive dimension. By contrast, Harvey argues that the production of space is immensely important, not just for the logic of capital reproduction, but for the consolidation of capitalist forms of individuality too. If this seems an odd connection to make, then Harvey reminds us that, historically, the rise of the money-form of value has been tied to the conquest and creative destruction of space, replete with all the apparatuses of surveying, cadastral mapping and so on. This has two implications for understanding the subject of capital. On the one side, it means that this
seemingly sovereign subject in fact arises as capitalism expands and absolute places become relative spaces within a world economy. The subject of capital is thus a geographical subject to the extent that its seeming monadism is founded on a money-form which represents distant strangers and distant places. But more emphatically, this subject is geographical because it necessarily exists within spaces which are increasingly commodified. In short, space becomes constructed accorded to the logic of profit and is valued in money (and thus labour value) terms. What this means, once again, is that space - though it is, as a commodity, a displaced form of the labour of myriad individuals - confronts those individuals as a force seemingly external to them. As with time, this seeming externality is consequential. Because it is a commodity, space can be purchased by individuals and so allow them, in effect, to command space for their own purposes. In turn, this command can be translated into spatial practices in which subjects can assert their individuality and freedom. But at the same time, space can be used against individuals as a form of social power, be it in Haussman's Paris, Moses' New York or the contemporary gentrification of run-down inner city areas. In both cases, space exists a real and stubbornly material force - again, as a concrete abstraction. And it is exactly this materiality - arising our of value flows - that for Harvey makes the appropriation of space such a weapon for - or against - the subject of capital.

In sum, then, 'Money, time, space and the city', extends Marx's account of the subject of capital in two respects. First, it more strongly accents the power of money in engendering and sustaining individuality. Second, by linking money to socially constructed time and space it emphasises the latter's centrality to the expression and inhibition of that individuality. In each case, money, time and space serve to obscure the processes grounding individuality. As importantly, this is because each of them exists as social abstractions "the tight norms defined by ... [which] are now so deeply entrenched that they appear almost as facts of nature" (ibid. 24). And herein, Harvey argues, lies a central dilemma for any attempt to subvert the norms which sustain the subject of capital: for so
established are money, time and space in their capitalist forms that any attempt to step outside them is either doomed to failure or else must itself use money, time and space to define an alternative form of subjectivity and sociality.

The urbanisation of consciousness

There is more to 'Money, time, space and the city' than this. But I now want to consider 'The urbanisation of consciousness' because it deals with these other issues at greater length. As its title suggests, Harvey's argument is that the systemic tendency for capital to urbanise - the topic of *The Urbanisation of Capital* (1985b) - has been complimented by the tendency for consciousness to be urbanised too. This is an arresting claim. Harvey gives it an even sharper edge by suggesting that this urbanised consciousness both arises from, and is vital to, the urbanisation of capital: the relation between the two is non-arbitrary and non-accidental. If, therefore, twentieth century capitalism has in part survived through the urbanisation of capital, then the urbanisation of consciousness must also be critical to this survival. This is not, of course, to suggest that 'the urban' can be defined in any absolute sense (Saunders 1981), which is why Harvey prefers to see it as a process rather than a thing. But it is a recognition, one shared by Simmel, Wirth, Sennett and other urban theorists, that in the (late) twentieth century "the urban [is] the primary level at which individuals now experience, live out, and react to the totality of social transformations and structures in the world around them" (Harvey 1985a: 251). So far so good, then. But it may be wondered by Harvey chooses the term 'consciousness' to summarise this experience. In the Marxist lexicon the term is, of course, a loaded one. Moreover, in the context of the present discussion it raises definitional questions over its similarities with and differences from the terminology of 'the subject', 'subject-positions' etc. that I have invoked. It is seemingly unfortunate, therefore, that nowhere does Harvey define consciousness, reflecting the speculative nature of the essay and, indeed, of *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* as a whole. However, I use the qualifier
'seeming' with good reason: for while Harvey's definitional lacuna does raise some problems that I will return to, I think it merely reflects his desire to use the term consciousness as a very general signifier for the modes by and through which individuals experience themselves, others and the world. As such, I do not think Harvey's choice of the term reflects any especial desire on his part to distinguish it from similar terms like subjectivity.

What, then, constitutes an urbanised consciousness? And in what ways is that consciousness central to the continued urbanisation of capital? Harvey argues that an urbanised consciousness arises out of five, what he calls "primary loci of consciousness formation" (ibid. 252). And he insists, at the same time, that each interrelates with all the others. The first locus in money, and here Harvey summarises his arguments about individualism, time and space from 'Money, time, space and the city'. But, now extending the earlier essay, Harvey makes more reference to a second locus: that associated with class consciousness in the earning of money. Surprisingly, he says little about how class consciousness arises or in what, exactly, it consists. Instead, he seems to assume it as more or less self-evident. Nonetheless, his point is that the earning of an income - and struggles over that income and over other issues with employers - is an important force in enabling many working individuals to see themselves as specifically (working) class individuals.

This point is relatively unobjectionable. But it is complicated, thirdly, by "the consciousness of community". Like class, community is an ambiguous and contentious term. Harvey uses it loosely to designate contiguous conglomerations of people living in "definite places", social and residential, in contrast to the 'community' defined by money which is a community "without propinquity in the broadest sense" (ibid. 254). The sense of community generated in the former case is, Harvey notes, immensely powerful and has long been the mobilising force for urban social movements in the twentieth century keen to defend or preserve (or even expand) their place in the city. Equally powerful, fourthly, has been the family, the domain of intimacy and affectivity and the central site of social and
individual reproduction. The family, as Harvey is well aware, pre-dates capitalism but it has also, as he notes, been shaped by it. As such, its shifting meanings and significance can offer a space of relative autonomy in which alternative modes of subjective being can flourish. Finally, Harvey argues, one must consider "the state as a locus of consciousness formation" (ibid. 259). This may seem an odd claim at first sight, since the state (local and national) seemingly stands apart from civil society and thus appears far removed from the question of the subject. But Harvey's point is that in its various roles in sustaining both regimes of accumulation and their attendant modes of social regulation, the state actively interpellates subjects as any and all of individuals, class members, community members and family members. At any one time, one or several of these aspects of identity may be emphasised by the state, and this in turn can generate contradictions within and between individuals seeking to reconcile the several identities they are called upon to simultaneously adopt.

In sum, then, "Individuals draw their sense of identity and shape their consciousness out of the material bases given by the individualism of money, the class relations of capital, the limited coherence of community, the contested legitimacy of the state and the protected but vulnerable domain of family life" (ibid. 261-2). In effect, by extending the arguments of 'Money, time, space and the city' what Harvey is putting forward here is a theory of the different subject-positions subjects are called upon to occupy within capitalism and capitalist urbanism. As I have already noted, Harvey does not resort to such terminology himself. But in some ways this is unfortunate, because it might make two things about his account of the subject much clearer. The first is that for him, clearly, subjects are socially constructed, but they are socially constructed within several inter-related processes. And the second thing is that for him, equally clearly, the subject is far from being a centred and homogenous entity: rather, it struggles to colligate often contradictory subject-positions.
So what has all this do with the urbanisation of capital? Harvey provides two responses. One is that some of these modes of consciousness - or subject-positions - arise directly out of that urbanisation, namely the individualism of the money-form and class consciousness. But his second response is that together the various aspects of urbanised consciousness actively sustain that urbanisation. This has a 'positive' and a 'negative' side. We have already seen how individualism of exchange and money, in tandem with time and space, is pivotal in ensuring capital reproduction. But community consciousness is important too, since it can serve to secure favourable conditions for profit realisation on residential and other urban developments. In this regard, Harvey emphasises 'consumption communities' which have grown up in many modern 'managerial' and 'entrepreneurial' cities (Harvey 1989d) around the common acquisition, use and defence of residential pockets suited to their self-perceived status and difference from other communities in the city. Likewise, the family can also serve to bolster capitalist urbanisation. It can complement community consciousness as a means of warding off outside 'others' and defending social spaces of the city. As a unit based on individuals, it can also use the money at its disposal to command time and space and so, again, contribute to capital reproduction. Finally, and most obviously, the state, though hardly a lackey for capitalists, has traditionally regulated social life in ways suited to capital accumulation. In everything from the way it defines the 'public' interest to its role in materially assisting communities and families, the state actively assists the urbanisation of capital and capital accumulation.

But Harvey also sees a much darker, negative side to all this. Indicative here is a theme which runs through 'The urbanisation of consciousness' (and 'Money, time, space and city' too): the theme of confusions of consciousness. For Harvey, although the various forms of consciousness are quite real, they are also problematic. As he says, "The confusion of urban social and political movements under capitalism derives from the ways in which individuals internalise diverse conceptions and act upon them in a milieu that demands mixed conceptions rather than giving anyone a clear-cut identity" (ibid. 262). The
implication here is that both 'mixed conceptions' and the lack of a 'clear-cut identity' are cognitive and political barriers. Such a judgement arises, of course, out of Harvey's desire to disclose the otherwise hidden political-economic forces which produce certain forms of subjectivity and which those forms in turn sustain. So it is that Harvey laments the fragmentation arising from the multiplicity of subject-positions into which subjects are called. Thus, for example, the class consciousness of being a worker can contradict the often jealously guarded individualisms arising from money, exchange etc. Likewise, community identities and family identities can complement one another in ways that displace the assumption of class solidarities in certain situations. And it is because of these and other contradictions that the confusions of consciousness Harvey identifies for him undermine a common cause against the urbanisation of both capital and consciousness.

Questions and counter-questions

The above summary has, of course, to some extent over-simplified (and indeed generously interpreted) Harvey's theorisation of the urbanised subject of capital. But it is accurate enough to suggest some of the strengths of that theorisation. Four things stand out as particularly suggestive. First, and most obvious, is that Harvey is among the very few contemporary Marxists in geography and beyond to insist that ostensibly 'economic' forms, like money, are in fact directly related to subject-formation. The mere identification of a 'subject of capital' is thus in itself, arguably, important. Second, his attempt to extend Marx's reading of this subject - by showing how it is a geographical subject - is also immensely suggestive and points to the potential for further historical-geographical materialist research into subjectivity. Together, these two points mean that historical-geographical materialism may have something fundamental and distinctive to add to current geographical attempts to 'map the subject'.

