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## Marxism and Geography in the Anglophone World

In October 1997 an article appeared in the impeccably bourgeois magazine, the *New Yorker*, which championed Karl Marx as the “next new thinker”. Down on Wall Street, wrote John Cassidy, there is a new appreciation for Marx’s understanding of capitalism, and a sense that Marx anticipated brilliantly what so-called globalization was all about (Cassidy 1997). The impending 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *The Communist Manifesto* intensified the clamour. As Marx and Engels famously wrote there, the bourgeoisie “creates a world after its own image”, and so with the dragon of international socialism apparently slain after 1989, despite local holdouts in Cuba and North Korea, and with Marx no longer the demon of capital, expectant young Wall Street financiers could embrace Marx’s vivid depiction of capitalism as a remarkably prescient portrait of the neo-liberal global order they themselves strove to create. Marx had brilliantly anticipated globalization, and Wall Street thought it was a good thing.

But the “Marx boom” of 1997-98 quickly fizzled as capitalism itself turned sour. The Asian economic crisis exploded, Indonesia’s Suharto was overthrown in a deadly revolt, and the economic malaise spread to Brazil, Mexico and Russia. Marx, it seemed, still had a sting in his tail. Reading *Das Kapital* to understand how capitalism really worked was one thing. But the same *Das Kapital* also seemed to teach that economic depression was endemic to capitalism, the stock market was a giant swindle, the Asian economic crisis – rooted in overproduction in Thailand and generalized into the region’s currency and security markets – was a classic capitalist crisis, and that political struggle is equally endemic to capitalism. On the heels of the Asian economic crisis came the 1999 battle in Seattle which, although neither the first nor even the most important anti-globalization uprising, finally focused the attention of the anglophone world on what most others already knew, namely that globalization represented a political contest about how the world was to be made rather than an economic *fait accompli*. More recent anti-globalization struggles – Washington, Prague, Bangkok, Melbourne, and the bloody repression of Genoa – confirm that a core of the movement is resolutely anti-capitalist, not just anti-globalization, suggesting to many that making the world’s geography in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

will indeed be a social and political contest (Fannin et. al. 2000; Smith 2000a; Wainright et. al. 2000).

At about the same time that these events unfolded on the global stage, literary critic Terry Eagleton made the observation that the discipline of geography, “which used to be about maps and chaps”, was now poised to become “the sexiest academic subject of all” (Eagleton 1997). This is an astonishing claim. Thirty years earlier, during the “summer of love” (1967) geography was perhaps the least sexy subject, certainly in the English-speaking world. The influence of the intellectually conservative Richard Hartshorne (himself heavily influenced by the neo-Kantian Alfred Hettner) still weighed heavily on US geography even as a new generation of scientific positivists in Britain and the US were installing themselves as the next new thing. It is difficult to conceive of a discipline more uncool than geography in 1967. And yet, the influence of the anti-war movement in the US, the feminist and environmental movements, the Prague Spring of 1968, the anti-imperialist movement, radicals discovering socialism and Marx – all of these wider social eruptions in the late 1960s and early 1970s completely transformed the discipline. They had a greater effect on geography than on any other social science in the anglophone world.

Marxist geography in the English-speaking world has occupied a highly contradictory position over the last thirty years; the discipline has experienced a classic case of uneven intellectual development. As Britain and the United States became increasingly conservative, electing Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and Ronald Reagan a year later, marxist work grew to dominance within the discipline. It is no exaggeration to say that in the period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, marxist work more than any other influence directed the research frontier in English-speaking human geography. That its influence remains paramount today, even as social theory has broadened well beyond its marxist roots, is shown by an analysis of citations within English-speaking geography: the two most cited geographers in the English language tradition are marxists and a majority of the ten most cited authors either are marxists (Bodman 1992). How are we to account for such an apparent paradox? And what does the history of marxism and geography in the anglophone world over the last three decades imply about the prospects for the future?

