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Challenging the political economies of injustice: An interview with David Harvey

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Some two weeks after Barack Obama’s US presidential election victory in November 2008, his newly appointed White House Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, was asked for his thoughts on the then emergent global financial crisis. Emanuel, an erstwhile investment banker and former director at Freddie Mac, began with a reworking of a well-known capitalist dictum: ‘you never want a serious crisis to go to waste’ (Sieb 2008). Five years into the global economic crisis, inequality is rising and the world’s billionaires are getting richer, faster than ever before. Capitalism still appears to be the ‘only show in town’, with a more regulated and benevolent form hegemonically scripted as the only way out – out of the very crisis it created. In all of this, the neoliberal project has, if anything, deepened. So what changes must we make to begin to address our unsustainable capitalist system? What alternatives must we start to think through and progressively enact? David Harvey, perhaps more than anyone and over the longest time, has insisted on the critical import of us having, and engaging in, this debate.

Harvey, as one of the most rigorous dialectical Marxists working today, insists on the value of Marxist methodologies in the critique of contemporary capitalism and modalities of neoliberalism. Inside of Geography, Harvey’s work has been seminal in inspiring a committed tradition of Marxist analyses of the production of space, place and nature. As Noel Castree (2006, 247) notes, Harvey ‘continues to shout his heresies with relentless erudition’, and his work continues to be not only politically luminous but also theoretically relevant. Indeed, perhaps one of Harvey’s great underestimated strengths is how much he has honed his theoretical analyses to keep up with the shifting beast of capitalism and what his great friend, Neil Smith (1984), called ‘uneven development’.

Outside of Geography, Harvey’s work has, in the words of Cindi Katz (2006, 234), ‘made it impossible to imagine capitalism or analyse capital accumulation without a geographical imagination’. His writings have had a huge influence in the broader academy, from Political Science and Sociology to Economics and Anthropology, and beyond.
He is the world’s most cited geographer and is among the top 20 most cited academic figures of all time in the humanities (Times Higher Education 2009). The reasons for this are numerous but, apart from the sheer incisiveness of his interventions in a range of urgent social and political debates in areas such as social justice, urbanization, geopolitics and neoliberalism, an additional key reason is undoubtedly his wonderful writing. His engaging prose, the unmistakable thoughtfulness and the searing hope in the midst of even his most forceful critiques explain much why he is so widely read and internationally recognized as a truly public intellectual. Harvey’s brilliance in the art of explanation lies in his ability to distil complexity in a politically engaging and compelling manner. He has been teaching Karl Marx’s Capital for over 40 years, and on his website (davidharvey.org) can be found his renowned lecture courses (all free) along with many of his recorded public engagements, blogs, podcasts and Twitter feeds. As brilliant a social theorist as he is, Harvey has never lost sight of a public and a politics outside the academy. His website has had over two million hits.

Of Harvey’s key intellectual contributions, arguably one of his most important theorizations has been that of ‘historical geographical materialism’, wherein practices of capital accumulation and political and social relations are spatialized – spatialized in a world that is not flat but deeply uneven and shifting. This project began with Social Justice and the City (1973) and a continuum of critique flows through the longue durée of his work over the past 40 years, through to The Limits to Capital (1982) and one of his most recent books, The Enigma of Capital (2010), in which he brilliantly shows how contemporary capitalism does not resolve its crises, but rather moves them around geographically, opening up new fields of capitalist accumulation. Though challenged at times for his tendency towards the metanarrative, Harvey has never ceased to be a geographer and has always insisted that space and spatial analysis matter. And his work, of course, has not been confined to the analytics of economy. In his most widely read book, The Condition of Postmodernity (1989), he produced a highly influential account of the cultural productions of late modern capitalism, divulging the dynamics of post-Fordist ‘flexible accumulation’. And in one of his more recent works, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (2005), he updated this diagnosis, illuminating how an ascendant ideology of neoliberalism has wrought a deeply unequal world marked by an asymmetric geography of wealth.
Harvey began his geographical studies at St John’s College, Cambridge, where he completed his BA, MA and PhD (his PhD examined the historical geography of hop production in nineteenth-century Kent, his home county). Before completing his PhD, he began his academic career as a Lecturer in Geography at Bristol in 1961. Staying there until 1969, he then moved across the Atlantic to Baltimore and Johns Hopkins University. He was there as Associate Professor and Professor of Geography until 1987. During that time, he migrated away from his spatial science training – best expressed in his first book *Explanation in Geography* (1969) – to essentially bring geography together with political economy to offer a radical Marxist account of historical development. Harvey then returned to the UK to take up the Halford Mackinder Professorship in Human Geography at Oxford until 1993, after which he returned to Johns Hopkins until 2001, when he then became Distinguished Professor of Geography and Anthropology at CUNY Graduate Center in New York, where he continues to work today.