This assertion, though, depends upon two further points which need to be dealt with at some length. The first is this: Harvey's account will only be relevant to wider critical
debates on the subject if it takes the subject of capital seriously. This may seem an odd thing to say since, from everything I have said so far, it seems quite obvious that it does take that subject seriously. But in fact, I would argue that Harvey's account embodies an unresolved ambivalence over the status of the subject of capital. And it is here that I can make good on my earlier claim that he inherits some of the problems of Marx's view of the subject. And it is here too that I can accent the tension between the modern/traditional elements of Harvey's account and the more interesting and productive non-modern/traditional elements which I now want to highlight.

The following statement, from the introductory section of 'The urbanisation of consciousness' provides a point of entry: "With a real material basis in daily urban life, the modes of consciousness [discussed in the essay] cannot be dismissed as false, although I shall insist that they are necessarily fetishistic" (Harvey op. cit. 251). What we see here is a contradictory double argument. On the one side, we have an insistence that the subject of capital is a real and forceful presence in society, one engendered by material social processes and one which is not, therefore, in any sense a subject of 'false consciousness'. To my mind, this insistence is entirely appropriate, indeed essential. In theoretical terms, it strongly supports the argument I have tried to make throughout the previous chapters that 'surface appearances', and those capitalist processes and forms beyond production narrowly understood (and exploitation), are every bit as material and consequential as the so-called 'essences' behind them. Indeed, Harvey's emphasis on money, time and space as all 'concrete abstractions' in relation to subject-formation (rather than some putative productive 'base') is a powerful testament to this, and suggestive of a non-reductive political-economy in which untenable ontological hierarchies and separations are abjured.

And yet, this said, Harvey's equal insistence that the processes out of which the subject of capital arises are 'fetishistic' threatens to undermine these points. I say this because it suggests a certain in-adequacy and in-correctness that the subject must get beyond in its own self-understanding. This is most obvious in Harvey's pursuit of the
'confusions of consciousness' theme. The implication is that there is i) an un- or less-confused consciousness to be had and therefore ii) that certain existing subject-positions are considered only as hindrances to self-clarity. Not surprisingly - and despite his failure to discuss the issue in any real detail - the one subject-position Harvey seems to consider as productive of clarity of consciousness is that associated with class. As he puts it, he sees his arguments as helping to "chart a path through the multilayered fetishisms that attach to the daily experience of urban living ... that can confront the ... underlying class relations of the capitalist mode of production ..." (ibid. 274). It is almost as if the other subject-positions Harvey refers to - individualism, community identity and so on - are mere obstructions to the realisation of a class consciousness.

Here, then, we see a repeat of the 'double reality' problematic to which I objected in Marx. Aside from the untenable ontological hierarchy this installs, it also ultimately involves Harvey in a cerning of the subject around a supposedly privileged identity or subject-position. In turn, this has consequences for our understanding of the limits and power of theory in his account of the subject. For it casts the theorist (Harvey) and theory in the role of privileged illuminator, in which the 'true real' is shown to animate the 'less real real'. As Amariglio and Callari (op. cit. 196) put it, here "the self-identification of ... individuals derives from a structurally produced inability of these agents to recognise their 'true' social nature", meaning that the 'vision' theory imparts is optically pure, correct and exhaustive. Thus, what is in fact an illicit cerning of the subject is proposed as licit because it is supposedly founded on a deep insight into the ways things actually are.

Of course, it is not my aim to deny the disclosive powers of theory. Nor am I seeking to deny that the subjectivity peculiar to capitalist formations does not arise out of a largely hidden field of global, systemic relations involving surplus value extraction and exploitation. On the contrary. But I do think it is possible to hold on to both of these things without either cerning the subject or failing to dis-cern the theory which elucidates that subject. In this light, what it interesting is that Harvey's theorisation is arguably a proto-
typical attempt to both dis-cern the subject and dis-cern theory - this despite the objections I have raised above. Let me explain.

It seems to me that the double reality problematic to which I have referred contains a valuable kernel of truth: that the subject is caught within several equally efficacious realities simultaneously. Where Harvey errs is in his attempt to vertically separate those associated with class and individualism and to ontologically posit the former as more important than the latter. And yet his own account actually gives no substantive grounds for such a vertical separation and ontological hierarchisation other than by assertion. It is, I think, perfectly possible to theoretically disclose the invisible relations and the concrete abstractions which engender individualism without arguing that the latter is somehow less important or less truthful than the former.

At the same time, I can here draw upon the argument I made about class and labour in chapter four. For it would be possible to accept the above argument, but still hold to a view that 'class' exists as a coherent identity into which subjects are called at the same time (and with the same importance) as those of individualism, community etc. As I have argued, I think such a modern/traditional view of class is problematic. However, as I also argued, it is possible to see class as about heterogeneity-in-similarity without abandoning the core categories of Marx's political-economy. What this means, in relation to Harvey's account of the subject of capital, is that theory shows that subject to be founded upon and thus related to a set of global and non-perceivable processes in which class exploitation and domination is central - but without positing class as a privileged, singular, unified identity which can/should be assumed.

With these points in mind, it seems to me that Harvey's meditations on consciousness can be read, not as an attempt to cern the subject around special and pre-eminent identity, but as an attempt to dis-cern the subject: for subjects are equally the subjects of class, individualism, community, family, the state and so on. This has significant consequences for understanding the cognitive 'powers' of Harvey's theory. For it
is, paradoxically perhaps, not the case that Harvey seeks to actively theorise those subject-positions other than class and individualism. Instead, these other positions are invoked and commented upon in rather general ways, whereas only class and individualism arise directly out of his political-economic theory of capitalism. What this means, then, is that his theory extends to actually explaining - rather than merely acknowledging - only some of the subject-positions he mentions. In effect, this can arguably be seen as an implicit recognition of the limits to theory insofar as the complex colligation of positions assumed by the subject necessarily escape Harvey's account. I say 'necessarily' because, as I argued earlier in this chapter, we should recall that theories of the subject are themselves constructed by subjects. If, then, the multifariousness and non-homogeneousness of interpellations means that the subject is never totally self-possessed and cogniscent, why should we expect theory to be?

This brings me, finally, to the fourth feature of Harvey's account of the subject which is, I think, productive and useful. It concerns the question of agency. If I have suggested that the relevance of Harvey's theorisation to wider debates on the subject depends upon it taking the subject of capital seriously, then it is also dependent upon providing some sense of the capacity of subjects to be more than mere dupes. After all, a critical theory of the subject cannot be critical if subjects are so caught within social structures, grids of power-knowledge etc. that they are socially determined. Here again, the tension between Harvey's modern/traditional and his non-modern/traditional predilections is interesting. On the one hand, if one argues that Harvey sees non-class subject-positions as functioning only to confuse consciousness and that he sees those positions as thus less real than class, then this, ironically, seems to rob him of a theory of agency. I say this for two reasons. One is because he conveys little sense that class is anything other than an ascribed subject-position (as, indeed, is individuality). The second is that the activating dynamic for agency is thus obscure. It is almost as if the subject, when it can 'see' its 'real' class position, will automatically resist and contest its own interpellation and the processes
associated with it. But as Stuart Hall (1984: 67) puts it, "This is an account of [agency] ... founded on the rather surprising model of St. Paul on the Damascus road".

Fortunately, though, Harvey's account is also suggestive of an alternative account of agency. I cannot go into great detail here since, as the work of Giddens, Bourdieu and others shows very well, the question of agency is a complex one with many dimensions to it. Let me, then, simply signal how Harvey's understanding of the subject points towards a potentially useful notion of social agency. This notion spins off Harvey's nascent attempts to dis-cern the subject, to which I have already referred. It also ties in with some of the more recent work on the subject - by Smith, Oliver, Laclau and others - of which I made so much earlier on. Simply put, if one searches both 'Money, time, space and the city' and 'The urbanisation of consciousness' for moments when Harvey discusses the question of resistance to ascribed subject-positions, one finds a consistent (though not exclusive) strand of argumentation. To take two indicative examples: 'active community building can take place in ways deeply antagonistic to the individualism of money'; 'class-bound ... movements against the power of capital hesitate or fail if they appear to threaten real and cherished ... liberties given by the possession of money ..." (Harvey 1985a: 257, 254). These and other statements arguably describe something far more profound than simple contradictions between subject-positions, to which I referred earlier. For what they point to is the fact that resistance arises as a result of the tensions within and between these subject-positions. Thus, for subjects to take action against their interpellation as class subjects does not simply depend upon them coming to see their domination and exploitation per se. Rather, it depends upon them coming to see those things in light of other subject-positions which hail them as un-dominated and un-exploited, such as individualism with its apparent freedom, liberty and equality. Agency and resistance are thus not synonymous with one or other social group, or even one or other subject-position. Rather, both become locations (metaphorically speaking) within the processes of subject-formation arising from the gaps and slippages between interpellations.

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This notion of agency and resistance, which is largely implicit but nonetheless real in Harvey's work, is a useful one. It avoids the antinomies of determinism and voluntarism. It shows the subject still to be socially constituted such that agency arises within the social process. But it neither reduces agency to a *sui generis* product of one or other subject-position alone, and nor does it posit the agent as a centred plenitude. In short, it is suggestive of a non-reductive notion of agency which cannot be captured by any one theoretical perspective alone - Harvey's included.

V. Conclusion: the subject of *Capital*

'Every ending is but a beginning'.

Anon.

If nothing else, I hope this chapter has signalled the potential for - and potential importance of - an historical-geographical materialist inquiry into the subject. Though it seems unlikely that the work of Harvey should impinge upon the question of subjectivity, I hope I have shown that this is only so if one holds to very restrictive and conventional notion of what geographical political economy is all about. Nonetheless, it is perhaps fitting that I should conclude my reappraisal of the explanatory-diagnostic moment of historical-geographical materialism with an examination of the subject: for as I have repeatedly acknowledged, it is among the least rigorously theorised and most speculative topics of historical-geographical materialist inquiry. This is to say that a great deal remains to be done if a satisfactory theorisation of the subject of capital is to be produced. And this applies even if my reinterpretation of Harvey's investigations of consciousness holds good. For while that reinterpretation may have displaced some of the unhelpful modern/traditional thematics animating Harvey's account, it still leaves several issues unresolved.

