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Spaces of Hope

David Harvey

University of California Press
Berkeley Los Angeles

for Delfina and Her Generation

Hope is Memory that Desires
(Balzac)

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University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

Published by arrangement with
Edinburgh University Press

ISBN 0-520-22577-5 (cloth)
ISBN 0-520-22578-3 (paper)

Printed in Canada

08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01
9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum
requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R 1997)
(Permanence of Paper). ∞

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CHAPTER 1

The difference a generation makes

1 Marx redux

Every year since 1971 (with the exception of one) I have run either a reading group or a course on Marx's *Capital* (Volume 1). While this may reasonably be taken as the mark of a peculiarly stodgy academic mind, it has allowed me to accumulate a rare time-series of reactions to this particular text.

In the early 1970s there was great political enthusiasm for it on the part of at least a radical minority. Participation was understood as a political act. Indeed, the course was set up (in parallel with many others of its sort across American campuses at the time) to try to find a theoretical basis, a way of understanding all of the chaos and political disruption evident in the world (the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the urban uprisings that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King in the United States, the growing opposition to the imperialist war in Vietnam, the massive student movements of 1968 that shook the world from Paris to Mexico City, from Berkeley and Berlin to Bangkok, the Czech 'Spring' and its subsequent repression by the Soviets, the 'Seven Days War' in the Middle East, the dramatic events that occurred at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, just to name a few of the signal events that made it seem as if the world as we knew it was falling apart).

In the midst of all this turmoil there was a crying need for some sort of political and intellectual guidance. Given the way in which Marx's works had effectively been proscribed through the long history of McCarthyite repression in the United States, it seemed only right and proper to turn to Marx. He must have had something important to say, we reasoned, otherwise his works would not have been suppressed for so long. This presumption was given credibility by the icy reception to our efforts on many a campus. I disguised the name of the course, often ran it of an evening and gave 'independent study' credit for those who did not want any mention of it on their transcript (I later learned from someone high up in the administration that since the course was taught in the geography

program and was called 'Reading Capital' it took them nearly a decade to figure out it was Marx's *Capital* that was being taught!).

Capital was not an easy text to decipher, at least for the uninitiated (and there were many of us in that condition and only a few old hands could help us on our way – most of them of European extraction where communist parties had long remained active). But for those of us in universities the intellectual difficulty was, at least, a normal challenge.

In these early years many young faculty members participated as did many graduate students. Some of them have gone on to be famous (and though some have changed their stripes most will generously acknowledge the formative nature of the whole experience). They came from all manner of disciplines (Philosophy, Math Sciences, Political Theory, History of Science, English, Geography, History, Sociology, Economics ...). In retrospect I realize what an incredible privilege it was to work through this text with people armed with so many different intellectual skills and political perspectives. This was how I learned my Marx, through a process of mutual self-education that obeyed little or no particular disciplinary logic let alone party political line. I soon found myself teaching the text well beyond the confines of the university, in the community (with activists, teachers, unionists). I even got to teach some of it (not very successfully) in the Maryland penitentiary.

Teaching undergraduates was somewhat more fraught. The dominant tone of undergraduate radicalism in those days was anti-intellectual. For them, the academy seemed the center of ideological repressions; book learning of any sort was inherently suspect as a tool of indoctrination and domination. Many undergraduate student activists (and these were, of course, the only ones who would ever think of taking the course) thought it rather unradical to demand that they read let alone understand and write about such a long and tortuous book. Not many of them lasted the course. They paid no mind to Marx's injunction that 'there is no royal road to science' nor did they listen to the warning that many readers 'always anxious to come to a conclusion, eager to know the connexion between general principles and the immediate questions that have aroused their passions, may be disheartened because they will be unable to move on at once.' No amount of 'forewarning and forearming those readers who zealously seek the truth' (Marx, 1976 edition, 104) seemed to work with this audience. They were carried forward largely on a cresting wave of intuitions and bruised emotions (not, I hasten to add, necessarily a bad thing).

The situation is radically different now. I teach *Capital* purely as a respectable regular course. I rarely if ever see any faculty members and the graduate student audience has largely disappeared (except for those few

who plan to work with me and who take the course as some kind of 'rite of passage' before they go on to more important things). Most of the graduate survey courses in other departments now allot Marx a week or two, sandwiched in between, say, Darwin and Weber. Marx gets attention. But in academia, this is devoted either to putting him in his place as, say, a 'minor post-Ricardian' or passing him by as an out-moded 'structuralist' or 'modernist.' Marx is, in short, largely written off as the weaver of an impossibly huge masternarrative of history and an advocate of some totally impossible historical transformation that has in any case been proven by events to be just as fallacious politically and practically as it always was theoretically.