### **Activism: The Origins of Marxism in English-language Geography**

Prior to the 1950s, English-speaking geography was largely untouched by any explicit concern with social theory, marxist or otherwise. The late nineteenth century work of revolutionaries Peter Kropotkin and Élisée Réclus was not entirely omitted from histories of geography, but it was treated largely as a curiosity and any implied connections between politics and intellectual pursuits were studiously ignored. The rejection of social theory resulted in part from the very practical geographical traditions that dominated in Britain, the British colonies, and the US; in part it resulted from the sense that geography was a science rooted in an understanding of the physical surface of the earth, both in its own

right and as a humanly transformed environment. But it also represented a deliberate choice. Especially in the United States, where the geographical tradition was heavily influenced by German geography, and where a nineteenth century agrarian pragmatism lingered long into the twentieth century, the anti-theoretical stance of mid-twentieth century geography expressed a powerful reaction against two threads of geographical inquiry. In the first place, the mistaken resort to environmental determinism, which especially occupied US geographers prior to World War I, was explained by many as resulting from a misguided quest for theory. Theory, it was concluded, led too easily to speculative ideas ungrounded in fact. Second, the opposition to theory expressed a reaction against German geopolitics in the 1920s and 1930s. Social theory applied to human landscapes, it was widely believed, led inexorably to political partiality and had to be avoided at all costs. Nineteenth century empiricism weighed heavily on English-language geography in the twentieth century, and still does.

The contrast with other social sciences draws an even more stark picture of the theoretical backwardness of geography in this period. Franz Boas, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and others were establishing a modern anthropology tradition in the US and to a lesser extent Britain; in sociology the theories of Durkheim and Max Weber were being imported and translated into English as the basis for a new discipline; Freud and others underwrote a powerful theoretical tradition in psychology; John Dewey and others theorized pragmatism as a significant basis of US political science; Robert Park and E.W. Burgess theorized urban form and process in Chicago with no apparent connection to the country's leading geography program across campus. Still hampered by the false start of environmental determinism, US geography was much weaker than the British tradition in this period, with the latter largely sustained by the connections to empire. Thus it was that during World War II, one of the most influential geographers of the century – Richard Hartshorne – worked in the OSS (the Office of Strategic Services was the precursor of the CIA) alongside economists, sociologist and such Frankfurt School figures as Herbert Marcuse, Carl Schorske, and Franz Neumann, with absolutely none of their theoretical influence rubbing off.

The first crack in this anti-theoretical armour came in the 1950s when the scientific aspirations of a younger generation of mostly US geographers sought to re-establish human geography on a more mathematically sophisticated basis. The so-called quantitative revolution now discovered the work of German economic geographers such as Walther Christaller and Alfred Weber – stretching back even to von Thünen – and (with less explicit citation) Soviet geographers such as Nikolai Baranskii. This new scientific rationale certainly involved a concern with theory, but it built on rather than abrogated the empiricist underpinning of English-speaking geography. Of greatest importance, the new scientific geography seemed to bring the discipline up to date and to promise a new era in which geography would again be highly relevant to an array of society's most serious problems.

The desperate disciplinary quest for relevance proved stronger than the quest for theory, however, and when the definition of social relevance changed radically, so did geography. To be socially relevant in the conservative 1950s and early 1960s was, for many, to contribute to scientific knowledge in such a way as to affect social policy. But the world-wide social movements, strikes, and uprisings of the late 1960s fundamentally redefined social relevance: the new sophisticated mathematical methodologies were widely overtaken as their technocratic intent proved impotent to deal with the geographical aspects of the most pressing problems of the period: why does racism persist and how does it become inscribed in the ghettoized landscapes of US cities? Why has Third World development failed? How are we to explain the imperialism that propelled the US into war in Vietnam? How is the oppression of women inscribed in different landscapes differently? What are the sources of environmental destruction? And so forth. While more technocratic geographers clung to their maths and their models, refusing to recognize these and other such questions as appropriately geographical, many others who had indeed been inspired by the newfound demand for relevance simply abandoned the models and began searching elsewhere for answers to the most pressing problems. The frenzied hunt for radical answers led in many often quite contradictory directions at once, but the common assumption was that “establishment geography”, whether scientific or otherwise, was irrelevant and had to be transformed (Eliot Hurst 1973). The major vehicle for doing so was *Antipode. A Radical Journal of Geography* which was founded in 1969 by students and several young faculty at Clark University. For more than a decade and a half, this journal was typed, reproduced on primitive mimeo equipment, collated, stapled and mailed by a loose collective of students and faculty. Parallel to this was the Union of Socialist Geographers, based in Canada and the US, with additional branches in Australia and Britain (Peet 1978).

