Chapter 30

Class
Part II

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What Questions is "Class" the Answer to?

Lamenting the apparent decline of class analysis in geography, Neil Smith (2000) asks "What happened to class?" The answer turns out to be that class has been displaced in favor of identity-based, culturalist approaches to understanding inequality and power. Smith calls for a revival of class as a focus of unifying analysis in an era when "neoliberalism" is restoring class power with a vengeance. Smith's argument belongs to a broader genre of left-criticism which opposes "Class," understood as a material, objectively economic vector of social power, to "Identity," understood as more subjective, and based on non-economic forms of power. For example, David Harvey criticizes political philosophies of cosmopolitanism because they focus on all sorts of diversities and differences "except the central difference that really matters: class power and its associated social inequalities" (Harvey 2009: 115). This critical genre acknowledges that there are plural sources of harm, inequality, and injustice in the world. It just presumes in advance that some of these are more fundamental than others, analytically and politically.

In geography the question "what happened to class?" really means "whatever happened to Marxism?" And *class* was never quite as central to geography's radical trajectory in the 1970s and 1980s as Smith's lament would have everyone believe. For a long time in geography "the key analytic has tended to be capital rather than labor, a focus which has often bypassed a broader interpretation of class, its subjectivities and materialities, and its lived experiences" (Stenning 2008: 9). The

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prevalence of capital-logic styles of conceptualization in geography's canonical Marxism is indicative of a division between different ways of ordering concepts. Some approaches theorize "vertically," deriving orders of temporal, causal, or normative priority from layered architectures of abstraction and concretization. This style of theory has generated some of the most important geographical work on "the urbanization of capital" and "the production of space." But you can also theorize horizontally, as it were, in terms of the articulation of different processes alongside one another. In this respect, it is notable that in the work of Doreen Massey (1984), *class-formation* rather than *capital* remains a more fundamental category of explanation than in other styles of Marxist geography, and for that very reason this work has been able to integrate other social relations and dimensions of inequality into a ~~conjectural~~ conceptualization of the spatiality of politics in a genuinely pluralistic way.

Class is certainly a flourishing topic of research in geography (McDowell 2006, Dowling 2009). This is because ways have been found of ~~looking at~~ those processes that geography's canonical Marxism has always struggled with: class as a lived, experiential dimension of everyday life, often studied ethnographically in contexts of housing, education, political organization, or employment, (e.g. Bridge 2006, Jeffrey 2010, McDowell 2009), and always with an understanding of the ways in which class intersects with (e.g. Valentine 2007) or "articulates" with other processes of racial formation, gender divisions of labor, or state formation (e.g. Chari 2004, Hart 2007), and situated historically in the politics of collective action and the geographies of labor (e.g. Griffin 2009, Revill 2005). At the same time, class is a central concern of quantitative spatial science, focused as it is on enduring patterns of inequality and whether or not these help to explain behaviors such as voting or relative life chances (e.g. Dorling 2008).

Rather than asking "whatever happened to class" as if there is only one thing to which class as a concept can refer to, Wright (2005) suggests that the way to proceed is to ask: "If 'class' is the answer, what is the question?" He identities six "anchoring" questions to which "class" might emerge as an important part of the answer:

- How are people objectively located in distributions of material inequality?
- What explains how people, individually and collectively, subjectively locate themselves and others within a structure of inequality?
- What explains inequalities in life chances and material standards of living?
- What social cleavages systematically shape overt conflicts?
- How should we characterize and explain the variations across history in the social organization of inequalities?
- What sorts of transformations are needed to eliminate oppression and exploitation within capitalist societies?

In geography, quite a lot of research is anchored by variations of the first three questions. But the headline debates in which "class" is invoked or dismissed most forcefully revolve around different versions of the last three questions. Debates about "class" matter in geography because they have been central to contested visions of where inequality and injustice come from, and how they are~~,~~ and should be politicized.