Even before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, in the early 1980s, Marx was definitely moving out of academic and political fashion. In the halcyon years of identity politics and the famous 'cultural turn' the Marxian tradition assumed an important negative role. It was ritualistically held up (incorrectly) as a dominant ideology that had to be fought against. Marx and 'traditional' Marxism were systematically criticized and denigrated as insufficiently concerned with more important questions of gender, race, sexuality, human desires, religion, ethnicity, colonial dominations, environment, or whatever. Cultural powers and movements were just as important if not more so than those of class and what was class anyways if not one out of many different and cross-cutting cultural configurations. All of that might have been fair enough (there were plenty of grounds for such criticisms) if it had not also been concluded that Marxism as a mode of thought was inherently antagonistic towards any such alternative formulations and therefore a totally lost cause. In particular, cultural analysis supplanted political economy (the former, in any case, being much more fun than being absorbed in the dour world and crushing realities of capitalist exploitation).

And then came the collapse of the Wall, the last nail in the coffin of any sort of Marxist credibility even if many of a Marxian persuasion had long distanced themselves (some as long ago as the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and still more with the crushing of the Czech Spring in 1968) from actually existing socialism of the Soviet-Chinese sort. To pretend there was anything interesting about Marx after 1989 was to sound more and more like an all-but extinct dinosaur whimpering its own last rites. Free-market capitalism rode triumphantly across the globe, slaying all such old dinosaurs in its path. 'Marx talk' was increasingly confined to what might best be described as an increasingly geriatric 'New Left' (I myself passed none too gently into that night known as 'senior citizen'). By the early 1990s the intellectual heft of Marxian theory seemed to be terminally in decline.

But some undergraduates still continue to take the *Capital* course. For most of them this is no longer a political act. The fear of communism has largely dissipated. The course has a good reputation. A few students are curious to see what all the fuss with Marxism was about. And a few still have some radical instincts left to which they feel Marx might add an extra insight or two. So, depending on their timetable and their requirements, some undergraduates end up in Marx's *Capital* rather than in Aristotle's *Ethics* or Plato's *Republic*.

This contrast I have drawn between then and now in terms of political and intellectual interest and response to Marx is hardly surprising. Most will recognize the broad outlines of what I have described even if the specific lense I am using exaggerates and distorts here and there.

But there is another tale to be told that makes matters rather more confusing. In the early 1970s it was hard to find the direct relevance of Volume 1 of *Capital* to the political issues that dominated the day. We needed Lenin to get us from Marx to an understanding of the imperialist war that so unnerved us in Vietnam. We needed a theory of civil society (Gramsci at least) to get us from Marx to civil rights, and a theory of the state (such as Miliband or Poulantzas) to get us to a critique of state repressions and welfare state expenditures manipulated to requirements of capital accumulation. We needed the Frankfurt School to understand questions of legitimacy, technological rationality, the state and bureaucracy, and the environment.

But then consider the historical-geographical conditions. In much of the advanced capitalist world, the trade union movement (often far too reformist for our radical tastes) was still strong, unemployment was broadly contained, everywhere (except in the United States) nationalization and public ownership was still on the agenda and the welfare state had been built up to a point where it seemed unassailable if flawed. Elsewhere in the world movements were afoot that seemed to threaten the existence of capitalism. Mao was a pre-eminent revolutionary leader in China while many other charismatic revolutionaries from Che Guevara and Castro in the Latin American context to Cabral and Nyerere in Africa actively held out the possibility of a socialist or communist alternative.

Revolution seemed imminent and we have subsequently learned that it was actively feared among many of the rulers of the time (even going beyond what might be expected from the evident paranoia of someone like Richard Nixon). How that revolution might occur and the kind of society to which it might lead were not topics even remotely touched upon in Marx's *Capital* (though there were plenty of other texts of Marx and the Marxists to which we could turn for enlightenment).

In short, we needed a whole host of mediations to get from Marx's *Capital* to the political issues that concerned us. And it frequently entailed an act of faith in the whole history of the Marxist movement (or in some charismatic figure like Mao or Castro) to believe in the inner connection between Marx's *Capital* and all that we were interested in. This is not to say there was nothing in the text to fascinate and delight – the extraordinary insights that came from consideration of the commodity fetish, the wonderful sense of how class struggle had altered the world from the pristine forms of capital accumulation that Marx described. And once one got used to it, the text provided its own peculiar and beguiling pleasures. But the plain fact was that *Capital* did not have that much direct relevance to daily life. It described capitalism in its raw, unmodified, and most barbaric nineteenth-century state.

The situation today is radically different. The text teems with ideas as to how to explain our current state. There is the fetish of the market that caught out that lover of children Kathy Lee Gifford when she was told that the line of clothing she was selling through Wal-Mart was made either by thirteen-year-olds in Honduras paid a mere pittance or by sweated women workers in New York who had not been paid for weeks. There is also the whole savage history of downsizing (prominently reported on in the *New York Times*), the scandals over child labor in Pakistan in the manufacture of carpets and soccer balls (a scandal that was forced upon FIFA's attention), and Michael Jordan's \$30 million retainer for Nike, set against press accounts of the appalling conditions of Nike workers in Indonesia and Vietnam. The press is full of complaints as to how technological change is destroying employment opportunities, weakening the institutions of organized labor and increasing rather than lightening the intensity and hours of labor (all central themes of Marx's chapter on 'Machinery and Modern Industry'). And then there is the whole question of how an 'industrial reserve army' of labor has been produced, sustained and manipulated in the interests of capital accumulation these last decades, including the public admission by Alan Budd, an erstwhile advisor to Margaret Thatcher, that the fight against inflation in the early 1980s was a cover for raising unemployment and reducing the strength of the working class. 'What was engineered,' he said, 'in Marxist terms – was a crisis in capitalism which re-created a reserve army of labour, and has allowed the capitalists to make high profits ever since' (Brooks, 1992).

