
Guest editorial

On the other hand ... dialectics

Introduction

On the other hand ... dialectics: a sometimes social, sometimes materialist, sometimes psychological, but always political ontology that has offered the foundational logic for historico-geographical methodologies, rumbles on even while carrying the burden of a litany of criticisms levelled against its occasional idealisms, teleologies, totalities, binarisms, and, at times, its downright clunkiness. In spite of such objections, the onto-*surjective* 'other-handed-ness' of dialectics, where relations and symmetries of the one hand grasp and shake the negations and contradictions of the other hand, continues to inspire new thought, direct novel research, and inform radical politics. Perhaps this is because, even in the face of growing allegiances to indeterminacy and alterity, the dialectical pairing never lets go: the chainlink of internal relations meets the one hand with the other, joined in constitutive proximity. Is there not, furthermore, something elegant about a mode of thought that finds theses within anti-theses and produces syntheses or, possibly, new fronts altogether; that tracks change not in circles but in spirals; and that anticipates all others, harmony with discord, rationality with emotion, man with God? And yet (or, on the other hand), after two decades of isolating and rooting out alternatives to its frequently claustrophobic structurings, dialectics has become an increasingly forbidden concept.

It was within the context of these 'one hands' and 'other hands' that we framed our invitation for submissions to this special issue of *Environment and Planning A*. Asking 'What about dialectics?', we set out upon a broad territory, following a loose collection of prefatory impulses, namely: (a) The dialectic has infused classical and modern analytical thinking on the nature of relationality, whether conceived as the interrelation between ideas, between people, or between the self and the world. Subject to continuous reimaginings, the dialectic has retained its authoritative status as a key tenet of philosophical discourses and political economic analyses. (b) While dialectics has more recently been employed to reveal the tyrannies that too often hide between supposedly stable, binary relations, we must recall that, in the history of thought, dialectics is fundamentally a *process philosophy*. Not being a system capable of thinking terms in their isolation it always thinks *both at the same time* in a movement of constitutive differentiation that is the process of continuous becoming. (c) Practically and politically—that is to say, *historically*—the 20th century marked the period of both its greatest uptake and its most thoroughgoing contestation. The Marxist socio-political experiment was extended practically and critically to the unification of global labour movements and the radicalisation of the academy; as a result, the dialectic became subject to everything from the most revolutionary mobilisation to the most conservative institutionalisation, with all in agreement that it represented *the* ontological framework for engaging history. (d) The emergence of scientific rationalism was predicated in part on a sustained critique of the dialectic as a contrived and even socially irresponsible paradox, querying how we can seek to reduce dissonance, whether ontological or epistemological, while at the same time insisting on finding contradiction, transformation, and becoming. (e) While many poststructuralist theorists deconstructed the Hegelian dialectic, drawing attention to its totalising and teleological ambitions over and against the productivities of the particular in the

forms of fragments, distributions, and frictions, debates around the dialectic have provided them novel ways of thinking through such issues as the relationship between alterity and difference, representation and its others, and the character of the singular and the serial. And (f) in keeping with its own logic, with its own other-handed-ness, we cannot assume that the dialectic emerges untransformed from these historical and critical encounters.

In the essays gathered here geographers speaking from a broad range of critical backgrounds—dialecticians and multiplitionians, Marxists past-, present-, and post-, feminists and poststructuralists—reconsider the place of dialectics in geography and social theory after the turbulent 20th century. While they reply in different ways, each considers—in multiple combinations—the many dialectical touchstones that have strongly shaped geographic thought over the past several decades, such as: the centrality of dialectics in providing the theoretical terrain for a postpositivist geography (Smith, 1979; 1984); the importance of that move for underwriting a ‘spatial turn’ in social thought (Massey, 1994; 2005; Soja, 1989; 1996) that raised the profile of geographic theory within social theory more generally; the profound shift in thinking, partially led by Jacques Derrida, that substituted *erasure* for sublation and poked holes in wholes (Dixon and Jones, 1998); and an equally important move from the macro-social dynamic spaces of dialectics (Mitchell, 2003) to the intensities and complexities of a Deleuzoguattarian minoritarianism (Doel, 1999).

And yet, even with poststructuralism, we witness again and again theoretical formulations that reveal familial proximities to dialectical processes. Derrida’s (1994) affinities with the dialectic surface within the very process of his critiquing it and more generally within his profound commitment to a relationality that retains strong connections to thinking the interconstitutive relation of multiples that is so characteristic of the dialectical process. In contrast to Derrida’s largely analytic proximities, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s (1987) machinic philosophy features specific processes whose dynamic productivisms share allegiances with the always-becoming movement—that kernel of immanence—that the materialist dialectic announces. Amidst so many reminders that Deleuze, speaking through Friedrich Nietzsche (Deleuze, 1986, pages 8, 162), had singled out for criticism the Hegelian dialectic, it can be easy to forget that he nevertheless celebrated the dialectic as “the art of problems and questions, the combinatory or calculus of problems as such” (1994, page 157). In these resonances, might we find opportunities to initiate dialogues between dialectics, *différance* and difference, among other analytic categories? Reconsidering the dialectic today, ‘after the post’, means rethinking the lineages and linkages that have emerged amidst lines of thought often considered disparate or oppositional. However, before turning to some of geography’s exemplars of these theoretical trajectories we offer a few brief thoughts on the place of dialectics within the discipline.

