

Harvey, D.

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Glossary

Accumulation by Dispossession Processes by which capitalist expansion is accomplished through the privatization of social spaces and services.

Dialectics An analytic, ontological, historical, and political system wherein two terms interactively and processually co-determine each other, constituting a third term marking the continuous, unfolding interaction of the former two.

Flexible Accumulation A post-Fordist style of accumulation that is extremely malleable in terms of: (1) the labor process (utilizing a more contingent and hence cheaper work force) and (2) economic organization (with firms that are multisectoral, more dispersed and spatially nimble, and more vertically disintegrated).

Militant Particularism A term that describes disconnected and narrowly focused political mobilizations that are limited by virtue of being grounded only in the localized and relatively unique experiences or characteristics of individuals.

Space–Time Compression The apparent global shrinkage of distance and speed-up of temporal relations resulting from capitalist transformations in production, distribution, and consumption, all driven by ever more far flung and rapidly organized accumulation processes.

Spatial Fix The tendency of capitalism to remake spaces – either in new places or in the transformation of existing ones – so as to resolve contradictions and crises generated in production and overaccumulation.

Harvey, David (1935–)

Born in Gillingham, Kent, 1935, David Harvey ([Figure 1](#)) grew up during and immediately following World War II, and was profoundly influenced by the colliding geographies that war brought to the shores of Britain, and by the alternating mood of patriotism and loss-of-empire that followed in its wake. Harvey recounts (2001, 2002) an early fascination with contemporary and historic maps and a youthful curiosity for geology, vegetation, land use, and local architecture. His training – with all three degrees coming from Cambridge – was largely historical-geographic in focus, culminating in a dissertation on changes in production in Kent's nineteenth-century hops

industry. That early 1960s work set the stage for a long-held interest in the relations between economic processes of production and the particularities through which they unfold in local contexts and at particular points in time, the first glimmerings of a long career devoted to the development of a historical–geographical materialism.

During the 1960s, however, geography was in the throes of a so-called 'quantitative revolution', a period characterized by the search for trans-contextual spatial theories and laws, and Harvey's major work during that period, *Explanation in Geography* (1969), was fully immersed in the discipline's recent philosophical transformation. *Explanation* represented an extended philosophico-methodological exploration of geographic approaches developed in spatial science. While generally sympathetic to the movement, *Explanation* presented both internal and external critiques of the systems that emerge through quantitative approaches. Employing analytics borrowed from positivist philosophy of science, Harvey married a concern for mathematic complexity and exactitude with the need to develop clear ontological and epistemological conceptions of the world we interrogate. In this regard, *Explanation* represented an attempt to combine the 1960s dream of quantitative analysis in studies of spatial differentiation with a focus upon the theoretical underpinnings that make any methodology – but especially those of spatial science – coherent and

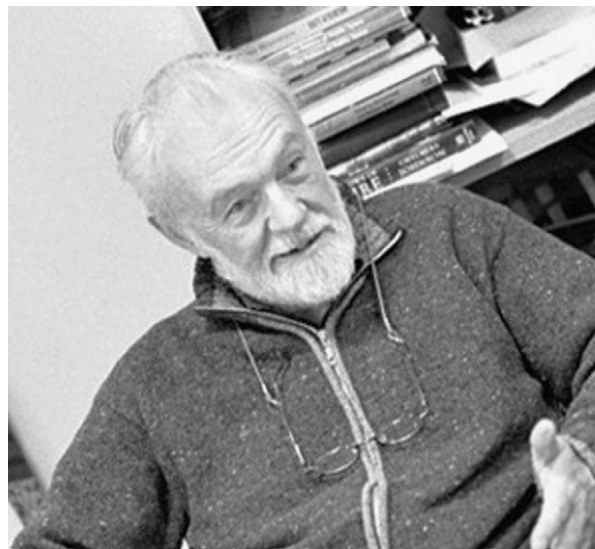


Figure 1 David Harvey.

rigorous. Although dated, *Explanation* is profoundly rigorous and analytic, and still serves as the germinal text within which the seeds of Harvey's mature thought can clearly be witnessed. Central among these are (1) the concern for the theoretical communication between science and philosophy, particularly as it pertains to epistemology and ontology, and (2) an early inclination toward the aesthetics of precision and solvability celebrated by positivist analytics. As he was to remark to an earlier generation trained in the largely descriptive field of regional geography: "By our theories you shall know us".