All of this now makes it all too easy to connect Marx's text to daily life. Students who stray into the course soon feel the heat of what amounts to a devastating critique of a world of free-market neoliberalism run riot. For their final paper I give them bundles of cuttings from the *New York Times*

(a respectable source, after all) and suggest they use them to answer an imaginary letter from a parent/relative/friend from home that says:

I hear you are taking a course on Marx's *Das Kapital*. I have never read it myself though I hear it is both interesting and difficult. But thank heavens we have put that nineteenth century nonsense behind us now. Life was hard and terrible in those days, but we have come to our collective senses and made a world that Marx would surely never recognize . . .

They write illuminating and often devastatingly critical letters in reply. Though they dare not send them, few finish the course without having their views disrupted by the sheer power of a text that connects so trenchantly with conditions around us.

Herein, then, lies a paradox. This text of Marx's was much sought after and studied in radical circles at a time when it had little direct relationship to daily life. But now, when the text is so pertinent, scarcely anyone cares to consider it. Why?

2 The difference a generation makes

I found myself asking the same question, though from a completely different angle, when I happened to view two films back to back (courtesy of capitalistic video technology). I saw them in reverse chronological order and I suspect that the impact they made on me was all the stronger for it. The two films were *Hate* (La Haine) which came out in 1995, and Jean-Luc-Godard's classic piece from 1966 called *One or Two Things I Know about Her* (Un ou deux choses que je sais d'elle).

Hate records a day in the life of three young men. Two are children of Maghrebian and African immigrants respectively and the third is of Jewish extraction. Their bond arises from the conditions of life of contemporary youth raised in the suburban projects (the public housing projects built for workers largely during the 1960s). Together, they face a world of unemployment, police repression, arbitrary state power, social breakdown, and loss of any sense of belonging or citizenship. The urban and (in this instance) suburban unrest, coupled with violent confrontations and street fights, lootings and burnings that periodically occurred in many French cities in the 1990s form the background to the story. This backdrop could be extended to include the violence that followed the Rodney King verdict in Los Angeles in 1992, the sudden outbreaks of youth violence in Manchester, Liverpool, and even 'nice' cities, like Oxford, in the late 1980s, as well as eruptions in several European metropolitan areas.

The film is full of raw anger, pain, and violent despair on the part of the three main protagonists. They cannot even have kind words for each

other, let alone for anyone else. There is scarcely a moment of tenderness let alone reflective or thoughtful examination in the whole film ('thinking too much' is a term of derision). Driven by their anger and raw emotions, these individuals are vulnerable to the core. They seem stripped of all defenses, yet they also desperately seek attention, identity, and recognition by engaging in the only kind of behavior that draws the attention of those possessed of power – sometimes sullen but always unpredictable and disruptive aggression. The only form of empowerment available to the protagonists lies in the gun (a service weapon lost by a police officer and found by one of them). The only relevant existential question that hangs over the film is how and when to use that gun.

The film itself mirrors this transgressive behavior in its technique and form. No attention is paid to subtleties. The film is as raw, crude, and unreflective as its subject matter. It uses the same techniques to attract attention as its subjects do. This is, the film seems to say, the contemporary metropolis at work. A place of both artistic and lived impoverishment if not humane impossibility.

Godard's film opens with the sounds and scenes of construction. Such scenes form a frequent interruptor of processes of quiet reflection on the part of the masculine narrator (the director) and the actresses who talk about their lives and give of their thoughts as they pass their day, prostituting themselves both to men as well as to the icons of contemporary culture (the car, the boutique, the highways, the suburban public housing projects, the simplistic bourgeois version of family life – the film in fact ends with a shot of an urban landscape made up of a bundle of consumer products). The city is a space in the process of formation. It is already marked by the traces of deindustrialization and the rise of the political economy of the sign as opposed to a political economy of direct material reproduction. The question mark that hovers over it is what will become of the inhabitants as this new urban world is created. By the time we view *Hate*, the answer to that question is omnipresent, but in 1966 Godard builds a subtle sense of dread, a sense of getting lost and of fragmentation. Yet there is a strong sub-text that hints of alternatives. Can we recover the ABC of existence, the narrator asks?