One of these is how subjects actually deal, on the personal level, with the forces constituting them and which they resist. Clearly, more needs to be done here on psychological motivations (Wolfenstein 1993), and particularly on the formative effects of money (Furnham and Argyle 1998). Secondly, more attention clearly needs to be given to
the institutions supporting capitalist individualism, like the law and education. Thirdly, more attention should also be given to how that individualism articulates in practice with other modalities of individuality (Pateman 1988). Finally, there is also a pressing need to actively bring together theorisations of other subject-positions to show how they articulate with those identified by Harvey. This is a large agenda, of course. But it does not obviate the necessity to grapple with the subjectivities that are currently arising from and reinforcing the hegemonic marketisation of virtually all arenas of social life in the West and beyond. Interrogating 'the subjectivity of political-economy' - to paraphrase David Levine (1998) - therefore has to be central to any radical geographic, and any wider Leftist, examination of the subject today. If nothing else, Harvey's urbanised subject of capital surely provides us with fruitful beginnings for such a critical interrogation.

NOTES

11 use the term 'overtly Marxist' advisedly, since several post-Marxist and Marxisant authors in geography have ventured into questions of subjectivity, such as Linda McDowell.

2 An honourable exception here is the journal *Economy and Society* which has been a forum for innovative essays and interventions which cross the divides between 'economics' and 'sociology' and 'cultural studies' to suggest the mutual imbrications of economy, society and culture in neo-liberal and neo-conservative agendas.

3 And it is symptomatic of the problems here that Smith (1988: xxxiii-xxxv) devotes a separate section of his book *Dis-cerning the Subject* to the problem of terminology.

4 Although as we shall see below, it is multiplication which has been picked up on more than disaggregation.

5 Derek Gregory (1991) is one of the few exceptions proving this rule, and, outside geography, Amariglio and Callari (1993) are also among the very few to acknowledge Harvey's theory of the subject. I should note here that, aside from the essays in *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, Harvey has also developed a second take on the subject. This is to be found in *The Condition of Postmodernity* where he theorises a condition of 'time-space compression'. This has inspired some to dig further into the mechanisms of this compression and its effects on the subject (e.g. Bridge 1997). However, I choose not to consider this second theory of subjectivity here because it rests on crude, sweeping and manifestly under-specified causal linkages (Deutsche 1991). Indeed, Harvey has elsewhere described *The Condition* as "an entertainment" and this is indicative of the speculative nature of many of the volume's arguments.

6 For more on Marx's various comments on money over the course of his later work see Dodd (1994: ch. 1).
CRITIQUE, NORM AND UTOPIA

A revolutionary theory offers real choices for future moments in the social process by identifying inmanent choices in an existing situation. [It] ... consequently holds out the prospect for creating truth rather than [merely] finding it.

David Harvey (1973: 151)

... the recent period has been dismal with respect to political action.

David Harvey (1989b: 16)
INTRODUCTION

To put it more soberly, the point is that his science asks to be considered as having not merely the usual descriptive and explanatory relationship to its object, but a practical significance or bearing for it also.

Joseph McCarney (1990: ix)

In the first chapter I suggested that any critical theory embodies two moments. In the last two Parts I have sought to reinterpret the explanatory-diagnostic - or 'positive' - side of historical-geographical materialist inquiry. In the short chapter which comprises this Part (and concludes this thesis) I want to turn to the important question of its anticipatory-utopian - or normative - side. In some senses this is a re-turn, of course, since in chapter 2 I sought to disclose and criticise some normative aspects of The Limits to Capital when read as a modern/traditional form of meta-theory. Also, along the way I have referred at points to the the 'politics' issuing from my arguments. I say the normative question is 'important' for obvious reasons. As a geographical critique of political-economy (rather than a critical political-economy), at some level historical-geographical materialism clearly presupposes the possibility of a better way of economic and social life than that found under capitalism. So it is that twenty five years after David Harvey's Social Justice so inspirationally and exuberantly advocated a 'revolutionary theory' designed to change, rather than merely describe, the world, normative questions today remain as important for historical-geographical materialism as they do for the wider geographical Left.

Yet a consideration of this normative dimension immediately throws up some serious obstacles. The first is the sheer range and complexity of normative questions. To probe the normative is to probe a theoretical and practical field embodying multiple issues of weight and moment. Following Fay's (1987) seminal exploration of critical social science, we can identify at least four relatively distinct concerns here. The first relates to the senses in which the explanatory-diagnostic moment of any critical theory is itself critical. It is a false dichotomy to separate the two moments of critical theory. Accordingly, the question of what Bhaskar (1986) calls 'explanatory critique' - that is, explanation which
is, _inter alia_, critical of that explained - is an important one. This was, for the most part, the subject of my prefatory normative discussion in chapter 2. The second concern relates to the sense in which critical theory, as _theory_, can have practical and political effects in changing the world it critiques. What is its audience and how does it influence them? The third aspect of normativity concerns positive suggestions for the specific shape of an alternative social order. Whether implicitly or explicitly, "without considering normative questions of what ought to be the case we can hardly define what constitutes a problem ... [or suggest a] desirable and feasible alternative" (Sayer 1995: 238). And the final aspect relates to the development of specific practical proposals for moving from the present state of affairs to that alternative state.

If the normative thus seems to be a field of almost bewildering complexity, we encounter a second problem when seeking to consider it in specific relation to historical-geographical materialism as a critical research programme. On the one hand, this programme has operated in various ways to both expose illusory ideas about capitalism and its geographies, as well as explaining how those capitalist geographies 'really' come into being and operate. This would lead one to suppose that it has explicitly considered normative questions in some or all of the ways listed above. However, this has not been the case. Surprisingly, perhaps, for a corpus which professes to be 'critical', historical-geographical materialism has long been characterised by a glaring asymmetry between its explanatory-diagnostic and its anticipatory-utopian insights. Yet the asymmetry is rendered more understandable when one recalls that Marx himself was notoriously wary of entering into normative debates, arguing that they smacked too much of 'blueprints' when what social transformation required was a sober and sensitive pragmatism. Nonetheless, this historical-geographical materialist silence on normative questions has extended even to a failure to articulate clearly what are arguably the most basic normative questions of all (Fay's first two): namely, the ways in which explanations of capitalism are inherently critical of it and the 'practical' effects of critical theoretical disquisitions on capitalism and
its geographies. This is perhaps most obvious in Harvey's oeuvre, which, given its size and importance, and given his early preoccupation with questions of social justice, is perhaps the last place one would expect to find such a silence. Yet after Social Justice and the City one looks in vain through key texts like The Limits to Capital (as we saw), The Urbanisation of Capital, Consciousness and the Urban Experience and the Condition of Postmodernity for more than cursory asides about what makes them 'critical' interventions; it is left largely implicit.¹

To be fair, Harvey, Smith, Swyngedouw and Merrifield are not alone in this: it is a general problem which has beset the Left within geography and without.² As Sayer (ibid.) puts it, "The positive (descriptive and explanatory) and the normative (critical and evaluative) sides of critical social science are therefore out of balance; while the positive side is endlessly debated, the normative side remains implicit and imbalanced". As well as being an embarrassment for the Left, this neglect of normative questions has been immensely consequential. I say this because over the last two decades particularly, the theoretical and political space of the normative has been colonised with remarkable success by neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. The former has been particularly strong here, and it is telling that most of the key figures in contemporary academic debates on the 'good life' - like Gray, Nozick and Rawls - are not (or not considered to be) figures of the Left. From a Marxist viewpoint, even when figures on the Left have made important and influential contributions - as in the case of Alec Nove and the debate over so-called 'market socialism' - these contributions have often been seen to be insufficiently radical and far too frequently reformist (Callinicos 1991).

However, there are, as always, exceptions to the rule. While critical human geography has shared with the wider Left a neglect of the normative, in recent years this has started to change (Sayer and Storper 1997; D M Smith 1994, 1997; Whatmore 1997). Ironically, as if inspired by the Marxist geographies they are largely critical of and which have conspicuously refrained from the kind of anticipatory-utopian discussions one would
otherwise expect them to enter into, this tentative consideration of normative issues is associated with many of the new dissident geographies (if I can so call them), particularly those associated with feminism and, more recently, gay and lesbian studies and green theory. This has been an important development in its own right, but also for historical-geographical materialism and other modalities of Marxist geography: for, as we shall see in chapter 9, in recent years it has encouraged (forced?) Harvey and his fellow-travellers to consider normative questions with an explicitness not found since Harvey's first writings as a Marxist a quarter century ago.

Whether or not one is sympathetic to historical-geographical materialist ideas, for Leftist geographers Harvey et al.'s normative (re)turn must surely be seen as a welcome and positive development. Only the most purblind critic would deny that our current conjuncture demands some kind of considered Marxian case (be it in 'modern' or 'postmodern' Marxist forms) which can expose its ills and pinpoint positive possibilities for real change. That this is so has perhaps been most graphically illustrated in the former Eastern bloc. For the Right, of course, the 'velvet revolutions' of 1989 were a vindication of the superiority of capitalism and betokened a wave of 'market triumphalism'. They were also taken to signal the final exhaustion of Marxism in all its forms. Fredric Jameson was quick to point out the rather obvious error of such a judgement. "It does not make much sense", Jameson (1991: 255) succinctly put it, "to talk about the bankruptcy of Marxism, when Marxism is very precisely the science and the study of just that capitalism whose global triumph is affirmed in talk of Marxism's demise". 'Global triumph' is indeed an apt description here, since the dismantling of the communist experiment opened up among the last great remaining tracts of territory not subject to capitalist forms of political-economic organisation. The intervening years have revealed the painful way in which the former USSR and its east European neighbours have coped with their almost overnight transition into market economies. For Marxists - and indeed for others with critical sensibilities - this must surely stand as a sobering reminder of the endemic violence capitalism has long
visited on the rest of the world economy. It would be nice indeed, in such a situation, to be able to do more than merely condemn capitalism and offer, as well, a positive vision for political-economic change. But here the 'revolutions' reveal the distinct lack of creative normative thinking by Marxists as much as they reveal the desperate need for such thinking. As Habermas (1991b: 27) observed in a stunning indictment of these otherwise celebrated 'events' and a prescient foresight of the free market policies which were to follow, the revolutions were largely devoid of "ideas that are either innovative or oriented to the future".