While *Explanation* appears to be exhaustive in terms of its philosophical attention to the methodological questions associated with positivism, at no point does it attempt to address questions regarding the political implications of geographic research. And yet, the human geography of the late 1960s and early 1970s, with its broad turn to issues of social relevance associated with the Vietnam War, imperialism, environmental degradation, women's rights, and racism and poverty, leveled this as a major flaw inherent in quantitative studies of spatial science in general. These issues were to consume Harvey after the publication of *Explanation*. He moved to Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1969, arriving in wake of intense protests in that city following the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King. Harvey found himself in a city with chronic impoverishment that jarringly contrasted with the country's status as the world's richest and most developed nation. He became involved in civil rights and anti-war movements, conducted studies for the city of Baltimore on housing inequality, and, in effort to better understand the conditions underlying urban deprivation, began to read Marx.

In *Social Justice and the City* (1973), his first major work following *Explanation*, Harvey interrogated several versions of moral and social philosophy in an effort to develop a program for geography that brings to the forefront issues of spatial inequality and social injustice. Evolving from standard liberalist analytics to a discovery and celebration of a Marxism that retains a strongly positivist bent, this volume looks to socioeconomic difference in the urban setting as a device for illustrating the inseparability of social processes and spatial forms. Thus, the practices involved in the production of specific social relations (e.g., the property relation) serve to constitute specific spatialities (e.g., particular built environments and associated social welfare outcomes). At the same time, Harvey follows Karl Marx (and turns away from liberalism) by affirming the collapse of the distinction between production and distribution, allowing for a conceptualization of social justice that turns upon examination of actual social processes, rather than upon the invocation of transcendental notions of justice that supercede the specificities of the situation.

The Limits to Capital (1982) represents Harvey's most explicit and direct immersion in Marxist theory. A lengthy and difficult meditation on Marx's *Capital*, Harvey spends much of the book examining Marx's major theories regarding the production, distribution, and consumption of commodities, the processes of accumulation, and the inherent contradictions and crises in capitalism – notions that will recur throughout the remainder of Harvey's oeuvre. Harvey's major contribution to Marxist literature comes in the closing chapters of *Limits*, where he initiates the first steps toward a spatialization of Marxist production, accumulation, and imperialism. He also contributes to Marxist theory – and presages work by others on economic globalization – by highlighting the important role of financial capital in the capitalist accumulation process. The final chapters of *Limits* serve very much as a theoretical roadmap for almost all of the work that will follow. In particular, it is here that Harvey first describes the processes by which contemporary capitalism finds a 'spatial fix' for its own self-produced crises through the exportation of devaluation to other spaces. Harvey suggests that such maneuvers ultimately tend toward the development of expanding crises in the form of imperialism and global war. It would be almost 20 years before Harvey would turn to any extended empirical explication of the nightmare visions that haunt the closing pages of *Limits*. Latterly, however, he has argued at length that the current moment of US imperialism, the hegemony of neoliberalism, and the initiation of global warfare (the war on terror, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, etc.) are illustrative of the processes first described in *Limits*.