The pieces seem to hold together as a solid reflection on what the city can and might mean (for the figure of 'the city' looms large throughout the film). But the individuals seem caught, helplessly passive, imprisoned and fragmented within the web of urban life being constructed by agents of power that seem far away – the Gaullist state with its all-powerful planning agencies, monopoly capital in cahoots with that state to rebuild a world and the city in its own image, and beyond that the globalizing reach of the United States waging a Cold War against Moscow and Beijing and a

hot war in Vietnam, dominating the media, and placing signs of its power everywhere (TWA, PAN AM ...). But even that contains a possibility, however problematic. 'Suddenly I had the impression that I was the world and the world was me,' says the alienated Juliette as she surveys the bland facades of the new residential tower blocks rising in the Paris suburbs.

The movie operates at a key point in the emergence of what later came to be known as a postmodern sensibility. It poses all the questions we are now all too familiar with. The limits of language (Wittgenstein's 'the limits of my language mean the limits of my world' is directly quoted), the impossibility of 'true' communication, the feeling that something is missing ('but I know not what'), the inability to represent events in all their fullness, the sense that 'life is like a comic strip' and the perverse ways in which signs, representations, and language confuse rather than clarify an always elusive reality. The physical clarity of images and representations, in the film as in the commentary itself, contrasts with the murkiness of a future in which the only hope seems to lie in the capacity of the human spirit somehow to 'take possession' of minor things and 'to catch a fleeting reason to be alive.' So what are dreams made of in such a world? Says Juliette in answer to that question (posed by her young son) 'I used to dream I was being sucked into a huge hole but now I feel I am being scattered into a thousand pieces and when I wake I worry that a piece is missing.' The fearful paranoia often associated with modernity here gives way to the sensibility of schizophrenia so often associated with postmodernity. Existential and phenomenological sensibilities (long present on the French Left) filtered through Marxism point (as in the parallel case of Althusserian philosophy, at its apogee when Godard's film was produced) towards a fragmented and postmodernist way of thinking.

Yet the film, as Chevrier (1997) points out, is a thing of enormous and compelling beauty. Like the calm and gentle beauty of its actress, the film uses aesthetic powers and intellectuality as a defense against pain. In this it counters the passivity of its characters with a subterranean utopian activism. It conjures a sense of future possibilities out of nothingness simply by virtue of the wide-ranging questions it poses. 'If things come into focus again,' says the narrator, 'this can only be through the rebirth of *conscience*' (the latter word having multiple meanings in French that stretch from external to inner understandings). It is the power of the human spirit rather than of the gun that holds the key to the future.

Godard, the avant-garde leftist film director, articulates the problems of French Maoism and Althusserianism and in so doing pioneers the transition to postmodernism through an artistic and intellectual *tour de force* that many now acknowledge helped open the flood gates on the left to a new mode of radical thought. In the short run this produced the

radical movement of 1968 but in the long run it led to the demise of functionalist, dogmatic, and foundationalist forms of Marxism. The latter proved inappropriate to the complicated world of monopoly state capitalism coupled with the post-war welfare state and a rising consumer culture in which the political economy of the spectacle and the sign were to take on new and enhanced roles.

But those times have changed. The city of the future that hovers as a question mark in Godard's film is fully formed in *Hate*. Utopian longing has given way to unemployment, discrimination, despair, and alienation. Repressions and anger are now everywhere in evidence. There is no intellectual or aesthetic defense against them. Signs don't even matter in any fundamental sense any more. The city incarcerates the underprivileged and further marginalizes them in relation to the broader society. But is not this exactly the kind of world for which a rather traditional, even crude and (dare I say it) vulgar and functionalist Marxism might be all too politically appropriate? What would happen if the 'penurious rabble' that Hegel deemed so threatening to the stability of civil society became a 'dangerous class' for itself? There is, of course, no hint of such a turn in the film (though the fascist skinheads bring echoes of a resurrected older power to be struggled against). But the parallel to my teaching experience with Marx is striking. Godard struggled to free himself from the chains of a dogmatic Marxism at a certain historical moment while keeping faith with some kind of Marxist/Maoist future. *Hate* records the absence of any such politics in a time and a place where some version of it should surely be appropriate.

3 The work of postmodernity

The paradoxes I have described relate to a massive discursive shift that has occurred over the past three decades. There are all kinds of aspects to this shift and it is easy to get lost in a mass of intricacies and complexities. But what is now striking is the dominance of an almost fairy-tale like belief, held on all sides alike, that once upon a time there was structuralism, modernism, industrialism, Marxism or what have you and now there is post-structuralism, postmodernism, postindustrialism, post-Marxism, post-colonialism, and so forth. Like all such tales, this one is rarely spoken of in such a crude or simplistic way. To do so would be particularly embarrassing to those who deny in principle the significance of broad-based 'metanarratives.' Yet the prevalence of 'the post' (and the associated inability to say what it is that we might be 'pre') is a dominant characteristic of contemporary debate. It has also become a serious game in academia to hunt the covert modernists (if you are a dedicated

postmodernist) or to hunt the decadent postmodernists (if you happen to be in favor of some sort of modernist revival).