For historical-geographical materialists to develop a fully articulated normative critique of capitalism will be the most difficult of endeavours and, as we shall see, they have only just begun to make a start. Aside from Sayer's (1995) *Radical Political Economy* virtually no Marxist or Marxisant thinkers in geography have even begun to grapple with the whole range of normative issues identified by Fay. In addition, human geographers have a very mixed record of reaching out from the academy to influence other actors and agencies in the making and remaking of their human geographies. As Hepple (1988) notes, this applies with particular force to critical human geographers who, he argues, are typically unaccustomed to the kinds of engagements routinely achieved by less radical colleagues in fields like GIS and 'applied geography'. Finally, even if its normative sensibilities were highly developed, historical-geographical materialism would only form one part of a wider classical Marxist project to transform capitalism. For these reasons (and I could offer others too) it seems to me important to put in place some of the considerations needed to walk before one thinks about running. Given the nascent form of normative debate in critical human geography in general and historical-geographical materialism in particular, the chapter which follows will not, therefore, deal with grandiose questions of either political strategy or the form a post-capitalist order should or might take. Instead, I propose to take a preliminary stab at Fay's first two dimensions of normative concern in relation to historical-geographical inquiry. If this seems a very modest endeavour then I
would reply that this modesty is entirely appropriate: for in its present form, historical-geographical materialist inquiry (and indeed analyses of it such as this thesis) enjoys only a very limited normative impact, one confined largely to academic debates in geography and cognate fields. An examination of aspects of its muted normative edges, as well as suggesting some reasons for their limited impact, may therefore be able to begin to do something about this state of affairs, however modestly. I regard this as vital, because among other things a normatively explicit historical-geographical materialism may, along with other modalities of Marxist geography, ultimately be able to offer something quite special to wider Marxian debates on post-capitalist alternatives: namely, the role a spatialised politics will necessarily play in strategies to transform and replace the topsy-turvy world of capitalism.

In the chapter which follows, I propose to deal with the normative concerns under the rubric of the 'politics of theory'. 'Politics' and the 'normative' are both complex terms and, while often used synonymously, I do not intend that the former should stand as a simple substitute for the latter. However, phrasing things in this idiom is instructive in at least two respects. First, critical theory is routinely described as being inherently 'political', a claim which advertises its supposedly normative nature. But secondly, as if to confirm the neglect of normative questions, the oft-cited notion of the 'politics of theory' suggests, as Bruce Robbins (1988: 3) wryly observes "that we already know what the 'politics' is ...". Yet this is not the case, and the senses in which theory - as a specific kind of human practice - is political remains all too often obscure. With this in mind I propose to disclose the politics of historical-geographical materialist theory along the first two normative axes identified by Fay. Accordingly, I investigate how, if at all, it is 'political' in the sense that it is geared, inter alia, to critique and judgement of its real world object ('capitalism' and its geographies); and secondly I investigate how, if at all, it is 'political' in the sense that its critique is addressed to a particular constituency or constituencies with the aim of encouraging it/them to alter its/their conditions of existence.
What, if anything, does all this have to do with the explanatory-diagnostic reinterpretation of historical-geographical materialism I have argued for in the previous chapters? The answer is everything since I will suggest that that reinterpretation productively reconfigures the normative precepts found if one were to remain wedded to modern/traditional thematics. More particularly, I will argue that the kind of both/and theoretical positions argued for in Part II and illustrated in Part III can in principle connect to a Janus-faced normativity in which historical-geographical materialism can function as an explanatory critique of capitalism with wide political appeal, without erasing or effacing other political aspirations or projects. However (and this is absolutely crucial) to move beyond such an 'in principle' case to operationalise these arguments in practical contexts is a difficult and daunting challenge that will require far more than individual theoretical interventions of the kind I have undertaken here. In particular, it will require a collective effort on the part of Marxian theorists and researchers to both learn from and inform those struggling against capitalism beyond the precincts of the university. Operationalising such an effort and such a dialogue is the difficult and under-discussed issue that will concern me towards the end of the chapter which follows. However, in the absence of such an effort and dialogue there are other alternatives, and I propose to discuss these too.

NOTES

1The one obvious exception here is Harvey's (1985) 'On the history and present condition of geography: an historical materialist manifesto'. However, this essay is peculiar in that it is a rather populist manifesto (a vague 'us' in constantly invoked as the paper's audience) and also very general in its exploration of how Marxian knowledge is inherently - rather than accidentally - critical and how it can connect to the transformation of Geography and society.

2Prior to the 1990s, the one major exception here is perhaps 'humanistic geography', which has, of course, been politically mixed in its viewpoints and social aspirations. In the work of some of its more left-leaning advocates - like David Ley, Anne Buttimer and Yi Fu Tuan - humanistic geography opened up some intriguing avenues of normative inquiry, particularly into questions of morality, ethics and aesthetics. For more on this see Gregory (1994, pp. 78-86).

3And it is, of course, both significant and interesting here that a figure often supposed to have little time for Marxism - French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1994a) - has called for a certain revival of Marxian theory in
what he regards as dangerous late twentieth century times.
CHAPTER EIGHT

THEORY, POLITICS AND NORMATIVITY

Now if there is a spirit of Marxism which I will never be ready to renounce ... it is ... a certain emancipatory and messianic affirmation.

Jacques Derrida (1994a: 89)

[T]he problem of identifying the specific types of politics which academic theory can hope to serve remains unformulated.


I. Introduction

This thesis, by virtue of its subject matter, has been preoccupied with questions of theory. This is not, of course, to say that historical-geographical materialism is a purely theoretical research programme - for example, Harvey's (1985a) empirical work on Paris, Smith's (1996c) on the 'rent gap' and Swyngedouw's (1997a) on urban water systems all give the lie to that idea. But theory has, nonetheless, been an absolutely central preoccupation of the authors whose work I have considered. As Harvey (1989b: 8) crisply put it: "As a Marxist I am always seeking coherent and consistent theory to explain ... historical-geographical processes". Moreover, much of this preoccupation has been with relatively abstract theory, although meso-level theory - related, in the cases of Harvey and Swyngedouw, particularly to the 'Regulation School' (as I noted in chapter 5) - has been important too. To my mind this focus on abstract theory - notwithstanding its disparagement in some quarters - is absolutely vital. Although, as I argued in chapter 1, the critique of Marxism in geography has not coincided with the demise of theoretical work per se - one need only refer to the intellectual terrain surveyed in Derek Gregory's (1994) Geographical Imaginations to be persuaded of that - it has coincided with a substantive and thematic turn away from geographical political-economy among critical geographers. Moreover, even where it has not, the innovations in radical political-economy in geography achieved over the last decade have been largely empirical and meso-level innovations, ones arguably bought at
the expense of more abstract theorising which, as Harvey and Scott (1989: 223) noted, seems to have "been largely reduced to background atmospherics".

This is unfortunate. As Sayer (1995: 10) puts it, "It [has] almost seemed as if one could dispense with the more abstract theory of political-economy and forget questions about the basic social organisation of economies". This is one key reason why this thesis has been explicitly an exercise in the explication and critique of a particular (and particularly important) corpus of abstract political-economic theory. For I agree with Sayer's (ibid.) further argument that empirical and meso-theoretical studies, for all their value and necessity, do not necessarily "problematize the broad structures of society" which is why "abstract political-economic theories remain invaluable ...".¹ As I argued in chapter 1, the kind of abstract - or 'meta-' - theory expounded by Harvey et al. is vital to any project of what I called 'envisioning capitalism'. For some, of course, any mention of abstract theory immediately conjures up all the dangers of a detached theoreticism.² This danger is a perennial one, but it is not necessarily endemic. As a particular form of human practice, the building of such abstract theory, I have argued, enables one to 'see' the logic and nature of processes and relations whose translocal nature makes them otherwise invisible. This is why I made so much of theory as an achievement, as well as a 'fiction' in the original sense of the word: that is, as 'something made'. In this sense, then, "abstraction [is] a positive human capacity" (Barnett 1995: 433). This still offers no automatic guarantees against cognitive abuse, of course, which is why I have also insisted that some forms of meta-theoretical endeavour are preferable to others and sought to spell out what one such a preferable form might look like. Although the product of particular, localised academic labours, on my alternative reading meta-theory of the sort developed by historical-geographical materialists actively allows one to assume the third-person perspective of the 'thinker-observer' in order to grasp the wider systemic forces and geographies at work in today's global space economy - yet without supposing that this
perspective is epistemologically privileged or the systemic forces and geographies it identifies are ontologically pre- eminent.

So far so good. Except that these comments only describe the value of abstract theory in its explanatory-diagnostic capacity. Yet, as I have said, historical-geographical materialism is also a research programme with anticipatory-utopian ambitions. As Harvey (1989b: 3) put it when explaining his reasons for first turning to Marxism: "The political foundation and purpose of this science ... made sense to me as its orientation is critical and progressive and aims not only to enhance the conditions of life of the least privileged but to probe the the frontiers of human emancipation in general". Or, as Smith (1989: 415) reaffirmed in a reflection on 'What's Left? A lot's Left', the purpose of Marx's work (along with other critical theories) is "presumably ... to shape an effective political opposition - to change the world". Comments like these immediately beg the question: in what senses is theory - particularly abstract meta-theory - 'political'? How can it help change, rather than just describe and explain, the world?

This venerable question of the 'politics of theory' is clearly an important one. If historical-geographical materialist inquiry is intended to be in some sense 'emancipatory', then it surely behoves us to examine how, if at all, 'theory' can contribute to this end. Yet, as I observed in the Introduction preceding this chapter, one cannot turn to the work of historical-geographical materialists themselves to seek much in the way of illumination here. But, then again, neither can one turn to their geographical critics for assistance. This may seem a surprising claim. After all, by exposing the 'modern' - or what I have called 'traditional' - architectonics of Marxisms like those of Harvey's, these critics have disclosed a theoretical politics of a sort - in this case, a troubling 'politics' in which theory's foundationalism, universalism and authoritarianism cognitively exclude (and even become complicit with) other important axes of social power and oppression. In addition, did not Lyotard's (1984) enormously influential critique settle matters when he announced that, aside from their cognitive exclusions, grand récits like Marxism actively mandate a
"terroristic" organised working class politics? Yet things are not so straightforward. On the one side, the geographical criticisms hardly exhaust the politics of theory. And, on the other side, even though Lyotard's argument makes reference towards a less theoretical and more 'practical' Marxist politics, it is still at best under-specified and at worst threatens to install a "knock-about destructiveness that these days often passes for critical discussion" (Harvey 1995b: 161).3 Thus, just as I worried in chapter 1 that, for all their power, many of the current criticisms of Marxist geographies are often insufficiently immanent and in-depth in their assessment of the positive side of those geographies, so too, it seems to me, a careful account of their normative side is also sorely lacking. As a corollary of this, the apparent rush to put in place post-Marxist alternatives - on the understanding that a modern/traditional reading of Marxisms like historical-geographical materialism is the only or 'correct' reading - may obscure a productive 'politics of theory' which can be located if one chooses to read historical-geographical materialism in the non-modern/traditional way I have adumbrated.