Alongside the theoretical project of describing Marx for geographers and developing a spatialized Marxist theory for leftists of all persuasions, Harvey continued to write essays in the 1970s and 1980s elaborating a framework for urban processes under capitalism. These works, together with original materials, were assembled as a pair of twin books, both published in 1985 – *The Urbanization of Capital* and *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*. Gone was the tentativeness of Harvey that peppered parts of *Social Justice and the City*. As assembled in book form, the articles trace an exceptionally rigorous and urban-specific analysis of capitalism, redressing the historicism in traditional Marxism on two counts: (1) by showing how the space of the city is the key site for accumulation, and (2) by demonstrating beyond *Limits* just how much spatial transformations in built environments are the heart and soul of capitalist accumulation: "Capitalist development has therefore to negotiate a knife-edge path between preserving the exchange values of past capital investments in the built environment and destroying the value of these investments in order to open up fresh room for accumulation" (*Urbanization*, p 25). Harvey covers the production of urban infrastructures

(or 'second natures' – roads, houses factories, schools, and shops) that arise from capitalist switches among its primary, secondary, and tertiary circuits, as well as the complexity of several types of rents and finance markets on housing provision. The separation of home and work is shown to have implications for not only production but also social reproduction and, finally, for the uneven distribution of class in urban space. Chapters on urban politics and planning close out *Urbanization*. They presage later work on urban entrepreneurialism that was to become one leg of his next major book, *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

As another leg of that next project, *Urbanization's* counterpart text, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* shifts away from capital's concrete circulation through, and objectification in, the built environment to what he calls the more 'speculative' investigation of political consciousness. The urbanization of capital, then, has two sides, the second of which is a profound reorganization of social, cultural, and political relations, experiences, and meanings. In essence, this book is a description of urban modernism – as cultural phenomena, political life, and epistemology – read through the dialectic of space and society and as imprinted on the urban built environment and the minds and actions of its inhabitants. It is here, then, where one sees the cultural-epistemological seeds of Harvey's next book, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (discussed below). Especially noteworthy in *Consciousness* is Harvey's early historical work in Paris, where he lived for a time, both researching the city's history and witnessing the ferment of French philosophical debate (the research would become part of a much later book, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, 2003). *Urbanization* reprints a famous Harvey study on the Basilica of Sacré-Coeur, where he shows a command for interpreting symbolic built environments that is on par with his insightful and rigorous analyses of the cold movements of capital.

As mentioned above, *Urbanization* and *Consciousness* provided Harvey with the tools for his next and most well-known project, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), written while he was at Oxford University. He uses them to address post-Fordist shifts in economic organization and to assess the transformation of cultural and political consciousness that had emerged under the popularization of postmodernism, an art and architecture movement that celebrated difference, depthlessness, and fragmentation. In *Condition*, Harvey explains that this movement was not merely the product of the celebration of culturally driven difference or changes in perspective (though it was surely this as well). In the final analysis, the postmodern era was brought on by a series of adjustments by capitalism in the second half of the twentieth century in response to increasingly intense competition and rapid technological change. The response – known as flexible accumulation – was to speed up production and delivery by changing

labor processes (e.g., outsourcing) and reworking the firm's technical and organizational arrangements (e.g., just-in-time production, branch plants, and relocations). These conditions effectively did the work of compressing space-time as the ever more rapid processes of capital accumulation – and the risks attendant to over-accumulation – began to take on pervasive, global characteristics. While postmodernity was, according to Harvey, principally the product of economic processes, the cultural/artistic, academic, and political impacts of these shifts (i.e., postmodernism) were mediated, if not produced, through the epistemological shifts – the loss of foundations – resulting from space-time compression. The most disconcerting of these changes was the proliferation of perspectives married to a devaluation of the grounds for political mobilization.

The experience of time and space has changed, the confidence in the association between scientific and moral judgements has collapsed, esthetics has triumphed over ethics as a prime focus of social and intellectual concern, images dominate narratives, ephemerality and fragmentation take precedence over eternal truths and unified politics, and explanations have shifted from the realm of material and political-economic groundings toward a consideration of autonomous cultural and political practices. (Harvey, 1989, p 328)