This interview took place at National University of Ireland, Galway on the occasion of Harvey’s visit to deliver the keynote lecture at the 45th Conference of Irish Geographers in May 2013. Harvey gave a memorable presentation at a packed conference venue on the theme of ‘transformative geographies: critical reflections on environment, sustainability and governmentality’. His talk also culminated a wonderful and touching day-long session honouring the lifework of Neil Smith, his lifelong intellectual confidante. The interview begins by taking Harvey back to one of his earliest and most important contributions.

**JM:** David, your extended writing over many years has divulged that you have always felt a deep sense of opposition to the social relations of capitalism. Can you take us back to what first inspired your writing *Social Justice in the City* 40 years ago this year?

**DH:** During the 1960s, I was very much engaged in writing *Explanation in Geography*, which was for me an investigation of method. In writing it, I became acutely aware of the big difference between the methodology of science and the world to which it is being applied. And therefore after the publication of *Explanation in Geography* I wanted to do a book on the philosophy of geography, which was going to have a very strong component about ethics. And the ethics side of it gradually morphed, if you want to call it that, into the notion of ‘social justice’ – and social
justice in a context I was just moving to: the United States, where there had been uprisings in many cities, such as Watts, Detroit; and then, in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, hundreds of cities. So it seemed to me that clearly there was a socially unjust situation in many cities in the United States and so the idea of what would be a socially just city to oppose that emerged. And I think one of the big findings that I came up with in *Social Justice in the City* was the distinction between talking about the symptoms and outcomes, and the processes that created a socially unjust city. What was I think a big turning point for me was realizing that there was no point, if you like, just dealing with the results of a process that was actually producing inequality and producing unjust outcomes. And the relationship between social justice, on the one hand, and the process that was dominating city construction and city life, on the other, was, of course, capital accumulation (and the social inequalities that go with labour markets and labour market segmentation and all the rest of it). So that's how it all came together around the theme of ‘social justice in the city’.

**JM:** At that point, you were at Johns Hopkins about four years, so you would have been observing first-hand a number of emergent struggles?

**DH:** Yes, I arrived in Baltimore a year after the assassination of Martin Luther King and of course there were still the marks of where much of the city had been burned down. And I became heavily involved in investigations into housing conditions in the inner city and its inequalities and injustice. So that got me into how is housing delivered – what’s the process by which housing gets delivered to populations – which then got me again to look at the relationship of justice to capitalist forms of free market behaviour.

**JM:** The term ‘justice’ features in the title of two of your books. In what way is justice, or indeed injustice, a spatial or geographical concept, and in what ways must we insist it to be?

**DH:** I think you can clearly see how injustice gets actually embedded in the landscape. You only have to drive around a city like Baltimore and you see straight away: the injustices which are there in terms of housing stock, housing quality, the amount of trash in the alleys and so on. Everything of that sort you can see immediately by mapping, if you like, the mess. I always remember one of the tricks that Bill Bunge
played was to try to get a figure for the amount of broken glass on playgrounds. And of course the inner city playgrounds were full of broken glass, and the suburban ones were not. And if you put a map of that around you could actually see.

**JM:** Did he follow through on that?

**DH:** Oh yeah, he did. He did a couple of little maps on that, and had students go out and do some mapping.

**JM:** That’s a really useful index…

**DH:** Yeah, a very useful index, and so you can say, well, you know the likelihood of a child ending up with cut knees or something like that because of broken glass. So you can get a measure of that and of course you could then say, well, a much more spatially just world would be one in which there’s no broken glass in any playground anywhere. And so there are ways I think you can talk about access, freedom of movement and things of that sort. But I think again it’s important to ask the question always ‘what is the social process which is actually producing these geographical patterns in which you see the embeddedness of injustice in the landscape?’.

**JM:** Yes, and it seems to me that much of the public commentary in relation to questions of justice is unwilling or unable to deconstruct the deeper architectures of political economy that we’re implicitly connected to. It seems there is a reluctance to think critically about the sorts of macroeconomic structures and governmentalities through which we operate?