Whereas liberal policy responses to the various social crises of the time emphasized the discreteness of particular social issues, isolating them into separate, supposedly manageable technocratic “problems”, the radical critique searched instead for the ways in which different social problems were not only systematically related but emanated from common roots in the multifarious structures of contemporary society. This inevitably sent the search for social theory in various directions. Some like David Harvey focused directly on Marx, while others like Richard Peet and Myrna Breitbart rediscovered Kropotkin and other anarchist influences. Doreen Massey and others in Britain looked to the newer influences of continental marxism and Louis Althusser in particular, while Jim Blaut and Bill Bunge mixed a broad range of marxist theories with some of the more traditional quantitative concerns of scientific geography. With little feminist theory in place in the 1970s, feminist geographers like Suzanne Mackenzie faced the double task of infusing geography *and* marxist theory with feminist analyses.

None of these early explorations was more influential than marxism and no publication more compelling in cementing the relationship between radical geography and

marxism than David Harvey's *Social Justice and the City*. The importance of this book lay not so much in the provision of a coherent overview of marxist theory applied to questions of justice in the city but rather in the hard fought evolution from liberal policy responses through democratic socialism to marxist theory – an evolution which Harvey himself had gone through and recorded in the book and which many geographers and social scientists, radicalized by the events of the late 1960s and early 1970s, also experienced. It indicted liberal urban policy for its roots in “counter-revolutionary theory” and invited us all to help fashion an appropriate “revolutionary theory” (Harvey 1973). The target was now squarely on capitalism, and the central question became: what does the geography of capitalism look like at different spatial scales and in different places? (For histories of this period see Peet 1978; Harvey and Smith 1984.)

Within “establishment geography”, the dramatic rise of marxism in the early 1970s was first ignored, later despised, and eventually resented, even as it was eventually if begrudgingly accommodated. Yet there was little that establishment geographers, who completely controlled the discipline in North America, Britain, and Australia, could do to prevent it. Responses to marxist work in this period invariably lacked the intellectual sophistication that marxist theory brought, and criticisms often came across as shallow and contradictory: they were motivated by political rather than intellectual concerns – repeating many clichés about marxism – while insisting on the non-political character of scientific work. Far more lively and attractive to a younger generation of scholars were the debates within and around marxist work, debates over feminism and environmentalism, questions of race and poverty, imperialism and gay geographies. A medical metaphor captures the situation. The allergy of English-speaking geography (as a discipline) to social theory throughout most of the twentieth century now meant that the discipline had no immune system against marxism. Marxism in the 1970s and 1980s not only offered powerful insights concerning the political questions of the day, and offered a breathtaking global vista of the geographies of exploitation, oppression and injustice – and their causes – but laid out the ways in which geography was molded in the image of capital while simultaneously providing a non-neutral spatial and environmental framework for its reproduction. Just as important, it provided the most sophisticated social theory that many geographers had come in contact with, and its opponents had few if any social theoretical resources for counteracting its influence. Unlike anthropology or sociology where various major figures had been socialists, geography as a discipline lacked all immunity against marxism. Intellectually if not institutionally, the old guard was defeated almost before the struggle began.

### **After the Revolution: Critique, Institutionalization and Backlash**

The incongruity between this new marxist-inspired geography and the moribund remnants of an earlier anti-theoretical tradition were most sharply evident in the United States where, in a ten-year period between 1977 and 1986, as marxist research blossomed, three

prestigious geography departments were closed at the University of Michigan, University of Chicago and Columbia University. The old guard together with a newer generation of frustrated positivists feared that the discipline was under threat of extinction. In exactly this period, if in quite different circles, the work of marxist scholars in geography was drawing considerable attention and admiration in other fields. David Harvey's 1989 book, *Condition of Postmodernity*, went on to sell almost 100,000 copies in various languages, was widely influential throughout the social sciences and humanities, and was voted one of the best 100 books of the second half of the twentieth century by the *New Statesman/New Society*. Here, quite extraordinarily, were marxists receiving the kind of public acclaim that eluded scientific positivists. Completing the irony, something similar was happening in physical geography in the anglophone world as geomorphologists, climatologists and others began to experience hard won respect in the sciences. In the UK the contradiction and sense of disciplinary crisis was less intense and came later, but in general the margins were thriving, it seemed, while the core of disaffected spatial analysts, old Hartshornians and others came together in acute crisis, still frozen out of the centers of political and intellectual power in the wider society.