One of the consequences of this prevalent fairy tale (and I call it that to capture its beguiling power) is that it is impossible to discuss Marx or Marxism outside of these dominant terms of debate. For example, one quite common reaction to my recent work, particularly *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, is to express surprise and disbelief at how I seem to merge modernist and postmodernist, structuralist and post-structuralist arguments (see, e.g., Eagleton, 1997). But Marx had not read Saussure or Lévi Strauss and while there are some powerful structuralist readings of Marx (principally by Althusser) the evidence that Marx was a structuralist or even a modernist *avant la lettre*, as these terms came to be understood in the 1970s, is neither overwhelming nor conclusive. Analyses based on Marx's work collide with the beguiling power of this fairy-tale reading of our recent discursive history. Put bluntly, we do not read Marx these days (no matter whether he is relevant or not) because he is someone whose work lies in a category that we are supposed to be 'post'. Or if we do read him, it is solely through the lenses provided by what it is we believe we are 'post.'

Now it is indeed interesting to look at Marx's *oeuvre* through such lenses. He was, of course, an avid critic of classical bourgeois political economy and devoted much of his life to 'deconstructing' its dominant principles. He was deeply concerned with language (discourse) and was acutely aware of how discursive shifts (of the sort he examined in depth in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*) carried their own distinctive political freight. He understood in a deep sense the relationship between knowledge and 'situatedness' ('positionality') though it was, of course, the 'standpoint' of the worker that was the focus of his attention. I could go on and on in this vein, but my point here is not to try to prove that much of what passes for innovative in our recent discursive history is already pre-figured in Marx, but to point to the damage that the fairy-tale reading of the differences between the 'then' and the 'now' is doing to our abilities to confront the changes occurring around us. Cutting ourselves off from Marx is to cut off our investigative noses to satisfy the superficial face of contemporary intellectual fashion.

Bearing this in mind, let me now focus on two facets of this discursive shift that have occurred since around 1970: those captured through the terms 'globalization' and 'the body.' Both terms were little if at all in evidence as analytical tools in the early 1970s. Both are now powerfully present; they can even be regarded as conceptual dominants. 'Globalization,' for example, was entirely unknown before the mid-1970s. Innumerable conferences now study the idea. There is a vast literature on the

subject, coming at it from all angles. It is a frequent topic of commentary in the media. It is now one of the most hegemonic concepts for understanding the political economy of international capitalism. And its uses extend far beyond the business world to embrace questions of politics, culture, national identity, and the like. So where did this concept come from? Does it describe something essentially new?

'Globalization' seems first to have acquired its prominence as American Express advertised the global reach of its credit card in the mid-1970s. The term then spread like wildfire in the financial and business press, mainly as legitimation for the deregulation of financial markets. It then helped make the diminution in state powers to regulate capital flows seem inevitable and became an extraordinarily powerful political tool in the disempowerment of national and local working-class movements and trade union power (labor discipline and fiscal austerity – often imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – became essential to achieving internal stability and international competitiveness). And by the mid-1980s it helped create a heady atmosphere of entrepreneurial optimism around the theme of the liberation of markets from state control. It became a central concept, in short, associated with the brave new world of globalizing neoliberalism. It helped make it seem as if we were entering upon a new era (with a touch of teleological inevitability thrown in) and thereby became part of that package of concepts that distinguished between then and now in terms of political possibilities. The more the left adopted this discourse as a description of the state of the world (even if it was a state to be criticized and rebelled against), the more it circumscribed its own political possibilities. That so many of us took the concept on board so uncritically in the 1980s and 1990s, allowing it to displace the far more politically charged concepts of imperialism and neocolonialism, should give us pause. It made us weak opponents of the politics of globalization particularly as these became more and more central to everything that US foreign policy was trying to achieve. The only politics left was a politics of conserving and in some instances downright conservative resistance.

There is, however, one other angle on much of this that may have equally deep significance. The NASA satellite image entitled 'Earth Rise' depicted the earth as a free-floating globe in space. It quickly assumed the status of an icon of a new kind of consciousness. But the geometrical properties of a globe are different from those of a two-dimensional map. It has no natural boundaries save those given by lands and oceans, cloud covers and vegetation patterns, deserts and well-watered regions. Nor does it have any particular center. It is perhaps no accident that the awareness of the artificiality of all those boundaries and centers that had hitherto

dominated thinking about the world became much more acute. It became much easier, with this icon of the globe hanging in the background, to write of a 'borderless world' (as Miyoshi, 1997, has so persuasively done) and to take a radically decentered approach to culture (with the massive cultural traditions of China, India, South America, and Africa suddenly looking as salient and as geographically dominant across segments of the globe as those of the West). Travel around the world, already much easier, suddenly had no natural stopping point and the continuity of spatial relations suddenly becomes both practically and rhetorically a fundamental fact of life. And it may well be that the focus on the body as the center of all things is itself a response to this decentering of everything else, promoted by the image of the globe (rather than the two-dimensional map) as the locus of human activity and thought.