**DH:** Well I think that was one of the first things I really discovered when I started to ask the question ‘what is the process producing this?’, and you see it’s essentially market-driven, profit-seeking capitalists doing it. Then as soon as you start to get critical of that then nobody wants to talk to you. If you just say ‘look, we should have a programme to clean up the playgrounds’, then everybody says ‘yeah okay, let’s try and do that’. It gets people to go and clean up the programme, but you’re constantly dealing with cleaning up the symptoms rather than going after the underlying cause of the social inequalities and the spatial inequalities which you are witnessing.
JM: Just in terms of effective political tactics for addressing the kinds of inequalities you speak of, there seems to be an absence of political will from even those political parties espousing to be in the defence of the working class in many countries, and certainly in Ireland too where you have the Labour Party in coalition with a centre-right party, Fine Gael. There’s been a lot of discussion here about the fact that Labour have sold out on their core policies. So I’m wondering then about the ability of local organizers, local activists, to change substantially that which really the state should be targeting. In other words, where is the state in all of this, and a broader government strategy?

DH: Yes, because clearly there are limits to which local action and local activism can really cure the problem. I mean we can make some things better and obviously you wouldn’t want to be opposed to that – you know to the degree that you could get, I don’t know, 5% improvement by local action, and obviously this is a very important line of political activism to pursue. But the difficulty comes when you want to jump scale, as Neil Smith would call it, and go to a bigger question. I’ve gotten interested recently in this whole issue of how do you organize a whole city. If you’re talking about a city like New York or even a relatively small city like Galway, it’s still a much, much bigger question. And at that point you need comprehensive organization. You need a political system that is able to represent the interests of the mass of the population in a democratic kind of way so that democratic decisions can be made about the nature of development which is not going to be privileging big capital and financiers and developers but is going to be privileging the needs of people. It’s a huge but vital challenge, to think about the unsustainable nature of capitalist development.

JM: In critically considering how to overcome our unsustainable capitalist system, you have variously written about organizing for what you call an ‘anti-capitalist transition’. What are the kinds of alternative political, economic and social productions that we must start to think through, to begin with, and then progressively enact towards that end?

DH: I think in the first instance we have to proceed by a kind of politics of negation. I mean I’ve been around long enough to remember many, many times when I’ve been told that global inequalities are going to be eliminated in, you know, 20 years or 10 years down the line. The Millennium Development Goal said by 2015 we would eradicate
poverty. Again and again, we’re told that in order to do that the only mechanism we can actually use is the market-driven capitalist system. And that therefore the method of getting to this cure for global poverty is this exclusive method. Now when I look at that I say, well, I’ve heard this now since 1950 again and again. And again and again what transpires is of course that it is the method that produces the inequality and produces the problem. So that then leads to the question, is there an alternative method which can deal with the question of impacted poverty in advanced capitalist countries, but also global impoverishment and bad health and all the rest of it? There has to be something other than the capitalist development model and the free market and all those things that we are ritualistically told we have to liberate in order to create. But in liberating them what we really do is to empower the wealthy and create even more social inequality as a result. So by proceeding by negation you then say, ‘all right, one of the first things we have to do is to stop working on anti-poverty programmes’, and insist on what we should be working on: anti-wealth programmes. Because you can’t stop the problem of global poverty without sorting the problem of the global accumulation of wealth. And there are, of course, various mechanisms whereby you can go after the global accumulation of wealth, and most of those mechanisms which are currently available to us are actually embedded within the state apparatus.

**JM:** Such as the potential state governmental machinery of tax justice?

**DH:** Exactly. So again by negation you would have to say we have to stop the state being a capitalist state, and we have to turn it into a people’s state. Now how do we do that politically then becomes a real problem, and there’s a lot of resistance by many of us on the left to going after state power, because state power is bureaucratic and because the current state is indeed a capitalist state. So then you have to think through what a different state apparatus might look like or if the state apparatus has to be dismantled, or certain aspects of it have to be dismantled. And, if so, what aspects are you going to dismantle? And what aspect of the state, as it is now, are you going to protect? I mean I would not like to see all those aspects of the state which deal with public health being smashed. When some of the people on the left say let’s smash the state, you need to say, well, are you going to smash the Centers for Disease Control? The answer is no, you don’t want to smash that. And you still want the sewage to be disposed of. And you still want clean
water to come. So there are ways in which proceeding initially by nega-
tion you then start to turn many of the institutions and processes which
are around us into something which is rather different. But it has to be
a gradual process because we live in a very complicated world and if
you pull the plug on one part of it a lot of nasty things could happen
to a lot of people very fast if you really did smash the state.