With these points in mind, I propose to examine the politics of historical-geographical theory on two related fronts. The first relates to the question of how such theory is intrinsically critical of capitalism and its geographies. I say 'intrinsically' because if it is a critique of political-economy then at some level such theory must pass judgement and thus question capitalism and its geographies. In other words, then, in its explanatory-diagnostic aspect historical-geographical materialism is also presumably anticipatory-utopian at the same time; rather than being anterior, the latter is an organic part of the former - explanation is criticism. In truth, I have already had cause to offer some discussion of this issue when, in chapter 2, I sought to examine some normative4 aspects of The Limits to Capital when read in a modern/traditional way. What follows thus builds on this earlier discussion. My second concern with the politics of theory relates to how far theory qua theory can actually inform and motivate its putative audience(s) to change the human geographies they find themselves making under conditions which are not of their
own choosing. If explanation is somehow critical, then it will count for little if its message remains deaf to those it is addressed to, which is why this second aspect of the politics of theory is so important. For convenience and to facilitate the discussion I will name these two concerns *politics as theory* and *theory as politics* respectively. Such semantic reversals are often more confusing than illuminating, and indeed both concerns are very closely related. But they are not so closely related as to be indistinguishable, which is why I insist on separating them out. Together, it seems to me, a consideration of them can begin to get us someway toward exploring what the 'politics of theory' is all about. In turn, such consideration will allow us an at least preliminary stab at the question of what makes historical-geographical materialism a normative as much as a positive research programme. So it is that we come full circle: twenty five years after Harvey's notion of 'revolutionary theory' installed the normative at the heart of what he was to label historical-geographical materialism, we return to this long-neglected issue.

II. Politics as theory: meta-theory and normativity

... then one can pass, without the addition of any extraneous value judgements, to a negative evaluation of the object ...

Roy Bhaskar (1989b: 63)

*Explanatory critique: promises and problems*

It is perhaps the exemplary promise of any critical theory that it can call into question that which it studies and explains. Here explanation is criticism, making it inherently political and evaluative. For all his reluctance to discuss normative questions this was certainly how Marx saw things, and it is not for nothing that he titled or subtitled virtually all of his work a 'critique'. In chapter 2 I tried to say something about this organic connection between explanation and evaluation by drawing upon Seyla Benhabib's examination of Marxian critique. For Benhabib, recall, the meaning of critique in the political-economy of the late Marx is both specific and highly evolved, combining three features: namely, *immanent critique* (combining a categorial and normative aspect), *defetishising critique* and *critique*
as crisis theory. Linking Marx's work to that of perhaps his most faithful geographical expositor, David Harvey, I sought to trace (perhaps rather too mechanically) how this triple-headed Marxian critique infuses *The Limits to Capital*. At many points in *The Limits*, Harvey refers to 'the rigorous unity of science and politics', indicating that careful theory construction is for him intrinsically political and "cannot be neutral in human affairs" (Harvey 1989b: 3). More specifically, in explanatory-diagnostic terms *The Limits* offered Harvey - and other historical-materialists - the kind of basis that 'revolutionary theory' had awaited since his formulation of the idea in *Social Justice*. For I suggested that in normative terms, *The Limits* is pre-eminently an exercise in critique as crisis theory: in its restatement and geographical extension of Marx's political-economy it shows how an increasingly global capitalist system is inherently crisis prone and thus inherently liable to dissolution if an appropriate social agent or agents can step-in to shape events. In one of his more explicit post-*Limits* statements about the 'politics' of historical-geographical theory, Harvey (1989b: 277, quoting Bourdieu) has furthered confirmed this:

> The critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation, has as the condition of its possibility *objective crisis*, which in breaking the immediate fit between *subjective structures* and the *objective structures*, destroys self-evidence practically.

When read in modern/traditional terms, the social agency which can productively seize this moment of crisis is, of course, the working class, the only insurgent actor capable of acting on an international scale to counter capitalism and the only actor with a vested, rather than merely accidental, interest in forging a post-capitalist order. An historical-geographical materialist project of envisioning capitalism thus entails not simply a 'making seen' but a strenuously critical modality of seeing too.

I will return to the pitfalls of these normative elements of historical-geographical materialism when read in a modern/traditional way. But first let me say something about what is, in principle, the power and appeal of any theoretical critique which can judge its object even as it explains it. In an analysis which in many ways complements that of
Benhabib, Marxist philosopher Joseph McCarney (1990) has sought to identify the different modes of 'critique' in critical social science and philosophy in order to establish the importance of critique which is thoroughly grounded in its real world object. Referring to Marxist and Marxisant theory in particular, he identifies three modes of critique in the twentieth century. The first is what he (ibid. 3) calls an "engineering model", one largely associated with the Marxism of the Second International. Here theory judges its object, but only in an external way. The insights it reveals can, if so desired, be put to work to criticise capitalism. Yet, as McCarney (ibid., emphasis added) notes, "Any organised body of [theoretical] ... knowledge may be said to ... [be critical] in this sense. The formulation ... is, however, taken to be a matter of normative commitment arrived at independently of the cognitive work of science". The second form of critique McCarney identifies is what he (ibid. 31) calls "moral critique", a form, he argues, largely associated with the later pessimistic work of the Frankfurt School. The problem here, McCarney suggests, it that because critique can find nothing potentially liberatory in the existing social reality it studies it inadvertently relinquishes its immanence. This means that it judges the social world by standards which are not grounded in it and which are thus in some sense arbitrary. In McCarney's (ibid.) words: "Cut off from the malignant purposes of things and the course of events which embodies them, it must confront these realities as the most abstract Sollen, not simply as extrinsic, but as wholly antithetical".

In light of the limitations of these two forms of critique, McCarney argues that a satisfactory alternative must be truly internal to its object. And for him the work of the later Marx and his twentieth century epigones is just that. What, McCarney argues, makes Marx's work special (though he is not the only critical theorist to achieve this) is that it does not involve him in having to play the role of 'the critic'. This may sound paradoxical, but what McCarney means is that Marx's political-economy reveals capitalism to be 'irrational' on its own account: it is made, so to speak, to condemn itself out of its own mouth. Marx's theory thus (to repeat my earlier citation of McCarney ibid. 127) becomes
"a form of social change, rather than merely the basis for ratiocination about the desirability for such change".

There is, it must be admitted, something enthralling about explanatory critique of this kind. Rather than being arbitrary or an additional add on, the 'politics' of theory here arise rigorously out of the very reality theory discloses. Moreover, in its modern form there is (depending on one's viewpoint) something even heroic about such critique in its specifically meta-theoretical permutations. Vouchsafed by the reality it makes visible, such meta-theory is able to pass judgement definitively on not merely local and contingent features but on large-scale social and economic relations and processes which impinge upon millions of lives. This, of course, was always the positive promise of modern meta-theory in its critical form. An offshoot of the so-called 'Enlightenment project', such meta-theory cast radical academics in the role of what Bauman (1987) calls 'legislators', critics able to offer objective and systematic solutions to questions of cognitive truth, moral judgement and aesthetic taste. And what better guarantee could one have than that those legislative judgements were securely grounded in social reality itself rather than introduced after the fact?

In this light, one can begin to see Harvey's attachment to the modern meta-theoretical practices for which his critics vilify him. For they 'legislate' insights at once cognitive and political which are of extremely widespread relevance since they cut to the heart of capitalism as a global set of relations, forms and processes. One can make an interesting connection here between the The Limits to Capital and the later book which critics like Deutsche eviscerated for its meta-theoretical exorbitancies and its rather mechanical and reductive explanatory structure, The Condition of Postmodernity. Harvey's well-known antipathy to postmodernism as a set of academic, artistic and architectural practices and to postmodernity as the socio-cultural condition in which those practices are embedded, is tied to his argument that the turn to both coincided with the restructuring of global capitalism after the crisis of 1973/4. 'Against postmodernism' (to use the trenchant
phrase of another classically-minded Marxist), Harvey insists that it has helped obscure our understanding of these 'basal' political-economic transformations and is thus - notwithstanding its many celebrants - in some sense counter-revolutionary. The themes of 'crisis' and 'counter-revolution' are important, of course, because the earlier Limits to Capital is about forging a theory which is, inter alia, revolutionary precisely because it shows capitalism and its geographies to be constitutively duplicitous and, as it were, to embody their own critique, namely crises. The problem with the post-1970s era, Harvey argues in The Condition, is that crisis has not issued in progressive change, but instead in obfuscation and the celebration of difference, locality and particularity at the expense political-economic similarity. One can thus see the genuine concern behind his (1989a: 359) call for "a renewal of ... the Enlightenment project" since for him the kind of grand vision meta-theory entails is all about responsible engagement with a real and dangerous world which remains as capitalist as ever.

And yet if the critique of modern meta-theory has taught us anything it is that the "... Enlightenment seems ... incapable of scraping the primordial mud of [counter-]Enlightenment off its boots" (Harpham 1994: 533). Enlightenment's other has always been close at hand. This is particularly so with Enlightenment meta-theories, since the very generality of their cognitive and political claims has always brought with it the risk (and reality) of installing silent closures and exclusions. This is why the attention postmodern, poststructural and postcolonial critics in and beyond geography have paid to theory as a re-presentation, in the complex cognitive and political senses of the term, has been so important. In this light, one of the major problems with the notion of explanatory critique I have discussed in this section is that it risks a certain normative authoritarianism posing as no more than an imperative of the real-in-itself. For it circumvents the whole notion of theorising as a situated practice and achievement, because the 'organic' connection between explanation and judgement is supposed to reside in the real: it is thus supposedly ineluctable once one recognises it. The 'rigorous unity of science and politics' Harvey so
emphatically calls for in *The Limits* may thus been seen to reveal a certain modern meta-
theoretical *naivety* that theory, once 'properly' (i.e. 'scientifically') constituted, is no more
than a relay or objective intermediary for the world's cognitive and political 'truths'.