So what of the body? Here the tale, though analogous, is substantially different. The extraordinary efflorescence of interest in 'the body' as a grounding for all sorts of theoretical enquiries over the last two decades has a dual origin. In the first place, the questions raised particularly through what is known as 'second-wave feminism' could not be answered without close attention being paid to the 'nature-nurture' problem and it was inevitable that the status and understanding of 'the body' became central to theoretical debate. Questions of gender, sexuality, the power of symbolic orders, and the significance of psychoanalysis also repositioned the body as both subject and object of discussion and debate. And to the degree that all of this opened up a terrain of enquiry that was well beyond traditional conceptual apparatuses (such as that contained in Marx), so an extensive and original theorizing of the body became essential to progressive and emancipatory politics (this was particularly the case with respect to feminist and queer theory). And there is indeed much that has been both innovative and profoundly progressive within this movement.

The second impulse to return to the body arose out of the movements of post-structuralism in general and deconstruction in particular. The effect of these movements was to generate a loss of confidence in all previously established categories (such as those proposed by Marx) for understanding the world. And it is in this context that the connexion between decentering and the figure of the globe may have done its undermining work. The effect, however, was to provoke a return to the body as the irreducible basis for understanding. Lowe (1995, 14) argues that:

[T]here still remains one referent apart from all the other destabilized referents, whose presence cannot be denied, and that is the body referent, our very own lived body. This body referent is in fact the referent of all referents, in the sense that ultimately all signifieds, values, or meanings

refer to the delineation and satisfaction of the needs of the body. Precisely because all other referents are now destabilized, the body referent, our own body, has emerged as a problem.

The convergence of these two broad movements has refocused attention upon the body as the basis for understanding and, in certain circles at least (particularly those animated by writers such as Foucault and Judith Butler), as the privileged site of political resistance and emancipatory politics.

I will shortly take up 'globalization' and 'the body' in greater detail. But I here want merely to comment on the positioning of these two discursive regimes in our contemporary constructions. 'Globalization' is the most macro of all discourses that we have available to us while that of 'the body' is surely the most micro from the standpoint of understanding the workings of society (unless, that is, we succumb to the reductionism of seeing society as merely an expression of DNA codings and genetic evolutions). These two discursive regimes – globalization and the body – operate at opposite ends of the spectrum in the scalar we might use to understand social and political life. But little or no systematic attempt has been made to integrate 'body talk' with 'globalization talk.' The only strong connections to have emerged in recent years concern individual and human rights (e.g. the work of Amnesty International), and, more specifically, the right of women to control their own bodies and reproductive strategies as a means to approach global population problems (dominant themes in the Cairo Conference on Population in 1994 and the Beijing Women's Conference of 1996). Environmentalists often try to forge similar connections, linking personal health and consumption practices with global problems of toxic waste generation, ozone depletion, global warming, and the like. These instances illustrate the potency and the power of linking two seemingly disparate discursive regimes. But there is a large untilled terrain within which these discursive regimes have been conveniently separated from each other. In this book, therefore, I sketch in a way in which 'globalization' and 'the body' might be more closely integrated with each other and explore the political-intellectual consequences of making such a connexion.

The line of argument I shall use is broadly based in a relational conception of dialectics embodied in the approach that I have come to call 'historical-geographical materialism.' I want, at the outset, to lay out just one fundamental tenet of this approach in order to lay another of the key shibboleths of our time as firmly to rest as I can. And this concerns the tricky question of the relation between 'particularity' and 'universality' in the construction of knowledge.

I deny that we have a choice between particularity or universality in our mode of thinking and argumentation. Within a relational dialectics one is always internalized and implicated in the other. There is a link between, for example, the particularities of concrete labors occurring in particular places and times (the seamstress in Bangladesh who made my shirt), and the measured value of that labor arrived at through processes of exchange, commodification, monetization, and, of course, the circulation and accumulation of capital. One conception of labor is concrete and particular and the other is abstract and 'universal' (in the sense that it is achieved through specific processes of generalization).

Obviously, there could be no abstract labor at all without a million and one concrete labors occurring throughout the world. But what is then interesting is the way in which the qualities of concrete labor respond and internalize the force of abstract labor as achieved through global trade and interaction. Workers engaging in productive concrete labors suddenly find themselves laid off, downsized, rendered technologically obsolete, forced to adapt to new labor processes and conditions of work, simply because of the force of competition (or, put in the terms proposed here, the concrete labor adjusts to abstract conditions at the same time as the qualities of abstract labor depend upon movements and transitions in concrete labor processes in different places and times).

I have used this example to illustrate a general point. The particularity of the body cannot be understood independently of its embeddedness in socio-ecological processes. If, as many now argue, the body is a social construct, then it cannot be understood outside of the forces that swirl around it and construct it. One of those key determinants is the labor process, and globalization describes how that process is being shaped by political-economic and associated cultural forces in distinctive ways. It then follows that the body cannot be understood, theoretically or empirically, outside of an understanding of globalization. But conversely, boiled down to its simplest determinations, globalization is about the socio-spatial relations between billions of individuals. Herein lies the foundational connexion that must be made between two discourses that typically remain segregated, to the detriment of both.