JM: So in many ways it’s really about thinking through the role of the
state *vis-à-vis* that really useful dichotomy between a ‘use’ value versus
an ‘exchange’ value, which Marx talks about in *Capital, Volume 1?*

DH: Yes, exactly. I think what you want is a state which is dedicated to
the delivery of use values to the population. And there are of course
other collective mechanisms too. Associated populations can get
together and I’m all in favour of these assembly forms that exist and
how collective decisions get made about how to manage the water
supply, how to manage the distribution of use values to populations
and so on. But, as you know, part of the problem right now is that
inequality is built into the landscape in such an iconic kind of way. You
have the very affluent condominiums and then you have kind of hovels.
And so how do you start to transform all of that, when you know it’s a
massive problem of coordination to get something of that sort changed?

JM: Why do you think it is so difficult for us to have a serious debate
about alternative political economies and alternative environment–
society relations to the capitalist model? Why is it so difficult for us to
break out of the destructive and unsustainable individualization at the
heart of neoliberalism and actually think creatively about sustainable
cooperation, use values for a broader public sphere, questions of envi-
ronmental and social justice and so on?

DH: Well, look at the vested interests there are in the preservation of the
current dominant social relations in society and look at the power of
those vested interests. I think one of the very good things that the
Occupy movement raised was the power of the one percent. Of course
it’s a metaphor in some ways, but on the other hand I think it catches
on to something very real: the tremendous concentrations of wealth
and income in that small sliver of the population and the tremendous
political influence that they exercise, and of course the tremendous
influence they have over the media and through education and so on.
I mean how many right-wing think tanks are there, versus how many socialist, alternative think tanks are there?

JM: You can say the same thing about newspapers, news channels and so on…

DH: Absolutely, absolutely. So you have got a huge disadvantage before you really start. But the second thing is that to think through some of these questions, which are quite complicated, you need some time to sit down and think. And most people who are the most vulnerable in our society don’t have time. I mean I remember working on the minimum wage campaign in Baltimore and what was so striking was that the people we were working with were working 80 hour weeks. They had two jobs, earning almost nothing at both jobs. But if you’re working an 80 hour week then how on earth do you have time to sit down and start to think about, or start organizing, your neighbourhood? What time do you have for that if you’ve got a couple of kids? It becomes impossible. The resources, the financial resources, the time resources are just not there. So what you typically find, of course, is that the social organizations that are looking out for the poor are essentially run by middle-class people, who actually haven’t got revolutionary transformation in their minds. They believe that they can actually do good without actually transforming the system in any radical kind of way.

JM: And therein lies the deep-rooted conservatism at the heart of liberalism…

DH: Yes, absolutely. I mean how many people in academia actually think and work and write like me? It is very small. And there’s a space where we should be free to explore a lot of these things but it turns out that it’s not so free after all.

JM: Yes, we sometimes forget that we’re faced with a much bigger public discursive terrain in which there are dominant voices and they’re frequently not ours, or very critical. David, to switch gears slightly, having spent 40 years living and working in the US, do you consider US global economic hegemony to now be in terminal decline?
DH: I think there's a certain danger of exaggerating its decline. It's still extremely powerful. Militarily, of course, it's still dominant. Economically, there have been serious challenges to its hegemony but it's still I think a very, very powerful player and so we shouldn't exaggerate its decline. But what I think has been clear since the 1980s is that even decision makers in the United States realize that when global difficulties arise – which they are arising – then the US cannot act alone. So what we've seen is the US increasingly turning to first to the G; first it was the G6, then it was the G7, then it was the G8, and then it became the G20. So you start to see that there's a recognition that there are many problems that the US is not in a position to just call the shots on. And I think that this is true on economic policy. Even if the Republicans in the United States were not stopping the Obama drive to have stimulus, Obama cannot force Merkel and the rest to get out of austerity politics. There's no way in which Europe is going to be told what to do, and the same is true of China and so on. So we're seeing the rise of what I call regional hegemons that are very important, like Germany within the European Union, Brazil within Latin America, China within the Far East. So you see regional hegemons emerging and a regionalization of political power. But it's still the case that the United States is probably the number one in the midst of all of those regional hegemons. And militarily of course it's unassailable.

JM: In terms of geographically peripheral countries in many of the regions you refer to, a good example is perhaps Ireland. And I'm wondering about your thoughts on Ireland's position within the western European hegemon and its challenge of recovering from the European-wide and indeed broader recession that marks our current globalized economic system?