Harvey's take on post-Fordism in *Condition* was widely celebrated and critiqued, and in addition to responding to important reviews of the book, in the early 1990s he also turned some of his attention to organizing around and writing about a car plant closure in the Oxfordshire town of Cowley, where a Rover Group factory was located. Subsequently, he returned to Hopkins where he was to write a new book, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996), an extended attempt to develop a Marxist onto-ethical system as a response to the challenges that arose from various ethics of reflexivity and positionality in feminism, critical race theory, post-colonial theory, and from what was often characterized as an attendant nihilism or relativism in post-structuralist theories. He also attempts to address a longstanding failure of Marxist theory to effectively engage environmental issues. *Justice* made three key contributions to geographic thought in general and to the political debates of the 1990s in particular: (1) it offers a dialectically articulated ontology focused upon interrelating, co-constitutive processes; (2) it puts forward a political vision that draws upon his ontological project of collective interrelations and thus rallies against fragmented political movements; and (3) it portends the beginnings of a turn toward considerations of utopianism – something that will come to fruition in *Spaces of Hope* (2000) – as a

political strategy for thinking about collective political change.

Militant particularism, one of the key concepts Harvey carries with in *Justice*, highlights the localized, specific situations from which political movements emerge. There – and more specifically in *Spaces of Hope* – Harvey's concern is to explicate a continuum running from the politicized specificities of the spaces of the body to the collectivized political generality of the global. At its heart, *Spaces* is an extended attempt to theorize routes to political subjectivities and progressive actions that culminate in large aggregates of individuals mobilized against the spread of globalization. While Harvey clearly begins to reposition earlier dismissals of studies of the body and of the politics of positionality through the development of an analytics of the 'body as accumulation strategy', he nevertheless cautions against 'body reductionism' that would establish the individualist perspectivalisms as the limit of political conceptualization. By contrast, Harvey proposes that projects of alliance engaged in alternative economies and collective action can be aided by returning to utopian concepts as a strategy of hope against the cynicism of global capitalism.

Latterly, Harvey has dedicated himself to the development of extended analyses of the rise and spread of globalization through a series of critical histories of the present that might be called the 'neoliberalism trilogy'. While not the first time Harvey has engaged the crises attendant to neoliberalism and globalization, nowhere else do these receive such relentless, surgical examination as in *The New Imperialism* (2003), *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), and *Spaces of Global Uneven Development* (2006). Together, these works look to the collusion of states (particularly the US and UK, but also notably China), the military industrial complex, and the withdrawal of the left and simultaneous rise of the right, to theorize the emerging socio-economic-political phenomenon of neoliberalist 'accumulation by dispossession', a process of creating new spaces for capitalism by dispossessing people of spaces and services to which they have certain rights. This is witnessed particularly within disenfranchisements accomplished through: (1) recent US-led imperial warfare as a strategy of coercion over consent for participation in neoliberalist capitalism; (2) the withering and privatization of state-based social services; (3) the spreading myth that crises in capital equal crises in the state; and (4) a growing gap between the rich and poor that is accompanied – not coincidentally – by an equally large gap between those who hold state power and those who are subject to it.

Written in the current, post-9/11 era of global warfare and new Western imperialist expansion, gone are many of the utopian ideals Harvey had toyed with only a few

years before. Here, he reads the continuing devolution of the present situation as dire enough that a more immediate fix, a (re)turn to a 'New New Deal', sits at the forefront of his recommendations for contemporary socio-political change. Over his lifetime, the US has fallen from its former stature as the world's producer, and is no longer in a position to claim the mantle of the world's financier; it can now only rely on its military strength and domestic surveillance to bear up its position in world affairs. Thus Harvey, while not denigrating the efforts of the many distinct local movements dedicated to inventing new ways to respond to these crises, nonetheless retains the view that widespread social transformation will not be achieved unless resistance is predicated upon and articulated through the common ground of class-based solidarity.

See also: Critical Theory (After Habermas); Entrepreneurship; Geopolitics; Historical-Geographical Materialism; Human Geography; Nature; Neoliberalism, Urban; Postmodernism/Postmodern Geography; Radical Geography; Uneven Development.

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