

for space

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1 opening propositions

This book makes the case for an alternative approach to space. It has both the virtue, and all the disadvantages, of appearing obvious. Yet the ruminations above, and much that is to come, imply that it still needs elaborating.

It is easiest to begin by boiling it down to a few propositions. They are the following. *First*, that we recognise space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny. (This is a proposition which will come as no surprise at all to those who have been reading recent anglophone geographical literature.) *Second*, that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity. Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space. If space is indeed the product of interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality. Multiplicity and space as co-constitutive. *Third*, that we recognise space as always under construction. Precisely because space on this reading is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far.

Now, these propositions resonate with recent shifts in certain quarters in the way in which progressive politics can also be imagined. Indeed it is part of my argument, not just that the spatial is political (which, after many years and much writing thereupon, can be taken as given), but rather that thinking the spatial in a particular way can shake up the manner in which certain political questions are formulated, can contribute to political arguments already under way, and – most deeply – can be an essential element in the imaginative structure which enables in the first place an opening up to the very sphere of the political. Some of these possibilities can already be drawn out from the brief statement of propositions. Thus, although it would be incorrect, and too rigidly constraining, to propose any simple one-to-one mapping, it is possible to elucidate



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from each a slightly different aspect of the potential range of connections between the imagination of the spatial and the imagination of the political.

Thus, *first*, understanding space as a product of interrelations chimes well with the emergence over recent years of a politics which attempts a commitment to anti-essentialism. In place of an individualistic liberalism or a kind of identity politics which takes those identities as already, and for ever, constituted, and argues for the rights of, or claims to equality for, those already-constituted identities, this politics takes the constitution of the identities themselves and the relations through which they are constructed to be one of the central stakes of the political. 'Relations' here, then, are understood as embedded practices. Rather than accepting and working with already-constituted entities/identities, this politics lays its stress upon the relational constructedness of things (including those things called political subjectivities and political constituencies). It is wary therefore about claims to authenticity based in notions of unchanging identity. Instead, it proposes a relational understanding of the world, and a politics which responds to that.

The politics of interrelations mirrors, then, the first proposition, that space too is a product of interrelations. Space does not exist prior to identities/entities and their relations. More generally I would argue that identities/entities, the relations 'between' them, and the spatiality which is part of them, are all co-constitutive. Chantal Mouffe (1993, 1995), in particular, has written of how we might conceptualise the relational construction of political subjectivities. For her, identities and interrelations are constituted together. But spatiality may also be from the beginning integral to the constitution of those identities themselves, including political subjectivities. Moreover, specifically spatial identities (places, nations) can equally be reconceptualised in relational terms. Questions of the geographies of relations, and of the geographies of the necessity of their negotiation (in the widest sense of that term) run through the book. If no space/place is a coherent seamless authenticity then one issue which is raised is the question of its internal negotiation. And if identities, both specifically spatial and otherwise, are indeed constructed relationally then that poses the question of the geography of those relations of construction. It raises questions of the politics of those geographies and of our relationship to and responsibility for them; and it raises, conversely and perhaps less expectedly, the potential geographies of our social responsibility.

Second, imagining space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity resonates with the greater emphasis which has over recent years in political discourses of the left been laid on 'difference' and heterogeneity. The most evident form which this has taken has been the insistence that the story of the world cannot be told (nor its geography elaborated) as the story of 'the West' alone nor as the story of, for instance, that classic figure (ironically frequently itself essentialised) of the white, heterosexual male; that these were particular stories among many (and that their understanding through the eyes



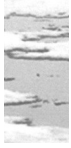
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of the West or the straight male is itself specific). Such trajectories were part of a complexity and not the universals which they have for so long proposed themselves to be.

The relationship between this aspect of a changing politics (and manner of doing social theory) and the second proposition about space is of a rather different nature from in the case of the first proposition. In this case, the argument is that the very possibility of any serious recognition of multiplicity and heterogeneity itself depends on a recognition of spatiality. The political corollary is that a genuine, thorough, spatialisation of social theory and political thinking can force into the imagination a fuller recognition of the simultaneous coexistence of others with their own trajectories and their own stories to tell. The imagination of globalisation as a historical queue does not recognise the simultaneous coexistence of other histories with characteristics that are distinct (which does not imply unconnected) and futures which potentially may be so too.