DH: My guess is that Ireland is probably in a competitively advantageous position, compared to say Greece, Spain and other peripheral countries within the European compilation. And I think this is for a very simple reason, which is that essentially the crash here was not the crash of the whole economy, it was really just the housing market. And the advantage that Ireland has with its low taxation rate, and all the other advantages such as people coming here to be inside of the European Union, are still with you. And I think you probably are seeing signs of some growth or stability in terms of foreign direct investment. FDI, however, is not itself being very vigorous because the global economy
is somewhat depressed. But to the degree that, for example, there is some recovery in consumerism in the United States, I think Ireland may well benefit from it in ways that Greece and Spain won’t be able to benefit from it. You’re better positioned, and so I think you may come out faster from recession, and I think you’re already seeing some signs of that. But you’ve still got this big overhang from the housing crash and the banking fiasco that accompanied it.

**JM:** Just in relation to FDI, I wonder if you could reflect on the following from the Irish Industrial Development Agency, which boasts on its website that Ireland’s international FDI ranking is still number one ‘for value of investment projects’ (IDA Ireland 2013). Now this is partially due, of course, to Ireland having one of the lowest corporation tax levels in the European Union, and the argument is repeatedly made that this must remain so to protect jobs, or global companies such as Intel and Google will uproot and leave. In what ways, do you think, can this common-sense discourse of neoliberal thinking be meaningfully contested in terms of thinking critically about organizing for a more sustainable political economy and a broader sense of spatial justice?

**DH:** Well, I’d be very interested to know – these are questions I have – what multiplier effect comes out of foreign direct investment. My suspicion is that the multiplier effect is not that great actually. So the spillover benefits therefore are relatively small. Secondly, I think that there’s always this game which is played with tax rates where you get what I call a sort of cargo cult capitalism where a territory cleans itself out and says please big capital come to earth and do what you want. When you do that actually you end up emasculating a lot of your own social welfare network, production apparatus, schools and so on. So that’s not necessarily going to maintain in the long run Ireland’s competitive advantage. But then there is also the question of if the tax is very, very low then why don’t you just put a little surtax on every now and again to get a little extra revenue to get yourself out of the mess? And you could do this as a temporary measure. For instance, in New York State, we’ve had that when there was a crisis and then there was a sort of a surtax which was put on high income, and it was just for two years. And the theory was if you just do it for two years people aren’t going to move out just for two years, but if you do it permanently it might cause a problem. But you can play games with that and I think that governments should be much more sophisticated.
JM: That seems a really useful idea for the Irish government to think about but I’ve not heard that even being debated here, which perhaps mirrors the rhetorical closing off of the question of our reliance on FDI and also illustrates our rather typical deferring to the elite powers of corporate capitalism.

DH: Yes, I’m sure that the heads of these foreign companies are often trotting in and talking to the minister of economy and industry or whatever, and probably also there are some nice kind of deals being made under the table about all kinds of things.

JM: David, in Ireland and elsewhere, a huge level of personal debt seems to have created a considerable degree of fatigue and indeed inertia in terms of resisting the palpable injustices and inequalities of late modern capitalism. In what ways, do you think, could we begin to reconstitute a more active and even radical public sphere of protest and organization, given that challenge?

DH: Yeah, that’s a very difficult one. I mean the role of debt is very important in stabilizing accumulation and I think it’s important to recognize that accumulation of capital is paralleled by an accumulation of debt, and that therefore you can’t get rid of indebtedness and keep capital accumulation going. So there’s a kind of relationship in the first instance. Then the question is how is the debt distributed – is it state debt, is it corporate debt, is it personal debt? And what are the consequences of that? And what we’ve seen, of course, is, if you like, the privatization of debt. So it goes away from the state, and so it becomes personal debt. Now personal indebtedness eventually leads to what you might call conditions of debt peonage. And if you’re in a condition of debt peonage then it’s very difficult for populations to rise up unless part of the demand that they’re rising up about is the abolition of the debt. But the abolition of the debt is a very, very difficult challenge, to get that to happen, to get a debt jubilee. I mean we have had this with student debt and housing debt, and how to deal with it. Now one of the ways in which you can deal with it, of course, is to turn it back into the state. So you de-privatize the debt if you like. But then the state has a problem of its own indebtedness right now, and so is resistant to alleviating personal indebtedness for all sorts of reasons.
**JM:** Yes, the finger in the dam metaphor has been repeatedly flagged here as part of a broader discourse signalling our economic insecurity and need for personal compliance with wider mechanisms of economic correction. And this, of course, was in many ways the same rationale through which Ireland’s recent bailout was administered by the European Union.