Marxism was the place to be as a young human or environmental geographer in the 1970s and 1980s; it pioneered social theory in anglophone geography and both directly and indirectly did more to revitalize the image of geography in the English-speaking academy than any other single influence. But it did not long remain alone, and the intellectual ferment it unleashed spilled out in many directions. Much of the initial exploration in marxist theory was dominated by political economy approaches aimed at revealing the deep structures of capitalist geographies, but as even a casual perusal of *Antipode* in the 1970s and 1980s suggests, that was never the exclusive project. The goal was to spatialize marxism while infusing marxist theory into geography (Soja 1989), and that project was from the start multifaceted. In retrospect, however, the near-hegemony of a marxist tradition in human geography, searching in the conservative 1980s for revolutionary theory, was surely untenable. The rapid deepening of marxist research in that decade was therefore matched by an even more rapid broadening as marxist work explored and eventually fused with all kinds of other social theory.

This deepening and broadening after the mid 1980s followed five identifiable tracks although these were in many cases intertwined. First was the exploration of cultural questions which had been a significant part of earlier marxist work (Galois 1976) but had always been secondary to political economy. In concert with a broader cultural turn in the humanities and social sciences during this period, the research frontier shifted decisively toward a "new cultural geography". Second, and related, postmodernist theory imported from architecture and cultural studies began to influence the kind of social theories that geographers brought to the explanations of spatial difference at various scales, while geographical research itself influenced the spatialized language of postmodernism (cf. Bondi 1990; Harvey 1989; Soja 1989). Third, feminist research, both inside and outside

prestigious geography departments were closed at the University of Michigan, University of Chicago and Columbia University. The old guard together with a newer generation of frustrated positivists feared that the discipline was under threat of extinction. In exactly this period, if in quite different circles, the work of marxist scholars in geography was drawing considerable attention and admiration in other fields. David Harvey's 1989 book, *Condition of Postmodernity*, went on to sell almost 100,000 copies in various languages, was widely influential throughout the social sciences and humanities, and was voted one of the best 100 books of the second half of the twentieth century by the *New Statesman/New Society*. Here, quite extraordinarily, were marxists receiving the kind of public acclaim that eluded scientific positivists. Completing the irony, something similar was happening in physical geography in the anglophone world as geomorphologists, climatologists and others began to experience hard won respect in the sciences. In the UK the contradiction and sense of disciplinary crisis was less intense and came later, but in general the margins were thriving, it seemed, while the core of disaffected spatial analysts, old Hartshornians and others came together in acute crisis, still frozen out of the centers of political and intellectual power in the wider society.

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geography, was building a powerful body of theory that emphasized gender differences. Fourth, the multicultural theories that evolved out of the civil rights, anti-imperialist and feminist movements of the 1970s also percolated into geographical research. Finally, the marxist focus on the structures of capitalism was augmented by poststructuralist theory that derived largely from France. Together, all of these influences tilted toward an examination of “the local”, leading to an intense debate over “localities” in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this period, geography, which had been one of the most closed and insular disciplines two decades earlier, was now one of the most open and heterogeneous. This revitalization of geography followed in the footsteps of post-1960s radicalism and was spearheaded first and foremost by marxist analyses, but as these five tracks of theoretical development suggest, it was quickly driven by a much more eclectic range of social theories.

What began as sympathetic extensions of marxist and marxist inspired inquiry increasingly transformed after the mid 1980s into a search for alternatives. Some scholars were disillusioned, others wanted more than they felt marxism offered, or something different, and increasingly serious critiques were mounted. Others, not unlike the Wall Streeters of 1997, were opportunistic; swept along by the analytical power of marxism and enjoying proximity to the intellectual action, they were far less comfortable with its political implications, and as the political tides turned in the wider society their intellectual allegiances migrated elsewhere. The new tracks of research were increasingly adopted in opposition to rather than in sympathy with marxism: cultural analysis came to be seen as a means to override and replace political economy as an object and mode of analysis; postmodernism was promoted in a paradoxically binary fashion as an alternative to a modernism that blanketed such disparate traditions as marxism, liberalism and bourgeois science under the label of a discredited Enlightenment; feminist theory and multiculturalism were increasingly posed as an alternative to, rather than collaboration with, class analysis, and post-structuralism as an alternative to structural analysis. By the 1990s, marxist theory remained influential in anglophone geography but no longer enjoyed such undisputed dominance.