Part of the work of postmodernity as a set of discursive practices over the last two decades has been to fragment and sever connexions. In some instances this proved a wise, important, and useful strategy to try to unpack matters (such as those of sexuality or the relation to nature) that would otherwise have remained hidden. But it is now time to reconnect. This book is an account of what happens when we try to do so.

There is a final point that I need to make. One important root of the so-called 'cultural turn' in recent thinking lies in the work of Raymond

Williams and the study of Gramsci's writings (both particularly important to the cultural studies movement that began in Birmingham with Stuart Hall as one of its most articulate members). One of the several strange and unanticipated results of this movement has been the transformation of Gramsci's remark on 'pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will' into a virtual law of human nature. I wish in no way to detract from the extraordinary feats of many on the left who have fought a rearguard action against the wave of neoliberalism that swept across the advanced capitalist world after 1980. This showed optimism of the will at its noble best. But a powerful inhibitor to action was the inability to come up with an alternative to the Thatcherite doctrine that 'there is no alternative' (a phrase that will echo as a recurring refrain throughout this book). The inability to find an 'optimism of the intellect' with which to work through alternatives has now become one of the most serious barriers to progressive politics.

Gramsci penned those famous words while sick and close to death in an Italian prison cell under conditions that were appalling. I think we owe it to him to recognize the contingent nature of the comment. We are not in prison cells. Why, then, might we willingly choose a metaphor drawn from incarceration as a guiding light for our own thinking? Did not Gramsci (1978, 213) also bitterly complain, before his incarceration, at the pessimism which produced then the same political passivity, intellectual torpor and scepticism towards the future as it does now in ours? Do we not also owe it to him, out of respect for the kind of fortitude and political passion he exhibited, to transform that phrase in such a way as to seek an optimism of the intellect that, properly coupled with an optimism of the will, might produce a better future? And if I turn towards the end of this book towards the figure of utopia and if I parallel Raymond Williams's title *Resources of Hope* with the title *Spaces of Hope*, then it is because I believe that in this moment in our history we have something of great import to accomplish by exercising an optimism of the intellect in order to open up ways of thinking that have for too long remained foreclosed.

1998 is, it turns out, a fortuitous year to be writing about such matters. It is the thirtieth anniversary (the usual span given to a generation) of that remarkable movement that shook the world from Mexico City to Chicago, Berlin and Paris. More locally (for me), it is thirty years now since much of central Baltimore burned in the wake of the riots that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King (I moved from Bristol to Baltimore the year after that). If only for these reasons this is, therefore, a good moment to take stock of that generational shift that I began by reflecting upon.

But 1998 is also the 150th anniversary of the publication of that most extraordinary of all documents known as *The Communist Manifesto*. And it happens to be the 50th anniversary of the signing of the *Universal*

Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations. Connecting these events and reflecting on their general meaning appears a worthwhile way to reflect on our contemporary condition. While Marx was deeply suspicious of all talk about rights (sensing it to be a bourgeois trap), what on earth are workers of the world supposed to unite about unless it is some sense of their fundamental rights as human beings? Connecting the sentiments of the *Manifesto* with those expressed in the *Declaration of Human Rights* provides one way to link discourses about globalization with those of the body. The overall effect, I hope, is to redefine in a more subtle way the terms and spaces of political struggle open to us in these extraordinary times.

PART 1

UNEVEN GEOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENTS

CHAPTER 6

The body as an accumulation strategy

[I]t is crystal clear to me that the body is an accumulation strategy in the deepest sense. (Donna Haraway, *Society and Space*, 1995, 510)

Capital circulates, as it were, through the body of the laborer as variable capital and thereby turns the laborer into a mere appendage of the circulation of capital itself. (David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, 1982, 157)

In fact the two processes – the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital – cannot be separated.

(Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 1975 [1995], 221)

Why focus on these citations? In part the answer rests on the extraordinary efflorescence of interest in ‘the body’ as a grounding for all sorts of theoretical enquiries over the last two decades or so. But why this efflorescence? The short answer is that a contemporary loss of confidence in previously established categories has provoked a return to the body as the irreducible basis for understanding (cf. Chapter 1 and Lowe, 1995, 14). But viewing the body as the irreducible locus for the determination of all values, meanings, and significations is not new. It was fundamental to many strains of pre-Socratic philosophy and the idea that ‘man’ or ‘the body’ is ‘the measure of all things’ has had a long and interesting history. For the ancient Greeks, for example, ‘measure’ went far beyond the idea of comparison with some external standard. It was regarded as ‘a form of insight into the essence of everything’ perceived through the senses and the mind. Such insight into inner meanings and proportionalities was considered fundamental in achieving a clear perception of the overall realities of the world and, hence, fundamental to living a harmonious and well-ordered life. Our modern views, as Bohm (1983) points out, have lost this subtlety and become relatively gross and mechanical, although some of our terminology (e.g. the notion of ‘measure’ in music and art) indicates a broader meaning.