**DH:** Yes, very much so.

**JM:** If I can return to the notion of spatial justice, have you seen evidence in previous recessions where appeals to fairness, or appeals to spatial justice, have actually been successful, and what do you see as the prospects for such appeals in the current crisis?

**DH:** I think the sorts of things I would look at would be the programmes that came out of the New Deal in the 1930s: rural electrification, road building and the like. I mean I’m not necessarily approving of all of these but I’m saying that this generated employment. But it was also employment on projects which were helping to integrate various populations and give them better access to migratory movements and jobs and all the rest of it; and at the same time taking services out into rural areas. So something like the rural electrification that occurred in the 1930s in the United States would be a very good example where differential access to electricity was overcome largely by a debt-financed recovery programme. What is astonishing about what has happened just recently with the foreclosure crisis is that we’ve not seen a similar kind of thing. I mean it’s not Obama’s fault – I don’t want to blame the poor guy too much – but if the political apparatus had willed it and set up say an urban reconstruction bank, in which case you would look at a city like Detroit with a large number of foreclosures and you would have gone in and dealt with all the foreclosures and allowed the people living there to continue living there under a different property regime. And if you’d gone in and done some kind of, say, green solar energy reorganization, and you started to reindustrialize in certain ways certain parts of Detroit, you could’ve started a process of urban regeneration for a low-income population; and you would have solved the foreclosure problem, which would have actually been a different way of dealing with the banking problem. But there was never ever any thought of doing that, because as far as the Treasury and the Federal
Reserve were concerned the thing was to save the banks and to save them directly, and not to do anything about the foreclosures.

**JM:** That was replicated in Ireland, as you know.

**DH:** Yes, that’s right. There was a tremendous opportunity to engage in a re-urbanization project when the crash came, but I don’t see anywhere in the world where that was actually undertaken.

**JM:** Isn’t it depressing that there doesn’t seem to be any historicizing of our contemporary moment, to actually look at what worked previously as a more effective and sustainable way of political–economic governing?

**DH:** Absolutely, but this is an obvious product of class interests. I mean this last crisis – which was generated by a certain set of class interests – is being used by those class interests to further its interests. And that’s what it’s been about. There’s not been a widespread abandonment of the neoliberal project; in fact, there’s been a deepening of the neoliberal project. So if you look at the distribution of income now compared to what it was four years ago when the crisis broke out, the distribution of income is now worse, and all the indicators are showing that. But that tells you something about who is managing the project. You know there’s this great saying ‘never let a good crisis go to waste’. And actually the major class interests involved in this crisis have managed this crisis extremely well to their own advantage and to the disadvantage of the mass of the population. So it’s not surprising under those circumstances that you didn’t get a re-urbanization project in Detroit, or a re-urbanization project in Ireland where you have foreclosed housing. There was no attempt to deal with that. The only attempt was to deal with the banking problem and then let the people suck up the problem of the housing.

**JM:** David, just one final question on the subject of spatial justice. Doreen Massey has reflected that our geographical imaginaries need to envision the effects of our capitalist consumption on ‘spatially distant neighbours’ – what some have argued as viewing ethically and compassionately the global south. In what ways do you feel we should also consider the effects of our capitalist consumption at home in developing an ethics and politics of care towards what Ananya Roy has recently
called ‘spatially proximate strangers’ – in other words, the homeless, the impoverished and the most marginalized in our own communities?

**DH:** Well, there are a couple of things here. I’m very sympathetic to this notion of ethical obligation, and that in some ways was the impulse behind my writing *Social Justice and the City* way back. My discovery though was that you’ve really got to go after the process that creates the problem. There are limits to which ethical concerns of this sort, well-meaning though they really are, actually are going to be sufficient to deal with the underlying nature of the problem. So I’m a little sceptical about what might be called a sort of socialist humanism. Personally, I find myself very attracted to it, but intellectually I think I would say I can’t support simply a socialist humanist project that doesn’t have in it a political economic project to displace the dominant system that is actually both producing wealth and producing inequality and poverty at the same time. So to me the priority is never to take my eyes off that project, and therefore while I’m personally very sympathetic to the idea of a sort of socialist humanist responsibility to others, I kind of worry about it getting lost in a do-gooder kind of NGO culture, which again has some very, very good people working in it. And I’m not saying there’s nothing good going on in it at all, but I am saying there is a deeper issue.

**JM:** You feel it’s a limited response, in other words?

**DH:** Yes, I feel it’s too limited a response.


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