It is important to stress that the taming of marxism in anglophone geography in this period was accomplished not so much by some counter-revolt by a conservative old guard or even by liberal positivists, however much such scholars retained powerful control of the national associations in North America, Britain and Australia. Rather, the power of marxism was dilluted by the proliferation of other social theories, often progressive, sometimes not. But two other observations are vital. First, the broadening out of social theory in the 1990s, partially at the expense of marxism, was not a wholly adverse result. It is difficult to imagine that a revolutionary marxism could have sustained such a dominant position in academia, and the development of a broader and more varied social theory base in academic geography has arguably led to a richer and more sophisticated marxism. Debates on feminism and postmodernism, the cultural turn and poststructuralism,



multiculturalism and identity politics may have diffused some of the power that marxist analyses had in the 1970s and 1980s, but they have at the same time led to a strengthening of marxist theory in anglophone geography at the turn of the twenty-first century. Second, the taming of marxism was not wholly effected by external forces; some of the impetus came from within marxism itself. Let us examine each of these arguments a little further.

Why was marxism's unprecedented and quite extraordinary dominance increasingly untenable by the late 1980s? Most fundamentally, the level of social and political struggle in the late 1970s and 1980s receded dramatically from the levels of a decade earlier. Marxism in anglophone geography was the direct product of wider social struggles rooted outside the academy, and these struggles were either won, receded or were absorbed. The anti-war movement (not to mention the Vietcong) effectively won US withdrawal from Vietnam; the victories of the civil rights and feminist movements were reincarnated and institutionalized as anti-discrimination and affirmative action statutes, sexual harassment legislation, and a plethora of other laws; environmentalism went even more mainstream; the upsurge of workers' struggles which toppled the conservative government in Britain in the early 1970s and challenged Nixon's industrial and wage control policies were defeated, first in the aftermath of the New York fiscal crisis in the 1970s and later in the disastrous 1985-86 miner's strike in Britain. There were periodic revolts – from Brixton and Toxteth in the 80s to Los Angeles in the 90s – and victories for some social movements – the Central American solidarity and the international antinuclear movements, for example – but these were generally decades of defeat, especially for the working class. The radical and critical impulse of marxist work was increasingly isolated within the academy as the political fires that fuelled marxist analyses burned less brightly. Marxist and radical scholars were also less connected to the struggles that did persist.

Closely connected to this increasing isolation of academic marxism from its sources of inspiration was the institutionalization of marxist research and marxist scholars themselves (Smith 2000b), what Michael Watts (2001) calls the "long march through the institutions". Strange as it may sound, the marxist insurgency in geography became fashionable and was eventually a victim of its own success. Some marxists were blacklisted in academia, of course, unable to get work because of their political views and actions, but in the 1980s and 1990s many of the early generation of graduate students and young faculty members also matured into tenured appointments – sometimes smoothly, sometimes only after a struggle. Whether out of desire or necessity or a mixture of both, they – we – accommodated ourselves in part to the power structures of which we were a part, and became increasingly professionalized. The establishment of a "Socialist Geographers Specialty Group" as part of the specialty group structure of the Association of American Geographers would never have happened without the intellectual force of *Antipode* or the organizational efficacy of the Union of Socialist Geographers (USG), and yet it simultaneously meant the death of the USG as an independent force (Katz 1999). As individuals we got tenure, some by the 1990s became chairs of departments, even deans and university

vice-chancellors. This certainly helped to broaden and deepen the influence of marxist ideas in anglophone geography in a positive way, but the institutionalization of marxist work in a period of increasingly tight academic job markets has also had the effect of blunting and integrating much potential political opposition within the discipline. It should be added that marxism is not unique in this regard; the powerful feminist geography tradition for example has experienced a similar institutionalization in the 1990s.

Taken together, the relative isolation from struggles and political organizing efforts and marxism's academic institutionalization provided convenient routes for many away from their marxist origins. This may be nowhere more obvious than in the so-called "LA school" of urban and economic geography which was built on a powerful application of marxist analytical insights in the 1980s. To the extent that this group had any brief coherence in the late 1980s and 1990s, it brought together figures such as Michael Davis, Michael Dear, Allen Scott, and Edward Soja, but it has now splintered entirely with only Davis holding on to a vibrant and always reinvented marxist analysis (Curry and Kenney 1999). Some have gravitated toward critical, liberal public policy while others have trumpeted the new idealism of cultural studies (Soja 1996; 2000). Still others have recoiled to a shrill, reactionary anti-marxism (Storper 2001).