As I argued in chapter, in a modern/traditional reading of a text like *The Limits to
Capital* this issues in a problematic notion of theory as critique. For on this reading, *The
Limits* posits capitalism as a closed totality grounded in class, exploitation and production
narrowly conceived, meaning that it functions as a critique from the standpoint of 'the'
working class as a worldwide constituency. The ontological problems here are that neither
'capitalism' nor 'class' exist in abstraction from complex social formations: since social
systems are complex and open (Sayer 1992) such ontological purity is impossible. The
epistemological problems are that a failure to take this seriously risks mistaking thought-
abstractions for real entities, thereby by-passing the question of knowledge as a situated
production while illicitly installing a notion of theory as more-or-less innocent mimesis.
Accordingly, the normative problem is that 'the' class agency which would supposedly
'come into its own' and reclaim 'the' capitalist historical-geographies it both makes and is
subject to does not exist as such, just as the 'pure capitalism' explained and judged does not
exist as such either. To base explanatory critique on such notions is immediately to do
violence to the nature of actual social formations and actual forms of social agency.

In the normative space vacated by such unsatisfactory notions, there is room for
several alternatives. One, which has begun to take shape on the Left in geography and
without in recent years, is the exploration of the normative edges of non-Marxian theories.
As Sayer (1995: 8) rightly notes, "That critical social science is no longer seen as
synonymous with a socialist perspective is a sign of considerable progress, and cause for
optimism too, as failure on the traditional front of class politics is compensated by progress
on other, newer fronts such as the politics of gender". This, I hasten to add, has not
coincided with the total demise of grand normative theories on the Left. After all,
'patriarchy' is as much a general set of social power relations and forms as those which
constitute 'capitalism'. However, the nascent flowering of multiple forms of theoretical critique does raise two concerns. One is that there is no central critique of a central social target (be it 'capitalism', 'patriarchy' or what have you) around which the Left⁹ can today rally in a normative sense: "now there are many targets - patriarchy, racism, homophobia, militarism, industrialism - and correspondingly many critical standpoints with complex relations between them" (Sayer ibid.). A second concern, is that the problems with a Marxist - and specifically historical-geographical materialist - explanatory critique in its modern meta-theoretical form should not be thought to exhaust the alternatives for a contemporary, and specifically meta-theoretical, explanatory critique of capitalism and its geographies.

These two worries perhaps go some way to explaining the extraordinary intervention recently made by Derrida (1994b). Long thought hostile to historical materialism, Derrida broke decades of silence to argue for a certain kind of revival of Marxism at the end of the twentieth century. Coming from a celebrated post-structuralist, such a call was as significant as it was unconventional. I use the latter word, because Derrida's notion of a 'revival of Marxism' was by no means synonymous with simple recuperation. Though insistent that a critique of 'capitalism' is vital, he rejected the notion that such critique could ever be epistemologically grounded in 'the true' and dispensed with the concept of 'the working class' as the audience of that critique. In place of this class constituency he argued that Marx's political-economy address and inspire "a New International, but without a party, or organisation, or membership. It is searching and suffering, it believes something is wrong ..." (Derrida ibid. 32). Not surprisingly, some Marxists have reprimanded Derrida for these seeming heresies (Callinicos 1996). Others, however, have been appreciative of his positive desire to reconfigure Marx's work in a way relevant to the contemporary world (Jameson 1995). Between both these viewpoints, it seems to me, the real significance of Derrida's intervention is clear: for it indicates the continued relevance of and need for a Marxian meta-theoretical critique of capitalism, but
also the urgent need to escape the modern metaphysical enclosures that critique has so long been framed by.

I have spent the bulk of this thesis trying to demonstrate this for the 'explanatory' side - a phrase I use for convenience since I do not mean to imply any rigid distinction between explanation and critique - of historical-geographical materialist work. The relevance of my epistemological, ontological and theoretical arguments to a reconfigured form of normative critique in the work of Harvey et al. is, I hope, readily apparent. In retaining a historical-geographical materialist commitment to systematic and meta-theoretical political-economic analysis I have sought to show that it is possible to launch a critique of capitalism and its geographies which can grasp their global, systemic and crisis-prone nature but, crucially, without normative closure and exclusivity. In particular, by insisting on the epistemological 'performativity' of theory and arguing ontologically that capitalism is at base a constitutively open totality which exploits and dominates a radically plural, rather than singular, constituency, I have sought to identify a preliminary version of critique which is epistemologically reflexive and ontologically open-ended. This both/and form of critique yields two normative advantages over modern forms of meta-theoretical explanatory critique. On the one side, it still permits meta-theory a role as a 'strong critique', in this case of capitalism and its geographies. But on the other hand, because that critique denies its identity with, and exhaustive grasp of, the real, as well being a critique of labour and its geographical productions, it abjures normative foundationalism, universalism and authoritarianism.

What is interesting is that the recent (re)turn of Harvey, Smith, Swyngedouw and Merrifield to normative questions (specifically those of social justice) in the face of the critique of Marxisms and the pluralisation of explanatory critiques, is suggestive of something rather similar. It is, then, worth giving it some attention.

*Explanatory critique: beyond modern meta-theory*
The recent publication of Harvey's (1996) *Justice, Nature and the Politics of Difference* and *The Urbanisation of Injustice* (Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1996) represent a preliminary but important step in (re)thinking how historical-geographical materialism can function as an explanatory critique at the end of the twentieth century. Although in chapter 1 I had cause to criticise the Harvey's new book as an overall package, I do think his essay (1996: ch. 12) on 'Class relations, social justice and the political geography of difference' is a useful and instructive one. As its title, and that of Merrifield and Swyngedouw's edited volume, suggests, this recent normative (re)turn has largely focussed on the question of social justice. The aim of these authors, to borrow Neil Smith's (1996b: 118) summary, has been to "reinvent 'social justice', both as a political bulwark against the right and at the same time a response to critiques of Marxism".

Harvey's essay perhaps outlines the issues at stake here best of all. He begins by recounting an horrific fire in 1991 at Imperial Food chicken farm at Hamlet, North Carolina, in which twenty five African-American women died. Working under a strict, almost feudal work regime, and in conditions contravening federal workplace regulations, Harvey remarks upon the stunning lack of both activist and academic responses to the deaths of these women. Perspectivising, he suggests one reason might be what he (ibid. 341) controversially calls 'the postmodern death of justice'. What does this mean? On the one hand, Harvey argues that "according to most common-sense meanings of the word, many of us would accept that the conditions under which men, women and minorities work[ed] in the Hamlet plant are socially unjust." However, one the other hand, "to make such a statement presupposes that there are some universally agreed upon norms as to what we do or ought to mean by the concept of social justice". And herein lies the problem: for, in Harvey's estimation, in these postmodern/structural/colonial times "universality' is a word which conjures up doubt and suspicion, downright hostility even ...". As he goes on, "The belief that universal truths are both discoverable and applicable as guidelines for political-economic action is nowadays often held to be the chief sin of 'the Enlightenment
project' and of the 'totalising' and 'homogeneising' modernism it supposedly generated'. And yet in the Hamlet case, "the obvious discourse with which to confront this market injustice is that of workers' rights deploying the whole rhetoric of class struggle against exploitation, profit making and worker disempowerment" (ibid. 345) - in other words, a discourse associated with modern/traditional forms of Marxism. Harvey's aim is thus to reinvent a historical-geographical materialist notion of social justice in the interstices between the 'modern' and 'postmodern' positions.

The interstitial position is interesting, and arguably brings out the non-modern and non-traditional thematics I have tried to draw out in the course of this thesis. Harvey begins by redefining universality. For him the notion that there are no general processes, such as those associated with global capitalism, is a nonsense. But so too is a notion of universality as *sameness*. This is why Harvey (ibid. 350) argues that "universality be ... reinserted in a dialectical relation to particularity" As Merrifield and Swyngedouw (1996: 10) instructively put it, "universality [thus] equates to *similarity* not *sameness*". In what does that similarity consist? Clearly, it cannot consist of any singular or common social *identity* between social actors worldwide. For Harvey's (op. cit. 348) second move in redefining universality is to reject the notion that any "social group can be truly unitary in the sense of having members who hold to a singular identity". This, as Harvey (ibid. 345) well knows, throws into doubt modern and traditional Marxian notions of class, since "a concentration on class alone is seen to hide, marginalise, disempower, repress and perhaps even oppress all kinds of 'others' precisely because it cannot and does not acknowledge explicity the existence of heterogeneities and differences based on, for example, race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, culture, locality, ethnicity, religion ... and the like". For this reason - and this, I think, is significant - Harvey "prefer[s] to define class as *situatedness or positionality in relation to processes of capital accumulation*". I say this is significant because it defines class as a location or structural address rather than an identity. And I also think it significant because it effectively amounts to a *redescription* of the
modern/traditional class analytics that have rightly been rejected no the Left. With class defined as a positionality in relation to capitalism, it becomes the basis on which social heterogenity and difference are putatively unified by general capitalist processes and forms. A meta-theoretical disclosure and critique of those processes and forms finds its relevance not just in the latter's generality, but also in the fact that it is a critique on behalf of a heterogenity not a singularity. As such, a historical-geographical materialist critique of political-economy can help "expose and clarify the theoretical bases for political alliance and solidarity" (Hartsock quoted in Harvey ibid. 356). Here, then, sees one of the clearest exemplifications of the non-modern and non-traditional moments of historical-geographical materialist work. And here too we see the contemporary appeal of a Marxism neither rigidly modern nor eclectically postmodern.

This is all well and good. As I say, it promises a meta-theoretical explanatory critique of capitalism which circumvents the antimonies of modern and postmodern positions. However, it is here that we begin to appreciate the limitations of explanatory critique in this non-modern form, as well as the strict impossibility of its modern incarnations. For, as it turns out, Harvey's reformulation of social justice and my own similar reinterpretation of historical-geographical materialism as explanatory critique, immediately relegate such explanatory critique to a humble role. For if 'capitalism' is, in reality, so interpenetrated with other processes and relations that it never functions in quite the way suggested by meta-theoretical abstractions, and if those abstractions are in any case neither exhaustive of nor identical with the world they disclose, then explanatory critique cannot enjoy the organic relation to its object promised in modern Marxian versions. Instead, it must assume a more ambivalent and tentative role, and accordingly any contemporary version of 'revolutionary theory' would necessarily have less certain and triumphalist tones than when Harvey first advocated it.