Dialectics in geography

In the midst of a current-day human geography that draws extensively on, and is by no means limited to, myriad forms of political economy, poststructuralism, feminist, postcolonial and queer theory—all of which have something to say about relationality—it is strange to be reminded that in 1972 Yi Fu Tuan could lament the fact that geographers had not as yet participated in the dialectical form of knowledge production so prevalent in the broader landscape of social theory. The works of Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Sigmund Freud, he wrote, had bypassed the discipline; not one of these figures “can be said to have left an imprint on academic geography” (page 507). Surely, Tuan suggested, human geography could no longer lag

behind the other social sciences and humanities in its simplistic rendering of the 'inner' self of human beings, as well as the relations that bound them to the 'outside' world.

Tuan himself had already begun to ponder this issue when, in 1965, he articulated the first of the dialectical framings—posing our understanding of the meaning of 'environment' over and against that of the 'world'—that he was to work with throughout most of his career. For Tuan, it is what he terms "the intrinsic ironies of the human condition" (1976, page 4) that invite the dialectical approach, as we become both agent of and subject to change through all manner of relations with other humans, animals, and the world at large. Articulated via an often highly personalised narrative that itself works through the abstract and the emotional, the dialectical arguments that pose 'man' against 'nature' (1966), 'human' against 'animal' (1976; 1984), 'space' against 'place' (1977), 'individual' against 'group' (1982), 'cosmos' against 'earth', (1996), and 'good' against 'evil' (2008), are not intended to remain open-ended encounters; the ultimate goal, for Tuan, is to delve deeply into these seeming contradictory concepts until a point of convergence emerges. Is such a point mere coincidence, he asks (1976, page 4), albeit a potentially poignant one, or are these concepts somehow necessary to each other?

Yet, it is fair to say that Tuan's own explorations were rarely to conclude with just such a resolution. Small wonder, perhaps, when we note that for Tuan the dialectic is a fundamentally sceptical mode of argument that says 'yes, but' when confronted with a seemingly self-secure concept or identity. Tuan's dialectic asks if the inverse is not also, in some sense, true. But, as Gunnar Olsson was to write in *Birds in Egg* (1975), dialectical thinking welcomes the indeterminate, the ambiguous, and the open-ended. Moreover, it is possessed by a deontic logic that eschews the possibility of truth and the impossibility of fiction in favour of an alternative mode of (moral) exposition based on the performance of that which is permissible, and that which is prohibited. Just as concerned with the conceptual trajectory of modern geographic inquiry as Tuan, Olsson had similarly pondered if the logical empiricism so prevalent within the discipline should become "thoroughly influenced, if not replaced, by ideas from the hermeneutic and dialectic schools of Continental Europe" (1970, page 230), such that its practitioners could pay attention to how knowledge developed, but also to how it came to be acknowledged as such. Writing at a time when the quantitative revolution had become wrapped within a positivist epistemology, and truth was to be discerned via rational thought processes made verifiable through the body's own sensory apparatus, the dialectic was one answer, perhaps, to just such a presumption of the harmonious marriage of mind and body. Could the dialectic rend asunder this double authentication of the true 'measure' of the world?

For Olsson, at the heart of all social scientific models, including those beloved by geography's quantifiers, lies the unacknowledged dialectic of the individual over and against society. In his writings this is no simple matter of the parts culminating in a greater whole, or the whole reduced to its parts; rather, this formulation addresses how the self is to be understood as the same as, or different from, the non-self, or other: "You or I, I or You?" he asks, "Dialectics again!" (1978, page 121). Aggregate models, he went on to assert, assume sameness across bodies, such that the very idea of the self is rendered obsolete. They are phallogocentric, normalising those who do indeed act in a rational, cost-effective manner, while problematising those who do not.

But why, Olsson, asks, is this dialectic so obtuse? It is because, "[m]ost social scientists are one-eyed Cyclops unable to imagine perspective; misled by our singular vision, we tend to confuse use and mention, word and object" (1982, page 24). In other words, we tend to assign a self-fulfilling presence to objects, including people, thereby eliding their coconstitutive relationships with other objects but also, as Olsson

was to reiterate time and again, the manner in which we think (or rather assume) those relations. “[R]elations are alien to the ruling ideology of presence”, he writes, “Rather than questioning the relations we are talking *in* we stare ourselves blind on what we are talking *about*” (1982, page 27, original emphases). Concerned to counter the definite definitions of logical empiricism [wherein $a = b$, even though, “everyone with eyes to see and ears to hear immediately recognises that a equals a not b . How small shall this discrepancy be and still be called a truth? And how big shall it be to be called a lie?” (1991a, page 87)], Olsson emphasises the self-referential, internal dialectic through which the material world becomes known and is disowned. Hence, we must worry at the manner in which signs—such as a word, gesture, equation, slogan, and so on—allow the transformation of mere things into relations and, conversely, how they allow relations to become transformed into mere things. For this, Olsson argues, is how power operates, “pretending to be concerned with things while in reality knowing that things are meaningless until tied into meaningful relations. The essence of power is thus in the slanted / its appearance in the repetitive – –” (1982, page 29).⁽¹⁾ To grasp how power works, then, in a particular context is to understand how an ostensibly firm and fixed material world is played off against a shifting, contingent web of meaning. In our analyses, Olsson advises, “Relations must never be confused with the related” (1991b, page 191).