Belatedly, counter-revolts did also come from within the geography establishment, backlashes against the putative influence of marxists in the profession. The merger between the Institute of British Geographers and the Royal Geographical Society (IBG/RGS) after 1995 had the effect, and for many the intent, of diluting the rising influence of marxists and other radicals in the IBG. That a professional organization at the end of the twentieth century would voluntarily renew its official royal patronage was shockingly regressive to many, raising the specter of geography in the service of a vanished empire. That the merger came with 40,000 pounds annual underwriting from Royal Dutch Shell was the last straw for many. Shell had been publicly indicted for its role in the Nigerian death sentence against poet Ken Saro-Wiwa and nine other Ogoni activists, and the merger, and the refusal of the IBG/RGS to refuse Shell funding, prompted dozens of geographers to resign in disgust from the new organization. Several years later, the leadership of the Association of American Geographers, whose journal, the *Annals*, had eventually come to reflect the energetic work of feminists and postmodernists along with marxists, wrested control of the journal from the editor and placed a quota on the number of social theory articles the *Annals* could publish.

The backlash against marxism is very real but by any reasonable standard, marxist research remains inordinately influential in the anglophone world and receives wide publicity (Byles 2001). Where it benefitted from uneven disciplinary development in the past, it now swims with much greater competition, which is not a wholly bad result. Although assumptions today are much more conservative and a new generation of scholars has developed a certain immunity *vis-à-vis* marxist theory and politics, it is also true that marxist work remains a baseline for wide swaths of research in anglophone geography.

But it is also true that marxist theory above all teaches the importance of interdisciplinary work; disciplines are only as useful as the questions they encourage and the answers they allow. As marxist-inspired geographical work is being read more and more widely outside the discipline, it may be that we are entering a period in anglophone geography where our major task and our major audience lies among those from whichever discipline who are recognizing that political change is necessarily a geographical project. Some of the most exciting current work already speaks across the borders that organize academic knowledge.

### **Marxist Geography Today: Scale, Labour Geography, Activism**

As marxist geography has settled into an established disciplinary role and as other influences have attracted theorists, the boundaries between marxist and other research have often become fuzzy. The major challenge for marxist work today is to take the wealth of insights generated from marxist explorations in and around geography during the last three decades and to apply these to the task of understanding and criticizing a highly dynamic geographical world, and formulating alternatives. The fashionability of global thinking, the new language of globalization since the 1980s, and popular appeals to the connections between global and local, all enhance the position of marxist geographical research to expose the ideological slant of much writing and thinking about global and local change, explore what alternatives might look like (Harvey 2000), and participate in a new generation of struggles aimed at building an anti-capitalist future. Several recent research themes emerging from marxist work in anglophone geography speak directly to these tasks, and two in particular have emerged within the last decade.

First there is the question of geographical scale. In the early 1970s, long before post-modernism and cultural studies made social constructionism fashionable in the social sciences and humanities, marxist critiques presented geographical space as a social product. The production of geographical scale is part of this process. Scale, it was argued, was neither simply a conceptual ordering device nor merely a methodological choice, but a socially produced metric that organizes social activity into geographically differentiated units – cities, regions, nation states, etc. (Herod 1991; Marston 2000; Brenner 1998; Smith 1984; 1992a; 1992b; 1995; Swyngedouw 1997; 2000). Socially produced scales both contain certain kinds of social activity, as when a national government controls its territorial domain through a police force, or by contrast it can empower social activity, as when a progressive movement captures city government and uses its power to promote alternative work, environmental, housing and other social relations – more broadly an alternative geography of possible futures. This was the importance of the “soviets” established from Seattle to Fife to Munich in 1919, but more recently it is the experience of Porto Alegre in Brazil whose progressive administration since the late 1990s has not only used its control of city government to empower the city’s workers but in 2001 hosted an “alternative summit” aimed at providing alternatives to the ruling visions of globalization presented at the annual Davos summit meetings in Switzerland.

The production of momentarily stable scales out of the flux of economic and political, social and cultural intercourse provide a spatial framework for the deployment of power and naturalization of some social assumptions rather than others. Thus foreign policy in the twentieth century was associated with the national scale – cities generally did not have foreign policies – and yet in mediaeval times, from West Africa to East Asia to the Mediterranean, foreign policy was precisely a function of the city state. The power of geographical scale is often hidden insofar as the naturalization of political relations to specific scales is successful, but precisely when certain scales of power come under threat, the politics of the production of scale become fully evident. There is no more political issue in Europe today than the construction of a new Europe, which is all about the reconstruction of state, economic and cultural power at the scale of the multinational rather than the national scale. To take a second example, when British prime minister Margaret Thatcher faced rising socialist opposition from within Britain's largest cities, her solution was to *abolish the scale* of metropolitan government. The socialists were left without a base, without a bounded scale within which popular empowerment could be established.