Third, imagining space as always in process, as never a closed system, resonates with an increasingly vocal insistence within political discourses on the genuine openness of the future. It is an insistence founded in an attempt to escape the inexorability which so frequently characterises the grand narratives related by modernity. The frameworks of Progress, of Development and of Modernisation, and the succession of modes of production elaborated within Marxism, all propose scenarios in which the general directions of history, including the future, are known. However much it may be necessary to fight to bring them about, to engage in struggles for their achievement, there was always none the less a background conviction about the direction in which history was moving. Many today reject such a formulation and argue instead for a radical openness of the future, whether they argue it through radical democracy (for example Laclau, 1990; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001), through notions of active experimentation (as in Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; Deleuze and Parnet, 1987) or through certain approaches within queer theory (see as one instance Haver, 1997). Indeed, as Laclau in particular would most strongly argue, only if we conceive of the future as open can we seriously accept or engage in any genuine notion of politics. Only if the future is open is there any ground for a politics which can make a difference.

Now, here again – as in the case of the first proposition – there is a parallel with the conceptualisation of space. Not only history but also space is open.⁶ In this open interactional space there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not, for not all potential connections have to be established), relations which may or may not be accomplished. Here, then, space is indeed a product of relations (first proposition) and for that to be so there must be multiplicity (second proposition). However, these are not the relations of a coherent, closed system within which, as they say, everything is (already) related to everything else. Space can never be that completed simultaneity in which all interconnections have been established,



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and in which everywhere is already linked with everywhere else. A space, then, which is neither a container for always-already constituted identities nor a completed closure of holism. This is a space of loose ends and missing links. *For* the future to be open, space must be open too.



All these words come trailing clouds of connotations. To write of challenging the opposition between space and place might legitimately provoke thoughts of Heidegger (but that is not what I mean). Talking of 'difference' can engender assumptions about othering (but that is not what I am getting at). Mention of multiplicities evokes, among others, Bergson, Deleuze, Guattari (and there will be some engagement later with that strand of thought). A few preliminary clarifications might help.

By 'trajectory' and 'story' I mean simply to emphasise the process of change in a phenomenon. The terms are thus temporal in their stress, though, I would argue, their necessary spatiality (the positioning in relation to other trajectories or stories, for instance) is inseparable from and intrinsic to their character. The phenomenon in question may be a living thing, a scientific attitude, a collectivity, a social convention, a geological formation. Both 'trajectory' and 'story' have other connotations which are not intended here. 'Trajectory' is a term that figures in debates about representation that have had important and abiding influences on the concepts of space and time (see the discussion in *Part Two*). 'Story' brings with it connotations of something told, of an interpreted history; but what I intend is simply the history, change, movement, of things themselves.

That bundle of words difference/heterogeneity/multiplicity/plurality has also provoked much contention. All I mean at this point is the contemporaneous existence of a plurality of trajectories; a simultaneity of stories-so-far. Thus the minimum difference occasioned by being positioned raises already the fact of uniqueness. This is, then, not 'difference' as opposed to class, as in some old political battles. It is simply the principle of coexisting heterogeneity. It is not the particular nature of heterogeneities but the fact of them that is intrinsic to space. Indeed it puts into question what might *be* the pertinent lines of differentiation in any particular situation. Nor is this 'difference' as in the deconstructive move of *spacing*: as in the deconstruction of discourses of authenticity, for instance. This does not mean that such discourses are not significant in the cultural moulding of space; nor that they should not be taken to task. Romances of coherent nationhood, as in the third rumination, may operate on precisely such principles of constituting identity/difference. David Sibley (1995, 1999) among others has explored such attempts at the purification of space. Indeed, they are precisely one way of coping with its heterogeneities – its actual complexity and openness. But the point at issue here is another one: not negative difference but positive



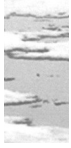
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heterogeneity. This links back to the political argument against essentialism. Insofar as that argument adopted a form of social constructionism which was confined to the discursive, it did not in itself offer a positive alternative. Thus in the particular case of space, it may help us to expose some of its presumed coherences but it does not properly bring it to life. It is that liveliness, the complexity and openness of the configurational itself, the positive multiplicity, which is important for an appreciation of the spatial.