This is not a charter for paralysis. Nor is it that kind of throw-up-your-hands-in-despair thinking which says the social world is simply too complicated for us ever to get an
adequate handle on it. But it is a sober recognition that today historical-geographical materialism as an explanatory critique gets us so far and falls apart. If this appears too sober by half, then I would insist that it applies to any contemporary form of explanatory critique today, meta-theoretical or otherwise. As if to prove the non-exhaustiveness and in-adequacy of any single explanatory critique today, however supple and reflexive, it is significant that perhaps the most ambitious contemporary example we have in critical theory - Habermas's theory of communicative action - only succeeds by locating tendencies immanent in social reality at level of abstraction so high that they become virtually in-determinate.¹⁰

In this light, Harvey et al.'s recent attempts to reconsider social justice as a normative concept must be seen as strictly limited in its possible effects. If this sounds negative and even rather defeatist for those seeking a more full-blooded 'politics of theory' then so much the better. For it seems to me that to over-state the depth and purchase of any politics attaching to abstract theoretical inquiry can only disappoint the optimistic and flatter Marxian academics, within geography and without, as to the importance of their academic labours.

III. Theory as politics: the academy, pedagogy and beyond

I am left convinced that what is needed is a more modest and situated consideration of what theory actually does and can realistically be expected to do.


If much of the above seems precious and arcane, then it is time to turn to a second normative aspect of theory: namely, the 'practical' effects of theory. This is what I am calling here theory as politics, that is, critical theory as an intervention and an active influence on the world it investigates: what Derek Gregory (1993), in a pungent formulation, has called "bloody theory". For whose who detract from theory and the theoretical endeavour, its 'bloodiness' is, of course, minimal: it is, by definition, abstract and so removed from the messy particularities of the world, or else compulsively and
reductively orders a recalcitrant and complex world. Surprisingly, perhaps, I propose to agree that theory's impacts are indeed minimal. This may seem perverse, for several reasons. The most obvious is that I have devoted enormous energy in this thesis assessing the work of authors whose commitment to theory is exemplary - and of course, my own arguments for a contemporary historical-geographical materialist project of 'envisioning capitalism' are themselves avowedly theoretical. Moreover, I also argued that, aside from its world-disclosing function, the kind of cognitive mapping meta-theoretical inquiry so valuably offers us actively makes claims on both ourselves and 'distant strangers' to whom we are connected. Yet, this notwithstanding, it must be admitted that the work of the authors I have considered (and works like this thesis) has made virtually no impact on the world they analyse and critique. I argued in chapter one that for meta-theory to be truly 'meta', it must escape the inextricably local sites of its production to be put in motion as a global formulation. That this has not occurred in the case of historical-geographical materialism is extremely troubling. The reasons for it, though, have little to do with the abstractness inherent to meta-theory. They are to be found, instead, in the very 'local site' in which meta-theory is routinely produced: the academy.

Discussions of the institutional specificity of universities and their relation to wider society have been conspicuously lacking on the Left of human geography, and this includes historical-geographical materialists. Aside from Merrifield's (1995) valuable attempt to 'situate' the 'geographical expeditions' of Bill Bunge, the relatively limited discussions of politics as theory have usually been confined to ill-defined notions that theory can actively contribute to what Harvey (1989b: 277) calls "a politics of ... radical transformation". This neglect of the insistently local questions of the institutional sites of theoretical production is, I suspect, due in part to a reason identified by Keith Bassett (1996b: 507) in his recent essay on the so-called 'crisis' of the modern intellectual. For him (ibid., quoting Robbins 1993), these intellectuals (Bauman's 'legislators' or what Foucault famously called 'universal intellectuals') were "peculiarly susceptible to the ideal of 'the
authentic career', in which the 'ideals of radical social change could reasonable be accomodated to the activity of earning a living, and even to upward mobility". There was a certain self-flattery here, of course, that the very act of researching and theorising on 'big questions' was in itself radical and emancipatory. That the postmodern/structural/colonial critique of modern theory has gone hand in hand with a deflation of this intellectual self-conception - Foucault's notion of the 'specific intellectual' or academics as what Bauman (op. cit.) calls 'interpreters' seems to be the new order of the academic day - has been a positive development. But it still begs the question of the relationship between theoretical work and the world it investigates: in other words, the question of what Barnett (op. cit. 427) calls "the worldiness of theory" is still on the agenda and deserving of a long-overdue consideration.

Fortunately, several human geographers - none of them historical-geographical materialists, alas - have begun to consider this important question (Barnett ibid., 1997; Bassett op. cit.; Blomley 1994, 1995; Gregory 1996; Routledge 1996; Tickell 1995). That it has been so routinely bypassed may tell us something important about the lacunae of both critiques of modern Marxisms and those Marxisms themselves. Thus, when Lyotard (1984) muttered darkly about the "terroristic" politics Marxist theory 'mandates' he was clearly giving that theory far too much credit: for, at least in the West European and North American context to which he was referring, modern forms of academic Marxism have never reached out to a truly mass audience, and have rarely contributed effectively to the kind of old-style working class politics Lyotard rightly finds so disturbing. At the same time, as if to confirm this, one has the peculiar situation of Marxists, like Harvey, devoting their professional energies to the formulation of sophisticated and insightul theory construction and yet conceding that such theory has been politically ineffectual while insisting that "the political proving ground... , in the final analysis, is the only one that counts" (Harvey 1989b: 16). Indeed, reflecting on Harvey's recent attempt to fashion a viable, non-modern historical-geographical materialist notion of social justice, Neil Smith
concedes that is likely to "be advanced and defended more on the grounds of intellectual than activist politics", again indicating the gap between theory and 'real world' political activity.

This muted recognition that the political 'effects' of political-economic theory have been minimal, may in turn explain the relative silence of historical-geographical materialists on this important question. It is almost as if, embarrassed by the gap between the radicalism of their theory and its failure to make any real impact on the world it studies, they have shied away from the issue. Meta-theory's limited impact may also explain the extraordinarily weak political impulses emanating from Harvey's *Justice, Nature and the Politics of Difference*. Having sought to redefine social justice by way of a redefinition of class and thus the audience of historical-geographical materialist insights, Harvey effectively acknowledges the resolutely academic nature of his theoretical labours. What I mean here is that, rather than examining how theory can make a difference in the world, he retreats into rather utopian and abstract discussions of what he calls 'the politics of possibility' (1996: ch. 14). Useful though this discussion is, it revolves around the further refinement of concepts and ideas, not their transmission to and negotiation in non-academic contexts.

It is not my intention to erect over-rigid distinctions between 'the academy' and the 'real world'. But I do think it vital to address the fact that in the post-war era in geography and other social sciences, meta-theoretical work has largely been conducted in university settings. These settings inevitably have their own specificities and dynamics, and indeed have in large part been the very condition of possibility for theoretical work of the kind Harvey *et al.* have pursued. That they make a difference is, then, clear enough. What this difference *is* becomes the key question. This is why any consideration of theory as a political intervention which fails to consider the difference that university settings make is an unrealistic one.
In this light, the recent interventions of Barnett, Bassett, Blomley, Gregory, Routledge and Tickell are exemplary beginnings for a geographical consideration of the topic of 'activism and the academy' (Blomley 1994). The debate between Barnett and Gregory is particularly instructive, not despite, but because of the differences between the authors: for each raises some very significant issues which the other underplays, issues which must, I would argue, be central to historical-geographical materialism today, as much as to the geographical Left in general. Barnett's (1995) thoughtful intervention was occasioned by the publication of Gregory's (1994) Geographical Imaginations. Because one of the recurring themes of the latter is that critical theory is political and consequential, Barnett's critique of the book revolves, precisely, around an exploration of the theory-politics relationship. He makes three particularly impotant observations. First, while appreciative of Gregory's often acute efforts to make social theory less 'modern' and more reflexive, Barnett (op. cit. 429) insists that "questions of representational authority defy any purely theoretical resolution". This is a telling observation, and one which applies with as much force to historical-geographical materialist work as to my reinterpretation of it. For at the end of the day however subtle and sophisticated our epistemological practices and our ontological claims may be in themselves they offer no automatic safeguards against cognitive and normative foundationalism, universalism and authoritarianism. This links, secondly, to the equally astute claim that "the 'politics' of any theory or form of representation is conj[un]ctural". As Barnett puts it, "The politics of any theory is radically underdetermined by that theory itself" (ibid. 431-2). This is why, thirdly, Barnett (ibid. 427) insists we undertake "a fully materialist analysis of the institution of theory ...". After all, "theories, representations, or forms of writing derive their worldly force from their conceptual architecture and rhetorical forms, on the one hand, and [also] from the economies of value and force which structure the institutions in which they are produced, on the other" (ibid. 431). These points are very well taken. In the context of this thesis and the body of theory it has investigated, it highlights the critical need for a 'fully materialist
analysis of the institution of theory'. For a reinterpreting meta-theoretical project like this, and any contemporary project to critically envision capitalism and its duplicitous geographies, will count for little if the forces preventing them from being put in force as global formulations are not properly examined.

These forces are considerable. Although this is not the place to examine them in any detail, it is worth saying something about the political and cultural economy that now prevails in the Anglophone higher education system in which Harvey et al. - along with the present author - research, write and teach. Of course, this is not a system as such, but rather a set of rather different systems. But as Slaughter and Leslie (1997) point out in their recent Academic Capitalism, and as Readings (1996) observes in his polemic The University in Ruins, a remarkable consonance of economic and cultural changes now characterises higher education in Britain, North America and the Antipodes. For Slaughter and Leslie the economic changes include declining state funding, increasing private funding and a turn to more applied and 'safe' research in both the physical and social sciences. For Readings, these shifts in the political-economy of universities has been coincident with a cultural shift towards the pursuit of 'excellence' as universities now compete globally for money and prestige. If, as Barnett argues, the politics of any theory are purely conjunctural and depend in part on the 'economies of force and value which structure the institutions in which they are produced' then this ongoing "entrepreneurialisaton" of Western higher education - as Robert Ovetz (1997) calls it - is surely impacting upon the reading and reception of the work of Marxian academics like Harvey and his colleagues.