Making "Class" the Answer to an Obsolete Question

In order to develop the sort of analysis suggested by Wright's focus on the questions to which "class" is meant to be the answer, it is worth focusing in on the work of David Harvey. Harvey's reconstruction of Marxism as *historical-geographical materialism* has been focused on transforming explanations of the variability of inequality and injustice over time *and* space – based on the assumption that the capital/labor relation is the central antagonism driving social conflict and deducing a privileged pathway to emancipation from this assumption. Harvey's emphasis has been on tracking reconfigurations in the production and appropriation of surplus, the distinguishing conceptual focus of Marxist class analysis. Harvey's work helps to disrupt and displace a classical Marxist teleology in which more and more inequality is generated by the appropriation of the labor power of property-less workers through capital's control over the labor process. The process of *exploitation*, rooted in an understanding of Marx's labor theory of value, certainly remains the core dynamic of capitalist development in Harvey's work. But Harvey's Marxism is concerned with how this core social relation of class is both dependent upon and displaced across various spatial-temporal practices beyond the labor process as such. The names and concepts for this process of displacement have been elaborated over time – from a theory of capitalist crisis cycled through secondary and tertiary *circuits of capital* (Harvey 1982) to the *urbanization of capital* (Harvey 1985), from *postmodern flexibilization* (Harvey 1989) to neoliberalized *accumulation through dispossession* (Harvey 2005). In Harvey's historical geography of the capitalist present, inequality is generated across a distributed system for the production, appropriation, exchange and distribution of surplus ~~labor~~. The flip-side of Harvey's *displacement* of the logics of capital accumulation into spatially and temporally distributed networks of relative mobility and fixity, is that class as a potential focal point for cultural and political identification is consistently disrupted and fragmented. The stories Harvey tells about the urbanization of consciousness, about postmodernism as a form of generalized cognitive dissonance, and about the politically disorienting and fetishizing effects of neoliberal financialization are all shaped by a phenomenological sensitivity to the changing spatial and temporal rhythms through which "experience" itself is configured.

If Harvey's analysis of accumulation has emphasized the multiple dynamics through which surplus is extracted and appropriated, and if his cultural theory has always emphasized the multiple dimensions of identification generated by living under capitalist social relations, then the framing presumption of these analyses has remained a search for a single principle of universalization. The presumption that contentious politics can and should converge on a single, unified focus of global struggle, and that the principle of this universalization (i.e. "Class") can be decided upon through the abstract theoretical deductions of Marxist theories of capital accumulation and the production of space, is indicative of an imbalance between diagnostic critique and normative reconstruction that characterizes radical geography (Sayer 1995). This imbalance is related to the difficulty that capital-logic styles of Marxism have with thinking about *politics* in a strongly constitutive sense, a problem that bedevils Marxist class theory more generally. This is best illustrated by the inadequate attention given by this tradition of thought to conceptualizing

the political agency of "capital." For example, in Harvey's influential narrative of neoliberalism as a political project aimed at restoring "class power," capital's internal imperatives of accumulation are assumed to be directly voiced by "the state." This reflects a longer habit of thought in which the state has only ever been theorized as a functional adjunct to collective-action problems which capital faces in securing the conditions of extended accumulation (e.g. Harvey 2001).

The elision of the analysis of class-formation "from above" is the condition of the assumption in this style of Marxism that the generality of capitalist social relations reflects a coherent strategy of universalization. This in turn leads to the insistence on finding a universalizing principle of equivalence across all social struggles which can match the apparent "universal" scope and reach of capital's singular capacity for self-expression. There is therefore a pivotal ambivalence between Harvey's systematic analysis of the displacements of capital accumulation through urbanized, financialized, monetized infrastructures, and his own gloss on these conceptualizations when it comes to programmatic statements about possibilities of political action. The spatialized analysis of capitalist development seems to challenge fundamental assumptions about class-formation in the Marxist heritage. For example, Harvey (2005) conceptualizes neoliberalism with reference to the concept of accumulation by dispossession, referring to practices of privatization, deregulation, and the financialization of debt which transfers publicly or commonly held assets and resources into private property. This analysis reiterates the lesson that the accumulation of capital is not always and everywhere teleologically oriented towards the extraction of relative surplus value anchored in the deepening of the wage-relation and transformations of the labor process – there are diverse strategies of surplus extraction and appropriation which can and do co-exist in space and time. In Harvey's narrative, nevertheless, accumulation by dispossession is presented as a coherent strategy that has the effect of fragmenting and particularizing social conflicts which could *in principle* be unified around a class-based identification.