This book is an essay on the challenge of space, the multiple ruses through which that challenge has been so persistently evaded, and the political implications of practising it differently. In pursuit of this there is inevitable engagement with many other theorists and theoretical approaches, including many whose explicit focus is not always on spatiality. They are referenced in the text. But it is perhaps important to say now that my argument is not simply in the mould of any one of them. I have not worked from texts on space but through situations and engagements in which the question of space has in some way been entangled. Rather, my preoccupation with pushing away at space/politics has moulded positions *on* philosophy, and on a range of concepts. The debates about heterogeneity/difference and social constructionism/discourse are cases in point. Equations of representation with spatialisation have troubled me; associations of space with synchrony exasperated me; persistent assumptions of space as the opposite of time have kept me thinking; analyses that remained within the discursive have just not been positive enough. It has been a reciprocal engagement. What I'm interested in is how we might imagine spaces for these times; how we might pursue an alternative imagination. What is needed, I think, is to uproot 'space' from that constellation of concepts in which it has so unquestioningly so often been embedded (stasis; closure; representation) and to settle it among another set of ideas (heterogeneity; relationality; coevalness ... liveliness indeed) where it releases a more challenging political landscape.

There has, as is often now recounted, been a long history of understanding space as 'the dead, the fixed' in Foucault's famous retrospection. More recently and in total contrast there has been a veritable extravaganza of non-Euclidean, black-hole, Riemannian ... and a variety of other previously topologically improbable evocations. Somewhere between these two lie the arguments I want to make. What you will find here is an attempt to awaken space from the long sleep engendered by the inattention of the past but one which remains perhaps more prosaic, though none the less challenging, than some recent formulations. That is what I found to be most productive. This is a book about ordinary space; the space and places through which, in the negotiation of relations within multiplicities, the social is constructed. It is in that sense a modest proposal, and yet the very persistence, the apparent obviousness, of other mobilisations of 'space', point to its continuing necessity.

There are many who have pondered the challenges and delights of *temporality*. Sometimes this has been done through the lens of that strand of anthropocentric



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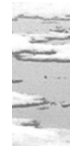
philosophical miserabilism which preoccupies itself with the inevitability of death. In other guises temporality has been extolled as the vital dimension of life, of existence itself. The argument here is that space is equally lively and equally challenging, and that, far from it being dead and fixed, the very enormity of its challenges has meant that the strategies for taming it have been many, varied and persistent.



When I was a child I used to play a game, spinning a globe or flicking through an atlas and jabbing down my finger without looking where. If it landed on land I'd try to imagine what was going on 'there' 'then'. How people lived, the landscape, what time of day it was, what season. My knowledge was extremely rudimentary but I was completely fascinated by the fact that all these things were *going on now*, while I was here in Manchester in bed. Even now, each morning when the paper comes, I cast my eye down at the world's weather (100°F and cloudy in New Delhi, 46 and raining in Santiago; 82 and sunny in Algiers). It's partly a way of imagining how things are for friends in other places; but it's also a continuing amazement at the contemporaneous heterogeneity of the planet. (I wrote this book under the working title of 'Spatial delight'.) It was, possibly still is, all appallingly naive, and I have learned at least some of its dangers. The grotesqueness of the maps of power through which aspects of this 'variety' can be constituted; the real problems of thinking about, and still more of appreciating, place; how much more easy it is for some than for others to forget the simultaneity of those different stories; the difficulty simply, even, of travelling. (The telling of the voyages of discovery in a way that holds 'the discovered' still; the version of globalisation which dismisses others to the past ...) None the less it seems important to hold on to an appreciation of that simultaneity of stories. It sometimes seems that in the gadarene rush to abandon the singularity of the modernist grand narrative (the singular universal story) what has been adopted in its place is a vision of an instantaneity of interconnections. But this is to replace a single history with no history – hence the complaint, in this guise, of depthlessness. In this guise, the 'spatial turn' were better refused. Rather we should, could, replace the single history with many. And this is where space comes in. In that guise, it seems to me, it is quite reasonable to take some delight in the possibilities it opens up.