In particular, as universities are increasingly coopted to, and lose their traditional relative autonomy from, capital - a loss especially noticeable in a country like the UK this last decade - Marxian theory risks being defined as a marginal, because dissident, form of knowledge. Of course, this marginality has always been evident in Western civil societies, where Marxian ideas have rarely been of widespread appeal. But current developments in
higher education specifically are worrying because, in the twentieth century, the academy has been one of the few spaces where Marxian ideas can and have been openly advocated and debated in Western countries. This potential squeezing out of Marxisms will also no doubt be further encouraged by the seeming lack of 'practicality' of Marxian research when compared to more applied and mainstream social science - a claim which is, of course, wholly accurate if one defines practicality in the instrumental terms of the Right. Finally, one can add to this the irony that the kinds of specifically theoretical work Harvey et al. have undertaken now forms what Barnett (op. cit. 430) "a high yielding form of cultural capital" in a situation where large commercial publishers have made academic publishing far more 'sexy' and consumer-oriented than it has ever been (Barnett and Low 1996). It is not for nothing, therefore, that a breezy polemic like The Condition of Postmodernity became a 'best-seller' - a fact which leaves one feeling rather ambivalent since one doubts whether the book's Marxian argument did much except gain knowing nods from the group of educated academics and post-graduates who could both understand it and afford to buy it. What all this means is that historical-geographical materialist work is now produced under conditions which, aside from obviously being made only in part by its authors, are conditions which threaten increasingly to both marginalise it politically and, even in the case of a 'popular' text like The Condition, sharply circumscribe its audience. It is a peculiar fact, therefore, that none of the authors working under the historical-geographical materialist banner have had anything of substance to say about the institutional conditions under which they produce and disseminate Marxian knowledge.

And yet, this said, it is easy to overlook the possibilities the academy offers radical projects like historical-geographical materialism when one becomes overly preoccupied with the 'big' questions of how meta-theory can reach out into the world and make a difference (see, for instance, Ovetz 1997). This, arguably, is the flip-side of Barnett's critique of Gregory and is a topic fastened upon in Gregory's (1996) reply to it. At one point, Barnett (op. cit. 434) objects to Gregory's supposed unwillingness to detail "the
mundane (sic) ways in which theory is used in teaching and research". As Gregory acknowledges, this kind of 'mundane' politics of theory is in fact vital: for teaching - and, specifically, critical pedagogy - is the most immediate arena in which theories are communicated, debated and contested by others. In an era when Western radical academics have access to greater numbers of undergraduate and graduate students than ever before, the ways in which meta-theory can impact upon and be negotiated through such institutionally based audiences is perhaps the kind of 'local' question about the 'politics of theory' we should be asking. It is one Gregory asks of himself, and part of his answer consists in reminding us that "the academy isn't [always] an especially democratic place for the explication and evaluations of ideas and it's hardly immune from the power-plays, corruptions and conflicts that mark other areas of social life" (Gregory 1996: ?). In the first instance, then, if not the last, it is extremely important "to safeguard spaces for the constructive examination of ideas" (ibid.). This is an important and serious observation. Before we (sic) anguish over-much that theory's politics is not reaching real-world audiences 'out there', we ought to consider the simple importance of maintaining a space of articulation 'in here' (Castree, forthcoming b). This, perhaps, is the first lesson for any historical-geographical materialism seeking to renew itself in this messy and tangled world of ours.

I have no definite answers as to how historical-geographical materialists might think more carefully about a critical pedagogy and about communicating with an increasingly mass audience of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Here an engagement with the work of authors outside geography who have given these matters some consideration is doubtless long overdue (see, for example, Giroux 1992; Readings op. cit.). If the work of Harvey et al. - and indeed critical geographers at large - is to make any difference to the world its studies then is surely time to focus seriously on the vital task of changing the way those who are educated in colleges and universities view that world.
NOTES

1 Note that I am using the term 'abstract' here in the sense of theories which capture general processes and relations: which is, in other words, 'meta'. This is in keeping with this thesis's focus on system-integration and it does not rule out of court the valuable argument made about erroneously identifying the abstract and the general made by Cox and Mair (1989).

2 Christopher Norris (1990), for example, has suggested that during periods of political retrenchment and defeat - of the kind experienced over the last twenty years in the UK and North America - Left academics routinely retreat into esoteric high-theoretical debates. They do so, he suggests, because the world offers so little in the way of possibilities for positive change that these academics have lost their raison d'etre - a raison d'etre they can only rediscover it in ethereal debates that allow them to feel critical while in fact being largely detached from real world political practice.

3 Then again, I suppose The Postmodern Condition was intentionally polemical, even if it was written for the government of Québec.

4 In the two sections which follow, my use of the term 'normative' will be specific to each of those sections and signify the particular aspect of normativity I am therein considering.

5 Most debate here has focussed on the relationship between 'science' and 'politics' in Marx's work has been the focus of much debate. On one reading Marx successfully combines theory with politics, in his scientific study of capitalism; on a second reading Marx is rigorously scientific and any appeal to politics, to what one should do, entails value judgements that are not part of science but reside in the domain of 'ideology'; while a third view sees a contradiction running throughout Marx's thought between 'critical' and 'scientific' Marxism.

6 Obviously, normative has a more specialised usage here, denoting not the anticipatory-utopian moment of Marx's theory in general but the specific procedure of critiquing capitalist society with what are in some senses its own standards.

7 Callinicos (1989).

8 And Alvin Gouldner, of course, famously argued that Western Marxist academics were part of a new, professionalised 'intellectual class' shopping around for a mass base to both legitimate and realise their own political aspirations. Suggesting that the notion of the working class was in some senses no more than a theoretical construct, he (1985: 48) suggested that it is best "understood as the radicalised intelligentsia's metaphor for a variety of goods and values it has sought, and for its ideal no less than its material interests".

9 Of course, some might consider this a good thing and object to the very notion 'the Left' as some nominally coherent wing of politics and thought.

10 And as Martin Jay (1988: 13) asks, who, in any case, "would man (sic) the barricades for a utopia of procedures?".

11 The UK has experienced a veritable sea-change in its higher education system these last 10-15 years. As government funding has decreased sharply, student numbers have greatly increased and private sector
funding become considerably more important. Both teaching and research now operate in a consumer-oriented environment where academics are encouraged to see themselves as providers of a 'service' - namely the awarding of degrees and the production of knowledge. This has gone hand-in-hand with governmental attempts to regulate academic labour and restrict the room for academic autonomy, in particular through the imposition of national Research Assessment Exercises and Teaching Quality Assessments. For more on this in relation to geography see Johnston (1995).
CODA

In short, Marxism without a revolutionary proletariat is a theology without God. Failing to take its poetry from the future, as Marx recommended, this gestural Marxism dresses up in a wardrobe from the past. From a history which is either failed or catastrophic, it salvages icons. Perhaps the good father is to be protected from the depredations of bad brothers and bad sons - the real (or early) Marx unblemished by Engels, or the one read by Luxemburg, not Lenin, or by Lenin and Trotsky, not Stalin. Perhaps there is, after all, a global working class in embryo, but it has been unfortunately misled, or its hour has not yet come - give it time! This shapeless "Marxism" lacking a labour theory or value, lacking the transcendent homogeneization of a universal class, lacking a universalising agency, shrinks into normal sociology, a set of analytical tools with which to grasp the globalization of capital - valuable tools for analysis, indeed, but hardly a mission, let alone the invocation of a universal spirit.

Todd Gitlin (1994: 163)

Gitlin's animadversions describe an apostasy he sees infecting much of what currently goes under the name of 'Marxism'. For him, those Marxisms which have abandoned the heroic logic of global class struggle are ersatz Marxisms, ones which substitute delphic elucubrations for the kind of revolutionary analysis and action our contemporary world, in his view, demands. Although, to some extent, I solidarize with Gitlin's opprobium - after all, it applies to the kind of 'post-' and 'postmodern' Marxisms I have objected to in this thesis - I cite it because it may also seem to describe my own efforts over the last three hundred or so pages. While I have sought to argue the case for and adumbrate a 'both/and' modality of Marxism (and a specifically geographical modality of Marxism to boot) which can negotiate the polarised alternatives of modern and postmodern readings, I may seem to have conceded too much to critics of Marxisms in general and historical-geographical materialism in particular. By way of a coda, then, let me engage (very briefly) in a little (not too critical!) auto-critique.

Despite my defense of a project of envisioning and of a systematic geographical political-economy, I have sought to move beyond certain 'fundamentals' of classical Marxism and historical-geographical materialism that for some are so fundamental as, in fact, to be utterly indispensable to both bodies of work. I have argued that if there is any truly international, even global, insurgent constitutency today, 'it' is not a 'working class' but, inter alia, a heterogeneity whose 'commonality' resides less in any common identity
and more in common positionality in relation to processes of capital accumulation and their geographies. A 'worker's' identity would thus be a worked for and contingent achievement, one strategic and provisional. At the same time, I have problematised the notion of 'capitalism' as a discrete system, even as I have sought to redescribe in what its 'systemic' qualities consist. I have, furthermore, displaced the cognitive and normative certainties issuing from modern notions of political-economic 'science' by identifying a certain epistemological ambivalence within venerable political-economic categories as they are unfolded dialectically. Finally, I have arguably severed (or at least complicated) classical notions of the vaunted 'theory-practice' relationship by arguing that the 'effects' of the work I have analysed and works like this thesis are far less worldly than one might be wont to think.

Judged by the standards of orthodox Marxisms, all this no doubt amounts to heresy and defeatism in equal measure. Indeed, by these standards, I would accept this judgement as essentially correct. But the point, of course, is that it is these very standards that I have sought to bring into question and in this I join wholeheartedly with post-Marxists and postmodern/structural/colonial critics of Marxism. Such questioning renders null the rhetorical force of orthodox Marxist interventions like Gitlin's. But at the same time, I hope, it encourages a revalorisation of theoretical and political moves which, by the standards being questioned, are viewed through a glass darkly. One of these moves, absolutely central to the reinterpretation of historical-geographical materialism presented here, is ambivalence: for in essence I have argued that epistemological, ontological, theoretical and normative ambivalence should be central to this (and any other contemporary) form of Marxism. On conventional semantic codings, ambivalence signifies undecidability and indecision and, as such, has hardly been a sensibility modern Marxists have taken to heart. But what I have tried to show here, through example, is that ambivalence is a necessary condition for any Marxist critique of political economy, and one which, moreover, yields identifiable theoretical and political pay-offs. If these pay-offs
are too 'gestural' and too 'shapeless' for Marxists who seek more full-blooded interventions, then it remains for them to demonstrate the power, relevance and consequentiality of their own analyses.
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