In short, Harvey's analysis indicates that social cleavages should not be expected always and everywhere to form around the central antagonism of exploitation in the labor process, that is, in terms of "class" as it is understood in classical Marxism. But more fundamentally, the silences and elisions in this account indicate that there is no good reason for supposing that these dynamics of conflict should be conceptualized as *diverging* from that classical problematic either. Harvey's invocation of "class" as a universalizing focal point of political identification runs against the force of the very argument presented. And anyway, it turns out that "materialist" class analysis has itself undermined assumptions that would lead one to suppose that a singular term such as "Class" must always be provided in answer to the question "what sorts of transformations are needed to eliminate oppression and exploitation within capitalist societies?"

Class Isn't What It Used To Be (and It Never Was)

In the history of Marxist social theory, there has developed a whole conceptual vocabulary of fetishism and reification and false consciousness and repressive desublimation and ideological interpellation to account for the "voluntary servitude" by which capitalist exploitation has been *legitimized* through the active consent of

those whose labor is the source of profit and who are also the primary victims of injustice. Complex vocabularies of space and spatiality emerge from this same theoretical problematic of the reproduction of capitalist social relations despite their contradictory effects. Issues of space and urbanization first enter the lexicon of Western Marxism to help account for "the survival of capitalism" (Lefebvre 1976), and a prevalent model of critique in human geography depends on the assumption that the reason that "thinking spatially" matters so much is because particular spatial ontologies (flat, bounded, territorialized ones) function *ideologically* – they "legitimize" existing power relations by essentializing and naturalizing contingent relationships of inequality, exploitation and oppression.

In contrast to this ideological problematic that defined so much Western Marxism in the twentieth-century is a historical tradition of thought in which "culture" has been understood as a field for the self-expression of working class experiences, grievances and aspirations – as "a whole way of struggle" or "whole way of conflict," in E.P. Thompson's Marxist "correction" of what became a more famous formulation by Raymond Williams (1961). Thompson helped inaugurate a startlingly assertive view of working-class formation as a process of pro-active "making" that seemed at least to escape the classical scheme in which the working class could only become a self-conscious subject "for-itself" once it been objectively constituted as a "class-in-itself" through the development of industrial capitalism. One of the most important recent contributions, and challenges to the expressive paradigm of working-class history, at which Thompson stands at the apex, is the recent work of Carolyn Steedman on domestic service in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England. Not only were the vast majority of the workforce in the period normally thought so central to the emergence and consolidation of industrial capitalism involved in non-industrial service work, but the intimate relationships to servants were pivotal to the ways in which ideals of self-hood, labor, and rights were conceived in this period (Steedman 2003). Steedman (2007: 41–42) argues that the elision of domestic servants is in fact a central condition of the development of the labor theory of value from Adam Smith through to Marx. This theory revolves around the banishment of types of work, which do not lead to the production of commodities separable from the laborer, from the realm of properly "productive" labor in the sense of being directly consumed in the course of production for the valorization of capital.