And yet, both Tuan’s and Olsson’s sustained exploration of the dialectic as a mode of geographic reasoning were to be summarily dismissed in some quarters as valiant attempts that had somehow, somewhere, missed the point. According to Allen Scott, for example, “the incipient Hegelian influence that is evident in the discipline promises to be enormously liberating, most especially in view of its central advocacy of the dialectical method” (1976, page 633): alas, Olsson’s commentaries on the sign over and against the signifier, the name over and against description, creativity over and against ambiguity, and so on suffer, he continued, from a tendency toward idealism. Instead, Scott wrote, we must look to how dialectical change is wrought though “dissonances embedded within the architectonics of society itself”, and to how “meaningful behaviour is rooted in general social and historical conditions”. Twenty years later, Noel Castree was to reiterate the same charge in his polite if fleeting dismissal of Olsson’s dialectics: his work, Castree writes, uses the dialectic to “reflect ... on the poetics and politics of conventional representational forms But in so doing he has risked lapsing into abstruse, idealist language games far removed from the mundane imperatives that structure people’s everyday lifeworlds” (1996, page 342).⁽²⁾

In similar vein, Derek Gregory (1981) was to argue that humanistic geography, of which Tuan is a key practitioner, places undue emphasis on voluntarism and mentalism. Despite reference to the interplay of individual and society, Gregory argued, such work is not truly dialectical because agency is located solely within one concept, namely the individual; hence, there is no transcendent point of resolution that can be

⁽¹⁾ An example of this would be the human body itself. Drawing upon the work of Michel Foucault, Olsson outlines how “I have a body and am a body.” Thus, the body is neither thing nor idea, “but the measure of things” (1991b, page 138).

⁽²⁾ Certainly on occasion Olsson’s rhetoric can lead to the view that he dismisses ontology in favour of epistemology and thus might well have acceded to a form of idealism. He writes, for example, that “there is no objective reality to reflect upon, for what appears is itself essentially a reflection of the reflexor’s subjective self-awareness of that reality. As the dialectics of flexuose flexion runs its course, questions of ontology therefore turn to self-reflective questions of mythology” (1982, page 30). But, it would be as well to recall that one of Olsson’s key themes is the dialectical manner in which the self becomes defined in relation to something not of the self; hence, there is no essentialised ‘individual’ here as a platform from which meanings are generated. For a sustained evaluation of Olsson’s work see Doel (2003).

reached from such an exposition. And, because there is no dialectic here, there is no identification of how change occurs at the societal or individual level. In contradistinction, he suggests that structuration theory, which sees social structures as forged from individual practices, can provide conceptual cohesion.⁽³⁾

From these commentaries, then, we can begin to discern how one articulation of the dialectic in geography became associated with the ‘inner’ world of individuals as manifest through the language used to ascribe meaning to the external world. This version was to be contrasted with another in which dialectics is used to explain sociospatial inequalities and guide systems of redistributive justice. Though both structuration theory, as noted above, and, later, a retroductive critical realism were to be posited by some as more conceptually productive forms of dialectical argument, it is the post-Marxism of David Harvey that has effectively transformed much of economic, political, and urban geography.

Harvey’s influential thesis develops steam in a number of works, including *The Limits to Capital* (1982), *The Urbanization of Capital* (1985a), *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (1985b) and *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), but it is in its most mature state in *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996). There he gathers up a number of propositions about dialectics that have guided much of the geographic thinking over the past two-plus decades, including the ideas that dialectics: (a) emphasises processes, relations, and flows over elements, things, structures, and systems; (b) that elements and things are constituted out of the former set, which in their turn operate within bounded structures and systems; (c) the ‘things’ are not, consequently, irreducible and independent, but, by virtue of the complexity of processes, relations, and flows, internally contradictory, and therefore “heterogeneous at every level” (page 51); (d) space and time are not external to processes but contingent to and contained within them—moreover, processes do not operate “*in but actively construct space and time*” (page 53, original emphases), which are therefore not absolute but multiple (eg, physical, biological, social); (e) parts and wholes mutually constitute one another and cannot be treated separately, as sometimes occurs in reductionism and holism; from which, (f), subject and object, cause and effect, are interchangeable—hence feedback models of social life, no matter how complex in their recursivities, are inappropriate (internal relations versus external relations); (g) social transformations and creativity arise out of the internal heterogeneity (becoming, not being), contradictions, and oppositions of processes and, hence, of things; (h) change is characteristic of all systems, but so too are there contradictory ‘permanences’; (i) dialectical *enquiry* is itself a process producing permanences (abstractions, concepts), but it is also integral to the exploration of new worlds, and the “building of ethical, moral, and political choices” (page 56).