The importance of this way of thinking about geographical scale is that it provides a powerful alternative to the ideological narratives of globalization and localization. Most globalization discourse tends toward the assumption that a certain equalization of economic and cultural conditions is occurring across the world – American Express and McDonald's restaurants everywhere. One marxist response, in addition to noting the long history of a "globalization" endemic to capitalism, is to highlight the greater differentiation that the new globalism brings. The division of labour is intensely asserted and reorganized, often in quite vicious ways (Smith 1997). The question becomes one of developing a language for discussing the ways in which these social differences are translated into geographical differences and how, in turn, these landscape differences – say between city and suburb or between global North and global South – are used to mirror back a certain ideological naturalness of some kinds of social difference.

This way of thinking about scale also translates into political strategy insofar as political power is gained by successfully "jumping scale". The struggle over who has rights to use a city park, for example, generates broader political power insofar as the struggle is generalized to all parks in a city, or becomes a central issue in the city's politics; the establishment of a new Europe is precisely about jumping scale; the Porto Alegre alternative summit sought to jump scale from the urban to the global scale. How different scales are defined – who, for example, gets to define globalization today? – is intimately connected with whose interests are empowered by newly (re)constructed scales and whose interests are to be contained by scale.

A second and equally exciting departure in anglophonic geography is the emergence of labour geography. In the 1990s second generation marxist geographers began to critique established marxist work for focusing too much on the dynamics of capital and paying insufficient attention to labour, the working class, and the importance of political struggles

in the making of space and landscape. Aspatial treatments of class struggle are necessarily one-dimensional, or as Andy Herod (1991) has put it, "geography complicates class analysis". Earlier economic geographers might have described and tried to account for geographical differences in union organizing, activism, or the propensity to strike, but the point about labour geography is to begin to understand geographical differences and specific landscapes as the outcome of historical struggles (Herod 1997; 1998). Herod's work on dockers in the US entwines with analyses of scale to show the ways in which different scales of union contract bargaining contributed to the shifting scales of economic regionalism there. Johns (1994) documents the beginnings of a new internationalism in the historically nationalist and conservative US union movement while Wills (1996) examines the ways in which, in the context of several British strikes, traditions of unionism do and do not translate across space and time. Not all of this work focuses on union politics. Mitchell (1996) demonstrates the ways in which the struggles of largely migrant workers are a central ingredient in the making of the mid twentieth century picture-postcard California landscape. Tonkin (2000) reports on how women's struggles for jobs in the Wollongong steel industry induced new geographies of work.

Labour geography has not focused narrowly on workplace-centered politics. Examining the history of female-dominated US garment workers' unions from the 1920s through the 1940s, largely comprising immigrant women workers, Vural (1994) shows a correlation between a loss of political radicalism and a decision by male union leaders to de-emphasize organizing around housing, educational and other community issues in favour of workplace questions. Far from diluting labour politics, such community-oriented struggles, often led by women, reinforced union radicalism. The work of Jamie Peck (1996; Peck et. al. 2001) combines a focus on workplaces with state programs of social regulation and welfare.

I have highlighted questions of scale and labour geography here because they represent comparatively new and currently building initiatives. There are of course many other areas of research, and longer standing foci of marxist work continue to develop: the politicization of space and the spatialization of political activism (Swyngedouw 1999); geographies of development (Banerjee-Guha 1997; Watts 2000); nature and environment (Braun and Castree 1998); the intersection of marxist and feminist work (Katz 2001; McDowell 1999). Marxist cultural analyses have also become more sophisticated, especially where they interweave with political economic concerns (Mitchell 1996). But three other developments deserve attention insofar as they are explicitly geared not just to research but to activism.