Steedman challenges a whole set of inherited conceptual problems around the relationships between work, culture, and politics. Crucially, she locates the lived sense of grievance that arose from everyday experiences of intimate, caring service work for others (and their children) as central to the emergence of working-class self-hood in this period. Steedman argues that her own work on domestic service and recent work on the historiography of the "Black Atlantic" systems of slave labor challenge the centrality accorded to industrial production as the norm around which class formation is theorized in the Marxist tradition. In short, class formation – even if still understood as rooted in practices of deploying labor for the production and appropriation of surplus – turns out to have a markedly different history from the one that has served as the conceptual framework for the analysis of the class formation and class-based politics in the Marxist tradition. This argument is bolstered by analysis of the restructuring of labor and employment in

"post-Fordist" and "neoliberalized" economies, which are dominated by low-paid insecure employment across sectors. This two-pronged revisionary movement in thinking about the material organization of the central process identified by Marxist class analysis – surplus extraction – shows how "incredibly partial and potentially distortive" the normative model of social formation based on industrial capitalism based on waged work in manufacturing has been (Eley 2007: 168). And opening up understandings of class-formation to a much wider array of practices of surplus extraction and labor coercion beyond the restriction to wage labor in the industrial labor process means that "Class" need not be thought of as the necessary universalizing principle around which "class politics" might emerge. What might still be thought of as the "hidden injuries of class" turn out to have been historically expressed through claims for "the right to be human" (Gilroy 2009) which have been rooted in experiences of oppressive labor systems never conformed to a model of the real subsumption of the wage-laborer to the control of capital in the industrialized labor process.

These revisions in how class-formation is conceptualized matter beyond those fields in geography where class itself is an explicit object of research because they point to a fundamental fault line across the field of critical social theory. Geography's canonical Marxism remains one of the few fields of critical social theory where the epistemological, empirical, and normative image of revolutionary political agency – where the proletariat is the bearer of universal values by virtue of its inherent interest in overthrowing capitalism – remains intact. Axel Honneth (Fraser and Honneth 2003: 239) suggests that recent social theory takes different routes out of this "production paradigm," shaped by a shared concern relocating the sources for the possibility of transformative political agency. First, in "normatively charged" accounts of the human psyche, drives, or the vitalism of the bodies, transformative agencies are relocated to deeper ontological levels of one sort or other. Second, emancipatory and transformative potentials are relocated to different sorts of action, other than labor, the form of action privileged in Marxist social theory; here, the main reference point is Jürgen Habermas reconstruction of critical social theory around an action-theoretic model of communicatively mediated interaction. Honneth's account of the relocation of the sources of critical social theory's normative force resonates with the argument of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005: xxiv–xxv) regarding two distinctive metaphysics of the social world that underwrite contemporary critical social theory. In one of these, characteristic of Marxist structuralism of the 1970s and Deleuzian inflected theories, the focus is on diverse relations of force that shape institutions and practices. From this perspective, the social is understood to exist on a single plane of immanence, and so the normative dimensions of social life are of little concern to it. A second strand, again associated with Habermas, does integrate the determinative role of normative practices – of law and morality – into its view of the social field.

Of the two trajectories of critical social theory identified above, critical human geography has cleaved more closely to the immanentist tradition. The ontological register of this tradition lends itself to geography's existing conventions of constructing alternative spatial ontologies. The action-theoretic strand has had a subordinate role in the discipline's recent theoretical adventures. This relative imbalance in attention is illustrated by influence of styles of Post-Marxist thought still haunted by the

epistemological and political hang-ups of the tradition of class reductionism they appear to depart from.

Ontology is Not An Answer to Political Questions

The most influential style of post-Marxist thought in human geography is indebted to the reconceptualization of hegemony developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985). This is one source of a broader flowering of interest in concepts of "the political" as a distinctive ontological seam or layer, defined by relations of struggle, conflict, dissensus and agonism. Emerging from the breakdown of previous paradigms of class analysis which attempted to salvage ~~some~~ sense of the determination in the last instance by economic relations while making room for ~~some~~ constitutive role for politics and ideology in shaping class struggle, concepts of "the political" in this post-Marxist vein of thought end up granting politics an absolute, as distinct from merely relative, degree of autonomy from other practices. Laclau and Mouffe laid the basis for a distinctive conceptualization of the political field as entirely shaped by the contingent relations held together in discourse, where discourse is understood as a semiotic field for the articulation of *meanings*. Words such as "freedom," "the people," or "democracy" function as "empty signifiers," as the contingent-universals around which disparate struggles are linked into temporary chains of equivalence. This is actually not a theory of discourse at all; it is a theory of politics as a practice of *naming*. In this tradition of political theory, the social field is freed from the strictures of class reductionism only to be reduced to an effect of political strategy, a reduction only further enhanced by geography's embrace of theories of governmentality indebted to Foucault's analysis of modern political rationalities.