One of Harvey’s key objectives in all his work—only briefly glimpsed in the above propositions—is to bring to light the otherwise shadowed role of space within Marx’s work (see Sheppard, 2006). His dialectical imagination spurs an analysis of the continual becoming and dissolution of material spaces—envisioned as emotive complexes (1985b) as well as brick and mortar (1985a)—as the totality that is capitalism seeks to transcend its contradictions only to see new ones emerge: “Capitalist development has ... 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” (1985a, page 25). Eschewing a

⁽³⁾As David Ley (1982) responded, this is rather a dismissive take on humanistic geography’s deployment of the dialectic. While Tuan’s work may well have divorced specific examples from their historical context, there is still an overarching conceptual emphasis on the boundedness of human experience.

one-directional causal link between society and space—that society produces space—a particular form of dialectic reasoning emerges within Harvey’s work wherein space is seen as integral to, or inescapably bound up with, social relations. This is a point developed at length in the work of Ed Soja (1989; 1996), beginning with his 1980 article on the “socio-spatial dialectic”: “[t]he structure of organised space is not a separate structure with its own autonomous laws of construction and transformation, nor is it simply an expression of the class structure emerging from the social (ie, aspatial) relations of production. It represents, instead, a dialectically defined component of the general relations of production, relations which are simultaneously social and spatial” (1980, page 208).

Both Harvey and Soja are indebted to Henri Lefebvre, who they helped popularise well before the translation of his most influential work, *The Production of Space* (1991). Lefebvre’s work reverberated throughout the decade, and with obdurate attention to the simultaneity and inseparability of social relations and space, he helped erase lingering fears of spatial fetishism, as when, for example, he asks:

“what exactly is the mode of existence of social relationships? Are they substantial? natural? or formally abstract? The study of space offers an answer according to which the social relations of production have a social existence to the extent that they have a spatial existence; they project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing that space itself. Failing this, these relations would remain in the realm of ‘pure’ abstraction—that is to say, in the realm of representations and hence of ideology” (1991, page 129).

Whether or not one buys Soja’s (1989) argument about the reasons behind or effects of the suppression of spatial thought in critical social theory, it is clear that, during the 1990s, Lefebvre, along with key works by Harvey (1989), Soja (1989; 1996), and Doreen Massey (1994), helped initiate a ‘spatial turn’ throughout the critical humanities and social sciences. One can reread articles from that period and see geographers and others grappling with a new rhetoric of sociospatial simultaneity, attempting to invent languages purged of both Cartesianism and facile recursivity. Processes are described as ‘imbricated’, ‘inextricably linked’, ‘interdigitated’, ‘intertwined’, ‘coconstituted’, and so on. And yet, complexity being what it is, one can also fail to follow the empirical threads of what, in some hands, began to sound more like spaghetti than dialectics, while others had difficulty with ‘social space’ thought together, and offered up explanations that looked like this: society↔space.

Depending on whom you ask, these are problems either solvable through or inherent to dialectical thought. Andrew Jones (1999) and Chris Collinge (2005), for example, variously employ a Derridean and/or Deleuzoguattarian critique of the Hegelian dialectic to undermine geographic dialectical materialism, with Harvey’s work taken as both example and progenitor. In the process, a critical distance is established between dialectical reasoning, which is now associated with an explanatory imperialism, and nondialectical analyses that privilege difference. So for Collinge, “the speculative dialectic is oppressive because it is all-embracing and seeks to neutralise differences by sublating these within a unifying Reason” (2005, page 192). At issue for Jones is the manner in which dialectical reasoning posits “two categories or concepts in some form of binarily supposed relationship” (1999, page 538), as well as the refusal to unpack key concepts such as class. What is more, he argues, dialectical reasoning must rely upon locating an ‘instance’ that can gauge the truth value of opposable opinions.

And yet, as Harvey (1999) points out, this locating of the Hegelian dialectic—characterised by a totalising, teleological imperative—within Marxist geography is reductive. In part, this is because Marxist geographers have drawn on a range of

writings within Continental philosophy to flesh out a spatially sensitive dialectical materialism. In this regard, they have at times drawn upon the same authors—such as Baruch Spinoza and Gottfried Leibniz—as those who have rejected the dialectic. But also, some have followed the tendency within social theory to revisit Marx's revolutionary deployment of Georg Hegel's dialectic in an effort to map where and how Marx's oeuvre eschews such imperatives [see, for example, Fredric Jameson's (1999) response to Derrida's (1994) *Specters of Marx*, wherein he argues that the future of Marxism as a political project depends upon *not* seeing it as a telos]. What is more, some have traced a 'Marxian' pathway that examines capitalism from an avowedly un-Hegelian form of dialectical reasoning: a key example of this is Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham's (Gibson-Graham, 1996) deployment (alongside a feminist antiessentialism) of Louis Althusser's concept of overdetermination, whereby "every identity is reconceived as uncentered, as in process and transition, as having no essence to which it will tend or revert." Rather, "[t]he process of existence implicates all exteriors, and by virtue of this implication undermines the hierarchy of importance that defines some attributes or causes as necessary or essential, and others as contingent or peripheral, to a particular locus of being" (page 28).