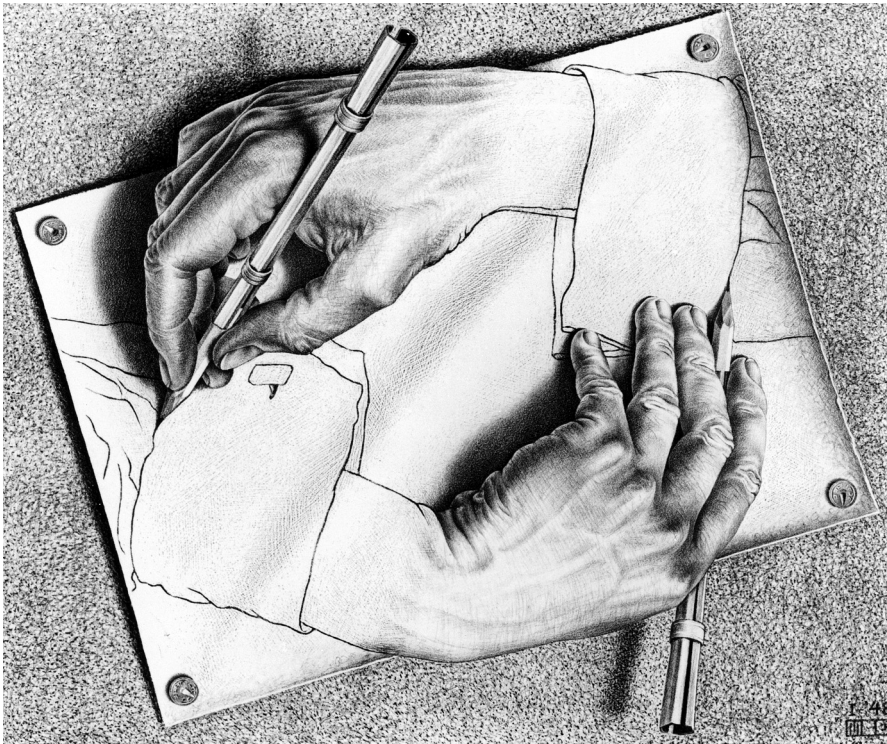
Part *Two* addresses some of the imaginations of space that we inherit from a range of philosophical discourses. This is not a book about philosophy but at this point it engages *with* some strands of philosophy in order to argue that

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from them are derived common readings and associations which may help to explain why in social and political life we so often lend to space the characteristics we do. Part *Three* takes up a range of ways in which space is articulated in social theory and in practical-popular and political engagements, in particular in the context of debates about modernity and capitalist globalisation. In neither of these Parts is the primary aim one of critique: it is to pull out the positive threads which enable a more lively appreciation of the challenge of space. Part *Four* then elaborates a range of further reorientations concerning both space and place. Throughout the book, strands of the relevance of these arguments to political debate are developed, and Part *Five* turns to these directly. This book, then, is not 'for space' in preference to something else; rather it is an argument for the recognition of particular characteristics of space and for a politics that can respond to them.

A number of subthemes weave their way *sotto voce* through the Parts. Some of these have their own headings. The series called 'A reliance on science?' questions some elements of the current relation between natural and social sciences broadly conceived. 'The geography of knowledge production' weaves a story of the connection between certain modes of practising science and the social and geographical structures in which they are set (indeed, more strongly, through which they are constituted). In both of these spheres, it is proposed, not only are there implicit spatialities but also there are both conceptual and political links to the wider argument of the book.

Other themes persistently surface as part of the more general thesis. There is an attempt to go beyond the specifically human. There is a commitment to the old theme that space matters, but also a questioning of some of the ways in which it is commonly thought to do so. There is an attempt to work towards a groundedness that – in an age in which globalisation is so easily imagined as some kind of force emanating always from 'elsewhere' – is vital for posing political questions. There is an insistence, relatedly, on specificity, and on a world neither composed of atomistic individuals nor closed into an always-already completed holism. It is a world being made, through relations, and there lies the politics. Finally, there is an urge towards 'outwardlookingness', towards a positivity and aliveness to the world beyond one's own turf, whether that be one's self, one's city, or the particular parts of the planet in which one lives and works: a commitment to that radical contemporaneity which is the condition of, and condition for, spatiality.



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