Where does this sort of ~~P~~post-Marxism leave the concept of "class" then? In the anti-essentialist class analysis developed by Resnick and Wolff (1987: 25), class is reduced to an arbitrary conceptual *entry-point*, which is not at any cost to be to be confused with a causal essence. This understanding of the epistemological pitfalls and potentials of Marxist class analysis (stalked by the ghost of Louis Althusser) has been developed in geography by Gibson-Graham (1996), who pluralize the points of identification around which the intersections of economic and non-economic practices generate political mobilization. But this strand of thought is marked by the conflation of different senses of "essentialism:" it is assumed that various harms associated with essentialized views of race, or sexuality, or gender, are legitimized by epistemological essentialisms rooted in notions of explanatory causality. And this conflation reiterates a long-standing inflation of the importance of having the correct epistemology to ensure good politics, only now the proper epistemology is one of contingency and "over determination."

Post-Marxist accounts of "the political," hegemony, and ~~over-determination~~ certainly represent a genuine pluralization of conceptualizations of the sources of inequality and injustice. While sometimes choosing class as an entry point, these approaches neither suppose that class is a necessary point of political identification and nor do they suppose other sources of inequality are derivative of or subordinate to class-based forms. They do however, retain the long-standing "ideological" emphasis on thinking of social formations~~,~~ as sutured together through the constitution of political subjectivities at the level of meaning and, more recently, of "affect."

There is a second strand of post-Marxist theory associated with a tradition of European political thought that develops a critique of the classical Marxist privileging of the industrial proletariat as the universal subject of emancipation. Rooted in a tradition of Italian *autonomista* thought ~~are~~ most fully developed by ~~Toni~~ Negri, it focuses on a concept of "immaterial labor" and a provocative interpretation of Marx's *Grundrisse*, sifted through the lens of Spinoza and Deleuze. A key concept to emerge from this field of work is that of "precarity." Precarity is a concept that links empirically observable transformations of work (Castree *et al*. 2003, McDowell and Christopherson 2009, Ross 2009), into a revisionist history of the present as marking a decisive new stage in the development of capitalism characterized by the emergence of new forms of political subjectivity such as the "precariat" and "the multitude" (Gill and Pratt 2009). Arguing that capitalism is now characterized by the dominance of knowledge and information, this tradition of political analysis underscores the sense that industrial capitalism and Fordist social formations are neither typical nor a *telos* of capitalist development (Neilsen and Rossiter 2009).

Behind the stated commitments to the multiple dimensions of political subjectivity, there remains in this tradition a resolutely monist imagination linking economic processes to cultural and political practices. It belongs to a long-standing lineage of Marxist thought in which it is not laborers themselves but the structure of socialized labor in general which assures the immanent possibility of the overcoming of capitalism. The argument that the informational, knowing, cognitive dimensions of labor are more and more important to the dynamics of capital accumulation (Thrift 2005) is worked-up by this distinctive strand of still-quite-Marxist thought into an argument about the deepening and extension of the "real subsumption" of labor to capital to include the whole field of social reproduction, education, and popular culture. It therefore retains a privileged focus on the analysis of logics of surplus extraction and appropriation. The distinctive concern with re-theorizing subjectivity in affective terms, rather than discursively, remains rooted to the idea that social formations are sutured all the way down by "getting at" people's beliefs, desires, and feeling. From this perspective, neoliberalism is as a process by which the state facilitates the emergence of a new form of marketized, financialized capitalism *and* the generation new type of individual appropriate to this new form (Lazzarato 2009).