In the first place, and directly connected to work in labour geography, a "People's Geography Project" has been established at Syracuse University. The purpose of this project is to translate the marxist, feminist and other radical research accomplished in geography over the last three decades into a series of books, videos and pamphlets on the "People's Geography of the United States". These will be accessible and easily readable by

the lay public ([www.peoplesgeography.org](http://www.peoplesgeography.org)). Second, although anglophone geographers have not always had extensive connections with others outside the English language sphere, that may be changing. The International Critical Geography (ICG) group, which held its inaugural conference in Vancouver in 1997, included participants from thirty countries on five continents, and the second ICG conference in Taegu, South Korea in 2000, was equally successful. Still very much in its infancy, the ICG includes a broad range of leftists in geography, marxists prominent among them, and seeks to provide an intellectual and political alternative to the established national organizations and annual conferences (<http://econgeog.misc.hit-u.ac.jp/icgg/>; Desbiens and Smith 1999; Ramirez 2000). Third, connected to questions of development and scale and especially in the wake of the Seattle uprising, a number of geographers have oriented their work toward the anti-globalization movement (Wainright et al. 2000; Fannin et. al. 2000). As the anti-globalization movement spreads and deepens, so too will the geographical research that this movement feeds and feeds on, forging a new connection between geographical research and activism.

## Conclusion

Especially in the United States, geography was a marginal academic discipline between the 1920s and 1960s, and geographical questions figured weakly in public political discourse. This geographic anemia was far from accidental but was, paradoxically, closely tied to the emergence of US global power. Whereas European colonialism depended on an intimate knowledge of physical and human geographical conditions across the globe, postwar US power was premised not on territorial possession but on control of global markets (Smith 2002). Not only was geographical knowledge somewhat dispensable, therefore (although not, of course, to the Pentagon or to the State Department) it was actually seen as dangerous insofar as US political and military strategy from Chile to Vietnam depended on a public lack of familiarity with such far away places. As long as the world's geography beyond US borders remained abstract and was filtered through a series of national and racist stereotypes, the US populace was unlikely to oppose US interventions.

The same political, economic and cultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s that destroyed the presumptions of the postwar world and laid the basis for the reconstructed "global world" of today also exposed the costs of geographical ignorance in the US. As the old geography continued to wither, marxist work led the reconstruction of a theoretically respectable comprehension of spatial and to a lesser extent environmental questions. Just as the despatialization of the US imaginary after the 1920s was simultaneously a depoliticization, the respatialization of that imaginary since the 1970s is equally a repoliticization. Only with the broad generalization of GIS technologies in the late 1980s did liberal and conservative establishment geographers begin to recapture some of the initiative. Unlike 30 years ago, many of the most pressing political issues today are framed in explicitly geographical terms: globalization, local autonomy, regional identities, the

supposed end of the nation state. This is a very threatening situation for established centres of power insofar as the inherent politics of these geographical issues is increasingly evident. Proponents of globalization have consequently fought very hard to argue that globalization renders geography irrelevant, takes us beyond geography – globalization, it is said, promises a global equalization of conditions and rewards. On the contrary, the central political issues involve an understanding of how geographical differences are reconstructed in such a way as to confirm social differences and to pass them off as inevitable, natural. More than ever, an understanding of the ways in which geographical scales are established, maintained, eroded and reconstructed, and the social and political work that geographical scales do, would seem to be crucial to the formulation of political strategies aimed at alternative future.

On the other hand, marxist analysis is no guarantee of an appropriately spatialized politics. In their otherwise impressive analysis of globalization, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) suggest that a new kind of global *Empire* has emerged in which power emanates from a virtual and discontinuous global network. Economic, political and cultural power do not reside anywhere in particular but simply inhabit this network of connections. In this vital respect, therefore – by insisting on the anonymity and spacelessness of power – this argument actually mirrors the most intense ideological claims of globalization's proponents. Marxists trained in geography, by contrast, not only recognize the recasting of scaled geographies – from the scale of the body to the trans-planetary – as an intensely political process but, conversely, understand the implicit spatiality of political power.

As the world changes, marxism needs to continually reinvent itself to deal with new realities. This may be the biggest challenge. Globalization is a case in point. Never was there a more urgent need for marxist analyses to adopt an explicitly spatialized vision for the purpose of more deeply comprehending the politics of this new phase of capital accumulation and thinking about alternatives. It is insufficient to point out, correctly, that globalization is not new but is endemic to capitalism, but it is equally insufficient to accept the capitalist hype that we are in a new age once again. If the still youthful and evolving history of marxism in anglophonic geography teaches us anything, it is surely that the most radical of ideas are susceptible to being co-opted and that in order to stay radical, deeply critical, there is no alternative but to continually reinvent marxism.

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