Though Marcus Doel's initial foray into the dialectic barely mentions Harvey's work, instead undertaking a tour de force deconstruction of a shallow postmodernism wherein "[d]ialectical accountancy always amounts to (an economy of) the same: difference must be submitted to the authority of that which it differs from" (1993, page 380), his later work does engage directly with Harvey's (1996) *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. And here we see that a familiar critique is levelled, wherein Harvey's dialectical imagination is possessed by "the drive to integrate all excess—to permit of no outside—[this] is what disturbs" (2006, page 78). The dialectic, in whatever conceptual guise it adopts, sees difference (that is, not the same) as contradiction, "thereby opening it up in advance to a resolution" (2006, page 78). In Doel's (1993) outline of difference, however, we find not just a critique of the dialectic but an other understanding of ontology. The web of relations that allow signifiers and signifieds to transform and transmute is akin to a 'signsponge', he avers, wherein meaning is not held, but is rather retracted and hollowed out. In place of real, self-sufficient entities that work in combination to produce change, we find a continual process of involution and ex-tension (Doel, 1999). Other geographers have similarly sought to delineate the features of new spatial ontologies, always relationally, if differently, articulated (for example, Dixon and Grimes, 2004; Jones et al, 2007; Jones, forthcoming; Massey, 2005; Murdoch, 2005). This has prompted geographers to grapple once again with a rhetoric purged of Cartesianism, now directed towards the 'coconstitution' and 'becoming' of 'singularities' that 'emerge' (or not) from a 'place of immanence'.

While it might be suggested that the dialectic, after the broad theoretical reframings that attended Derridian deconstructions and Deleuzoguattarian becomings, has been relegated to the conceptual backwaters of geography, we suspect that it is quite the opposite, that something of the 'spirit' or 'spectre' of the dialectic looms large in the discipline, having shed many of the decorations and prescriptions that made it so heavy throughout the 20th century. What is left is an insistence upon a world conceived processually, in the midst of its own self-expression, and the equally pressing questions for social theorists and scientists: How can we conceive of a world that is in continuous processes of change and transformation? And, how can we come to think it, to understand it, and to enlist ourselves in the production of radical change? From a multiplicity of perspectives, the thinkers featured in this issue describe the ways that

dialectics, and the legacy of questions, problems, and propositions that it initiated, continues to announce itself within contemporary theorising.

And so, What about dialectics?

Barbara Hooper's paper addresses the dialectic before it acquired this modern-day history and this geography, when to be dialectical, or to engage in *dialegesthai*, meant to talk something through. Importantly, Hooper points out, in Ancient Greece this was a fundamentally corporeal process, wherein a reduction, purification, and clarification of plurality, conceived of as the many bodies composing the *hoi polloi*, as well as the anarchic desires flowing through the undisciplined body, took place. Dialectical reasoning, understood as the reduction of the plurality of conflicting opinions and beliefs to single truths, thus played a crucial role in: (a) the metaphysical reduction of an ontological plurality to an ordered dualism of universals and first principles; (b) the reduction of the many (beastly) appetites and desires of the body to the rule of reason; and (c) the political reduction of the rule of the *hoi polloi*, the many, to the rule of the few and the one. An examination of *dialegesthai*, Hooper suggests, is not merely a matter of recovering a particular etymology of the dialectic, it is also a provocative means of interrogating a modern-day *nomos* of the flesh, wherein the sorting and ordering of the right to be (to exist and persist) takes place. For Hooper, *dialegesthai* is an important mechanism in the production of "corporeal vulnerability" in women, children, barbarians, and other uncivil beings. It also allows for the emergence of a dialectic of "excluded inclusion" at the heart of political life, as the citizen's body becomes that which "lives on but repudiates its [own] bloody animality" (page 2565).

Vinay Gidwani's paper opens with just such an emphasis on corporeality, citing Franz Fanon's (1967 [1952]) anger and frustration at how Jean-Paul Sartre's dialectical reasoning in *Orphée Noir* (1948) reduces the lived, bodily experience of Negritude to a mere transitional moment in the eventual emergence of a universal humanness. From here it is but a short step to a critique of the Hegelian philosophy upon which Sartre's reading is based. For Gidwani, Hegel's efforts to explain how—via a dialectic that confronts and transcends difference—the will of the Spirit proceeds to fulfil itself are fraught with uncertainty as well as violence. Importantly for Gidwani, this is because of a fundamental geography that lurks at the heart of this Spirit. Posed by Hegel as a liberating and universal quest for Reason, such a Spirit is rather, Gidwani argues, the barely concealed "selective and questionable liberation of a subsection of humanity by military and managerial domination of colonized others" (page 2582). As was the case with the uncivil of Ancient Greece, the self–other dialectic Hegel articulates is, "tantamount to conscripting the 'other' in service of the colonizing 'self'" (page 2582). Surely, Gidwani asks, it is the European subject that confronts and transcends the colonised other "as a means of expanding *its* 'enjoyment' of 'freedom'?" (page 2582). The mastery of Europe is not secure, however, insofar as the slavery of an already racialised (and bestialised) other does not allow a sufficient sense of accomplishment; moreover, it is the bodily labour of the colonised other that provides for the master's privileged mode of life.