What is most distinctive about this capacious account of the condition of political transformation "after the end of work" (see Grantner 2009, Vandenberghe 2002) is the optimistic interpretation of the political significance of contemporary transformations of capitalism. Writers such as Hardt and Negri (2000), Virno (2004), and Gorz (2010) discern in the dynamics of immaterial labor, precarity, and knowledge capitalism the already present possibilities of fundamental transformation~~; just~~ not in the image in which it has previously been pictured by the Marxist revolutionary tradition. The gravediggers generated by the immanent logics of capitalist development are no longer the proletariat; the new political subject generated by this phase of capitalist development turns out to be a revivified version of Spinoza's figure of "the multitude," a figure for a mode of dispersed collective action which retains its constitutive diversity while managing to address affairs in "common." So it turns out that the way out of the impasses of Marxist analyses of class politics is to displace the animating questions of this tradition to an ontological level in which

both the dynamics of capitalism and the resistance to capitalism emerge immanently from the same type of action. Which means that not a lot of thought has to be put in to thinking about the hard-work that goes into political organization in ~~these changed~~ political-economic conditions (cf. Wills 2008).

Political theories of "hegemony" and of "the multitude" squeeze normativity out of the social and political fields, under the weight of ontologies of abundance, immanence, and lack; or of purely strategic understandings of political identification. But this ontologization of politics is really an evasion: "There is no transitivity between ontology and politics" (Critchley 2007: 105). But to register the full implications of this thought, we need to shift theoretical terrain.

Why "Class" Isn't the Only Answer to Questions about Emancipation

Geographers' have contributed to projects which multiply the modes of surplus extraction and appropriation through which inequalities and injustices are understood to be structured. Geography's debates about these matters since the late 1980s have been framed in terms of a series of overlapping binary oppositions: class versus identity, economy versus culture, materiality versus discourse. But there are other routes through these same issues, routes which invite a more thorough overhaul of the social-theoretic assumptions inherited from Marxist theory. What defines these traditions, returning to Wright's anchoring questions, is a focus on the variable combination of *plural* sources of inequality and injustice, rather than restricting themselves to identifying multiple variations on a single dynamic of surplus extraction which continues to define a Marxist "entry-point" into these issues. We have seen that some strands of post-Marxist analysis also open themselves up to this sense of plural sources of inequality. But they remain wedded to a reproduction problematic in which functionalist concepts of subjectivity continue to exert powerful influence. In contrast, the broad family of social theory I have in mind – it would include thinkers such as Luc Boltanski, Pierre Bourdieu, Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, Hans Joas, Michael Mann, Charles Tilly, Loic Wacquant – is defined by a concern with understanding the rationalities of different forms of action through which the social field is coordinated (see Joas and Knöbl 2009).

The difference between *cultural* theories centered on concepts of subjectivity and *social* theories centered on concepts of action has largely been overlooked in geography's debates about the significance or otherwise of Marxist theory. This is indicative of the sidelining of the second of the two routes out of the "production paradigm" discussed above; the route which pluralizes forms of action beyond a privileging of *labor* to include *communication* (Fraser and Honneth 2003: 246–247). Axel Honneth's own project to reconstruct the normative foundations of critical social theory synthesizes the emphasis on affective dimensions of subjectivity developed by theorists of immanence with the Habermasian emphasis on the rationalization of different forms of action. Honneth retains from Habermas the emphasis on the normative expectations built into communicative relationships through which social life is coordinated. He departs from Habermas in arguing that we should not equate "the normative potential of social interaction with the linguistic conditions of reaching understanding free from domination" (Honneth 2007: 70).

He re-centers the normative core of critical social theory on the dynamics of *recognition*, which has affective, embodied aspects which the Habermasian emphasis on the cognitive dimensions of communication fails to credit. There is "a core of expectations of recognition that all subjects bring to social interaction" (Fraser and Honneth 2003: 247). Social conflicts emerge when these expectations are systematically undermined and flouted. The central claim of this approach is that ~~it is~~ felt experiences of *disrespect* ~~which~~ animate transformative political agency, experiences which draw on "intuitive notions of justice violated" (Honneth 2007: 11).

The concept of recognition which Honneth develops is rooted in the history of class analysis: Hegel's account of labor as the scene for recognition and misrecognition. Honneth pluralizes this struggle for recognition beyond the social relations of labor to which it has been classically contained by Marxist theory, to include plural forms of disrespect. In the shift from a linguistically-oriented theory of communicative action to a philosophical anthropology of recognition, he also rejects the economism of Marxism which frames recognition in epistemological terms of grasping objectively shared common interests. Honneth (1995: 160–170) argues that there are three analytically distinct dimensions of recognition which are essential to identity-formation: emotional concerns; rights-based concerns; and social esteem. This framework informs a diagnosis of the multiple social pathologies generated by contemporary capitalist modernity, which revolve around multiple forms of disrespect: violations of the body, denials of rights, and denigrations of ways of life (Honneth 1995: 131–139).

While Honneth emphasizes the affective dimensions of recognition and disrespect, this analysis does not remain on a single plane of immanence. The affective dimensions of disrespect have "cognitive potential:" "the injustice of disrespect does not inevitably *have to* reveal itself but merely ~~"~~*can*" (Honneth 2005: 138). This argument points in the direction of an analysis of the role of political movements in articulating "intuitive senses of justice violated," one which departs markedly from the idea of the contingent suturing together of identities around empty signifiers. Honneth's point is that analysis of mobilization and movement formation needs to be attentive to the "dynamics of moral experiences" animating social conflicts. This "experiential" framing of the communicative dynamics of movement formation has been developed also by other thinkers working a Habermasian vein of thought, such as James Bohman, John Dryzek, Nancy Fraser, and Iris Marion Young, all of whom investigate the ways in which the "cognitive potentials" of the dynamics of disrespect are *geographically* articulated in and through movement politics (see Scheuerman 2006). Honneth's project also has affinities with Andrew Sayer's (2005) account of the "moral significance of class." Sayer argues that recognition "is thoroughly materialized in the distribution of material goods" A key implication of this linking of recognition and distribution cuts to the heart of the issue most at stake in different perspectives on how class matters in social theory. Sayer argues that social scientists must take seriously "lay normativity," by which he means the ordinary sense of "what matters" to people; what goods and valued ways of life they strive towards and for which they seek recognition. This injunction requires us to break with the understanding of social power that informs one-tier ontologies of pure immanence, for as Sayer (2005: 6) argues, the struggles of the social field are not only about habitual actions or the pursuit of power – they are

crucially shaped by the disputes over the things which matter to people (e.g. Skeggs 2004~~, 2009~~; Tilly 2008).

The pluralization of power and justice is also a feature of the style of "pragmatist" French social theory pioneered by Luc Boltanski and "the conventions school" of economic sociology. This tradition reinserts a concern with ordinary normative action into the overwhelmingly strategic, even cynical, view of power developed by social theorists such as Bourdieu and Foucault. It seeks "to take seriously the imperative to justify that underlies the possibility of coordinating human behavior" (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006: 37). For Boltanski and Thévenot, this commitment leads to an empirical program of investigating ~~the movement across~~ different "orders of worth" through which practices are coordinated, challenged, and criticized (cf. Stark 2009). Boltanski and Chiapello (2005a) develop this theoretical framework of situated practices of justification and "orders of worth" into a fully-fledged retheorization of the dynamics of capitalist modernity, in which capitalism is not so much *crisis-dependent* as it is *critique-dependent*: "In obliging capitalism to justify itself, critique compels it to strengthen the mechanisms of justice it contains, and to refer to certain kinds of common good in whose service it claims to be placed." Practices of justification are understood not as mere ideological superstructures, but as constitutive coordinating devices ~~by~~ which exert constraints on accumulation processes.