Sue Ruddick provides another close reading of Hegel's philosophy. Her intent in doing so, however, is not to interrogate the manner in which the dialectic has enabled a particular mode of politics to develop and become naturalised, but rather to interpose a Spinoza-inspired dialectic of the *positive*, and in so doing ask how this latter understanding might enable a progressive political agenda to emerge. Ruddick points to the manner in which Hegel articulated a dialectic of the negative, wherein Reason finds within its immanent domain a contradiction that engenders movement and, finally, resolution. For Spinoza, however, existence is thoroughly positive, grounded in an

entity's desire to increase its capacity to act, or *potentia*. The negative, as constriction or containment, appears only as an exteriorised force, namely another's antagonistic *potentia*. Though both entities are finite expressions of an infinite substance—Nature—they “do not relate to one another through an extrinsic arbitrator (God)” (page 2595), Ruddick writes, “nor are they individually imperfect or limited, needing to be ‘added up’ to express the infinite.” Importantly for Ruddick, such a mode of reasoning is not antithetical to Marx's dialectic. This is because: (a) Marx also rejects the idea of defining an entity, concept, or practice by virtue of the absence of something else; (b) Spinoza's entities are not anatomically or species defined; rather, “things, beings, individuals are determined by the ways they act in agreement, in mutually beneficial collaboration, with other things, which in turn produces another level of composite thing, individual, or being” (page 2594). Hence, capitalism can be considered a highly complex entity that seeks to expand its capacity to act over and against others brought into its orbit. And; (c) thought (whether as an error-laden imagination or a distinct thinking that recognises the essence of self) is similarly considered a form of materiality, insofar as it is an expression of substance as well as the social field within which it operates. If only, Ruddick concludes, opponents of capitalism could collaborate with those engaging in other forms of struggle, the *potentia* of all would be considerably enhanced.

Eric Sheppard's paper is animated by a similar sentiment, though the goal here is two-fold; that is, a concern with articulating an emancipatory agenda *and* rendering the dialectic more geographic. As with Ruddick, his argument proceeds via a reengagement with Hegel's dialectic. For Sheppard, “the imaginary underlining Hegel's dialectical philosophy is that of progress defined as a univalent and teleological process, driven by an obsession with dyadic self-contradictions, to be overcome via self-conscious transformative reasoning” (page 2605). If we take the poststructural argument for emergence and uncertainty seriously, then we need “a far more complexly relational, and open ended, dialectics than is generally attributed to Hegel (or, too often, Marx)” (page 2606). The key to this is a rethinking of negation. Drawing on the work of Roy Bhaskar, Sheppard posits multiple relations rather than a dyad; coconstitution and coimplication rather than contradiction; and many possible trajectories in different times and places rather than one final resolution. Importantly for Sheppard, not all of these relations are isonomic; some can be considered external, or contingent. Hence, their presence affords the possibility for radical change, otherwise unimaginable within a hermetic totality. Though Sheppard does not dwell on the implications of this for a critical geography, or the contribution of geography to such reasoning, he does point to the need to think of entities as mutually constitutive within and across scale; that the human and nonhuman are intimately related; and that “spatiotemporality is an emergent but influential aspect of these shifting socionatural relations” (page 2609).

Chris Collinge also outlines the totalising character of Hegel's philosophy, but focuses on contingency as the central problematic for this form of dialectical reasoning. From this, Collinge posits a need to query Hegelian-inspired dialectical understandings of space and scale in geography. He notes, for example, Henri Lefebvre's (1991) emphasis on the dialectic as mediating relations between spatial levels, despite his earlier, Nietzschean intimation of the contingencies of everyday space as existing outside of, and hence ‘resisting’, this totality (Lefebvre, 1968). Similarly, Collinge argues, Harvey (1996) suggests that the particularities of spatiality can confound the teleology of both Hegel and Marx but, and here he refers to Harvey (1982), his “spatial fix is coordinated under the aegis of this hierarchical structure, and the scale framework produces a totalisation of space that is functional for capitalism whilst either dissolving or subordinating the contingencies that Harvey himself wants to theorise” (page 2616).

Neil Smith's (1984) *Uneven Development* is an extended case in point here. In a Derridean, poststructural analysis of these cases, Collinge argues, contingency is understood to operate not as a limit to, or constraint on, necessity, but as its *supplement*. That is, the term is understood as having been exteriorised by such authors as outside of the primary origin of entities—their necessary cause—but as nevertheless necessary for the presence and functioning of that origin. And so, Collinge argues, the secondary action of spatial contingencies has been used as a means of maintaining a sociospatial dialectic that claims to resolve the production of a series of nested spaces of organisation under capitalism.