A crucial feature of this conceptualization is the distinction between two senses of "legitimate" that runs through modern social theory, going back to Max Weber. In one sense, *legitimation* is understood as a process of "retrospective concealment," an understanding quite compatible with Marxist theories of ideology. This understanding of legitimation remains remarkably resilient in critical human geography, lending itself to the academic vocation of unmasking the real interests beneath mere appearances. In a second sense, *legitimacy* is the key concept, one which acknowledges the communicative, coordinating relevance of normative arguments. Boltanski and Chiapello's orientation to issues of legitimacy rather than legitimation re-opens a route to understanding what Marxism and ~~P~~post-Marxism think~~s~~ of as "hegemony" – the power-infused coordination of social action in space and time – as a process in which actors orient themselves to structured fields of choices (cf. Przeworski 1985). Taking justificatory practices seriously means that it is possible to acknowledge that different "spirits" of capitalism legitimize particular patterns of accumulation, but in so doing they also make possible the mobilization against certain forms of accumulation which are presumptively less just, less legitimate (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005b).

Paralleling Honneth's phenomenology of the multiples harms of misrecognition, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005a: 36–43) identify four different and irreconcilable "sources of indignation" that provoke criticism: capitalism as a source of disenchantment and inauthenticity; as a source of oppression; as a source of poverty and inequality; and as a source of opportunism and egoism. Each of these normative reference points provides a critical fulcrum which generates demands for justification. Boltanski and Chiapello argue that since the possibility of critique is internally related to the demand for justification, capitalism adjusts by responding unevenly to irreconcilable forms of criticism. These four types of criticism coalesce into two broad strands of critique, developed by coalitions of different social actors: an

artistic critique combines the criticism of disenchantment and inauthenticity with the criticism of oppression, which emphasizes alienation, loss of meaning, the destruction of creativity; and a *social critique* which combines the critique of the egoism of private interests with the critique of the impoverishment. In Boltanski and Chiapello's reinterpretation of capitalist mutations since the 1960s, capitalism mutates by responding to the artistic critique. But the key point of their argument is that "evading a certain type of critique often occurs at the cost of satisfying criticisms of a different kind," which means that the processes of critique, justification and adjustment is never total nor complete; in their analysis, the social critique of capitalism is reconfigured and reasserted in response to the adjustments made to satisfy the artistic critique.

Conclusion

This chapter has tracked the ways in which various shifts in social theory – towards ontology, to theories of action, to practice-based concepts, to ethnographic styles of research, to culture, to conceptualizing "the political" – follow from attempts to escape the social-theoretical straightjacket imposed by a tradition of Marxist class analysis. In geography, it is certainly true that a great deal of conceptual innovation has been shaped by a perceived need to escape from what Thrift (2007: 23) calls "remorselessly monopolistic accounts of capitalism that act as a kind of intellectual and political bulldozer." But when geographers have focused on the limitations of Marxist concepts of accumulation or class politics, it has often been in an ontologized register of culture, the political, and materiality which leaves in place some of the most problematic assumptions of Marxist theory about how the social field is coordinated and transformed. Proponents of "class" as the universal principle of equivalence with the potential to unify otherwise disparate struggles, as well as the prevalent approaches that seek a way out of the totalizing ambitions on this particular Marxist shibboleth, hold to epistemic understandings of the dynamics of human agency which always lead back to the belief that the social field hangs together, and must be transformed, by "getting at" people's beliefs, desires and feelings without them knowing it. This is a legacy of theorizing about *subjectivity* rather than *action*, a trace of one particular trajectory out of Marxist analyses of politics. The reason these issues still matter, then, is because different ways of settling accounts with this heritage inform different understandings of the public spaces of critique: accounts which proclaim contingency and multiplicity are easily embodied in an ethos of revelatory education and aesthetic disruption, while those concerned with plural rationalities of action inform a more modest position in which academic knowledge is one voice in an open space of plural disputes about what matters.

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