Anna Secor's paper also queries the relevance of the dialectic for geographers given its Enlightened association with a totalising, teleological mode of reasoning. Inspired by Slavoj Žižek's (2006) *The Parallax View*, as well as the seemingly incompatible thought of Gilles Deleuze, Secor dwells on the gap that lies at the heart of the dialectic. Here, we do not find the grounds, or even potential, for reconciliation, but rather a radical antimony, a void between the thing and itself, the signifier and its inscription. Importantly, this gap does not obscure from our gaze the real state of affairs; it cannot do so precisely because the gap *is* the real. Within the real, entities such as the economic and the political are neither reconcilable nor independent from each other. They are, rather, held in tension. And so, Secor writes, "Finally, this gap, this space between, is the site of a new dimension, a structural effect without substance that is nonetheless productive" (page 2625). Instead of posing one concept over and against another and attempting their resolution at some higher level, our analyses should echo the movement of a finger within a Moebius strip: "you cannot effectively occupy the position of inside *or* outside the loop. Wherever you begin, you find yourself in transit from one to the other" (page 2626). As Secor goes on to argue, while reality for both Deleuze and Žižek is composed of the virtual (all that is possible), as well as the actual (that which has come into being), the latter's emphasis on antimony has in fact recuperated Hegel's idea of the negative as productive of movement and change, while rejecting his assumption of totality: for Žižek, the real is "cut, fissured, and therefore incomplete, inconsistent, and untotalizable" (page 2626). And for those interested in virtual and actual spaces, then, "neither the virtual nor the actual is the proper space of production, because production is the limiting process through which the virtual is actualized. In this sense, the productive moment is the one in which the virtual is negated—that is, *actualized*" (page 2628, emphasis in the original).

And yet, what is at stake, Doel asks, in thinking of the real as conflicted? Doel begins by pointing out the duplicitous character of the dialectic as a form of reasoning, in that it promises resolution but works through the continual, and orderly, unfolding of contradiction: "the crucial thing", he writes, "is not that there is always a multiplicity of antagonistic positions, nor that these positions may be arrayed so as to contradict and negate one another, but that every position can be shown to contradict itself and supplement itself by being drawn out into a series: whatever is given is wont to turn back on itself, and in turning back it calls forth the supplement that was 'always already' held on account" (pages 2634–2635). But why, then, do we have recourse time and again to the dialectic? Because, Doel reminds us, this mode of reasoning is considered most fit to investigate a dialectical ontology. As he remarks, "All and sundry regard the Real as charged: polarized and conflicted; held in antagonism and tension; traversed by power and resistance, positivity and negativity, actions and reactions; held together by so many differential relations, such as self—other, presence—absence, and structure—event, that portend destabilization, transformation, and revolution" (page 2632). But what if we replace the dialectic with dissemination, and a charged reality with a blank one?

This special offering of *Environment and Planning A* concludes with an afterword by Stuart Elden, who performed the role of discussant in the ‘What about dialectics?’ sessions we organized for the 2006 San Francisco meeting of Association of American Geographers. Taking the articles as an entry point into his own discussion of Quentin Meillassoux and fate of the dialectic, Elden poses the following questions: “first ... how well dialectics enable us to deal with the world—as it is, in its complexity, with its measurements, in its reality But we should also ask whether this is something we actually want: do we know how the world *is*, its reality; and is its complexity something we want to *measure*?” (page 2644, emphasis in the original). As Olsson (and perhaps Tuan) may well respond, the ambiguous realm of the dialectic is constituted from more than mere analytic paradox; it is part and parcel of the human condition “as it straddles the abyss between the sensible and the intelligible ... the border between appearance and apparition, the realm of things and the affections in the soul. How do I remember the absent and forget the present?” (Olsson, 2007, page 122).

Deborah P Dixon

Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University

Keith Woodward

Department of Geography, University of Exeter

John Paul Jones III

Department of Geography and Regional Development, University of Arizona

References

- Castree N, 1996, “Birds, mice and geography: Marxisms and dialectics” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* **21** 342–362
- Collinge C, 2005, “The difference between society and space: nested scales and the returns of spatial fetishism” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **23** 189–206
- Collinge C, 2008, “Positions without negations? Dialectical reason and the contingencies of space” *Environment and Planning A* **40** 2613–2622
- Deleuze G, 1986 *Nietzsche and Philosophy* translated by H Tomlinson (Columbia University Press, New York)
- Deleuze G, 1994 *Difference and Repetition* translated by P Patton (Columbia University Press, New York)
- Deleuze G, Guattari F, 1987 *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* translated by B Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN)
- Derrida J, 1994 *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* translated by P Kamuf (Routledge, London)
- Dixon D P, Grimes J, 2004, “Capitalism, masculinity and whiteness in the dialectical landscape: the case of Tarzan and the Tycoon” *GeoJournal* **59**(4) 265–275
- Dixon D P, Jones J P III, 1998, “My dinner with Derrida or spatial analysis and poststructuralism do lunch” *Environment and Planning A* **30** 247–260
- Doel M, 1993, “Proverbs for paranoids: writing geography on hollowed ground” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* **18** 377–394
- Doel M, 1999 *Poststructuralist Geographies: The Diabolical Art of Spatial Science* (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD)
- Doel M, 2003, “Gunnar Olsson’s transformers: the art and politics of rendering the co-relation of society and space in monochrome and technicolor” *Antipode* **35** 140–167
- Doel M, 2006, “Dialectical materialism: stranger than friction”, in *David Harvey: A Reader* Eds N Castree, D Gregory (Blackwell, Oxford) pp 55–79
- Doel M A, 2008, “Dialectics revisited. Reality discharged” *Environment and Planning A* **40** 2631–2640
- Elden S, 2008, “Dialectics and the measure of the world” *Environment and Planning A* **40** 2641–2651
- Fanon F, 1967 [1952] *Black Skins, White Masks* translated by C L Markmann (Grove, New York)
- Gibson-Graham J-K, 1996 *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Blackwell, Oxford)

- Gidwani V, 2008, "The subaltern moment in Hegel's dialectic" *Environment and Planning A* **40** 2578–2587
- Gregory D, 1981, "Human agency and human geography" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* **6** 1–18
- Harvey D, 1982 *The Limits to Capital* (Blackwell, Oxford)
- Harvey D, 1985a *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD)
- Harvey D, 1985b *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD)
- Harvey D, 1989 *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Blackwell, Oxford)
- Harvey D, 1996 *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Blackwell, Oxford)
- Harvey D, 1999, "Of fatal flaws and fatal distractions" *Progress in Human Geography* **23** 557–563
- Hooper B, 2008, "Dialegethai: towards a posttranscendent politics—or, let's talk about bodies" *Environment and Planning A* **40** 2562–2577
- Jameson F, 1999, "Marx's purloined letter", in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx* Ed. M Sprinkler (Verso, London) pp 26–67
- Jones A, 1999, Dialectics and difference: against Harvey's dialectical 'post-Marxism'" *Progress in Human Geography* **23** 529–555
- Jones J P III, Woodward K, Marston S, 2007, "Situating flatness" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **34** 264–276
- Jones M, forthcoming, "Phase space: geography, relational thinking and beyond" *Progress in Human Geography*
- Lefebvre H, 1968 *Dialectical Materialism* translated by J Sturrock (Jonathan Cape, London)
- Lefebvre H, 1991 *The Production of Space* translated by D Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell, Oxford)
- Ley D, 1982, "Rediscovering man's place" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* **7** 248–253
- Massey D, 1994 *Space, Place, and Gender* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN)
- Massey D, 2005 *For Space* (Sage, London)
- Mitchell D, 2003, "Cultural landscapes: the dialectical landscape recent-landscape research in human geography" *Progress in Human Geography* **26** 381–389
- Murdoch J, 2005 *Post-structuralist Geography: A Guide to Relational Space* (Sage, London)
- Olsson G, 1970, "Explanation, prediction and meaning variance: an assessment of distance interaction models" *Economic Geography* **46** 223–233
- Olsson G, 1975 *Birds in Egg—Eggs in Bird* Michigan Geographical Publication No. 15, Department of Geography, University of Michigan; reprinted in 1980 (Pion, London)
- Olsson G, 1978, "On the mythology of the negative exponential or on power as a game of ontological transformations" *Geografiska Annaler, Series B: Human Geography* **60** 116–123
- Olsson G, 1982, – / – *SubStance* **11**(2, issue 35) 24–33
- Olsson G, 1991a, "Invisible maps: a prospectus" *Geografiska Annaler, Series B: Human Geography* **73** 85–91
- Olsson G, 1991b, *Lines of Power: Limits of Language* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN)
- Olsson G, 2007 *Abysmal: A Critique of Cartographic Reason* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL)
- Ruddick S, 2008, "Towards a dialectics of the positive" *Environment and Planning A* **40** 2588–2602
- Sartre J-P, 1948, "Orphée noir", in *Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Nègre et Malgache* Ed. L Senghor (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris) pp ix–xliv
- Scott A J, 1976, "Review of *Birds in Egg*" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **66** 633–636
- Secor A J, 2008, "Žižek's dialectics of difference and the problem of space" *Environment and Planning A* **40** 2623–2630
- Sheppard E, 2006, "David Harvey and dialectical space–time", in *David Harvey: A Reader* Eds N Castree, D Gregory (Blackwell, Oxford) pp 121–141
- Sheppard E, 2008, "Geographic dialectics?" *Environment and Planning A* **40** 2603–2612
- Smith N, 1979, "Geography, science and post-positivist modes of explanation" *Progress in Human Geography* **3** 356–383
- Smith N, 1984 *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Blackwell, Oxford)
- Soja E, 1980, "The socio-spatial dialectic" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **70** 207–225

-
- Soja E, 1989 *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (Verso, London)
- Soja E, 1996 *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other Real-and-imagined Places* (Blackwell, Oxford)
- Tuan Y-F, 1966, "Man and nature: an eclectic reading" *Landscape* **15** 30–36
- Tuan Y-F, 1972, "Review of *The Dialectics of Social Life: Alarms and Excursions into Anthropological Theory* by R E Murphy" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **62** 507–509
- Tuan Y-F, 1976, "Reflections on humanistic geography" *Journal of Architectural Education* **30**(1) 3–5
- Tuan Y-F, 1977 *Space and Place: The Perspectives of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN)
- Tuan Y-F, 1982 *Segmented Worlds and Self: Group Life and Individual Consciousness* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN)
- Tuan Y-F, 1984 *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT)
- Tuan Y-F, 1996 *Cosmos and Hearth: A Cosmopolite's Viewpoint* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN)
- Tuan Y-F, 2008 *Human Goodness* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI)
- Žižek S, 2006 *The Parallax View (Short Circuits)* (MIT Press, Cambridge MA)