The resurrection of interest in the body in contemporary debates does provide, then, a welcome opportunity to reassess the bases (epistemological and ontological) of all forms of enquiry. Feminists and queer

theorists have pioneered the way as they have sought to unravel issues of gender and sexuality in theory and political practices. And the question of how measure lost its connexion to bodily well-being has come back into focus as an epistemological problem of some significance (Poovey, 1998). The thesis I want to pursue here is that the *manner* of this return to 'the body as the measure of all things' is crucial to determining how values and meanings are to be constructed and understood. I want in particular to return to a broader relational meaning of the body as 'the measure of all things' and propose a more dialectical way of understanding the body that can better connect discourses on the body with that other discursive shift that has placed 'globalization' at the center of debate.

I Bodily processes

I begin with two fundamental propositions. The first, drawn from writers as diverse as Marx (1964 edition), Elias (1978), Gramsci (1971 edition), Bourdieu (1984), Stafford (1991), Lefebvre (1991), Haraway (1991), Butler (1993), Grosz (1994), and Martin (1994), is that the body is an unfinished project, historically and geographically malleable in certain ways. It is not, of course, infinitely or even easily malleable and certain of its inherent ('natural' or biologically inherited) qualities cannot be erased. But the body continues to evolve and change in ways that reflect both an internal transformative dynamics (often the focus of psychoanalytic work) and the effect of external processes (most often invoked in social constructionist approaches).

The second proposition, broadly consistent with (if not implicitly contained in) the first, is that the body is not a closed and sealed entity, but a relational 'thing' that is created, bounded, sustained, and ultimately dissolved in a spatiotemporal flux of multiple processes. This entails a relational-dialectical view in which the body (construed as a thing-like entity) internalizes the effects of the processes that create, support, sustain, and dissolve it. The body which we inhabit and which is for us the irreducible measure of all things is not itself irreducible. This makes the body problematic, particularly as 'the measure of all things.'

The body is internally contradictory by virtue of the multiple socio-ecological processes that converge upon it. For example, the metabolic processes that sustain a body entail exchanges with its environment. If the processes change, then the body either transforms and adapts or ceases to exist. Similarly the mix of performative activities available to the body in a given place and time are not independent of the technological, physical, social, and economic environment in which that body has its being. And the representational practices that operate in society likewise shape the

body (and in the forms of dress and postures propose all manner of additional symbolic meanings). This means that any challenges to a dominant system of representation of the body (e.g. those mounted by feminists and queer theorists in recent years) become direct challenges to bodily practices. The net effect is to say that different processes (physical and social) 'produce' (both materially and representationally) radically different kinds of bodies. Class, racial, gender, and all manner of other distinctions are marked upon the human body by virtue of the different socio-ecological processes that do their work upon that body.

To put the matter this way is not to view the body as a passive product of external processes. What is remarkable about living entities is the way they capture diffuse energy or information flows and assemble them into complex but well-ordered forms. Creating order out of chaos is, as Prigogine and Stengers (1984) point out, a vital property of biological systems. As a 'desiring machine' capable of creating order not only within itself but also in its environs, the human body is active and transformative in relation to the processes that produce, sustain, and dissolve it. Thus, bodily persons endowed with semiotic capacities and moral will make their bodies foundational elements in what we have long called 'the body politic.'

To conceptualize the body (the individual and the self) as porous in relation to the environment frames 'self-other' relations (including the relation to 'nature') in a particular way. If, for example, we understand the body to internalize all there is (a strong doctrine of internal relations of the sort I have outlined elsewhere – see Harvey, 1996, Chapter 2) then the reverse proposition also holds. If the self internalizes all things then the self can be 'the measure of all things.' This idea goes back to Protagoras and the Greeks. It allows the individual to be viewed as some kind of decentered center of the cosmos, or, as Munn (1985, 14, 17), in her insightful analysis of social practices on the Melanesian island of Gawa, prefers to put it, 'bodily spacetime serves as a condensed sign of the wider spacetime of which it is a part.' It is only if the body is viewed as being open and porous to the world that it can meaningfully be considered in this way. It is not how the body is seen in the dominant Western tradition. Strathern (1988, 135) underlines the problem:

The socialized, internally controlled Western person must emerge as a *microcosm of the domesticating process* by which natural resources are put to cultural use . . . The only internal relation here is the way a person's parts 'belong' to him or herself. Other relationships bear in from outside. A person's attributes are thus modified by external pressure, as are the attributes of things, but they remain intrinsic to his or her identity.

But in the Melanesian case:

[The] person is a living commemoration of the actions which produced it . . . persons are the objectified form of relationships, and it is not survival of the self that is at issue but the survival or termination of relations. Eating does not necessarily imply nurture; it is not an intrinsically beneficiary act, as it is taken to be in the Western commodity view that regards the self as thereby perpetuating its own existence. Rather, eating exposes the Melanesian person to all the hazards of the relationships of which he/she is composed . . . Growth in social terms is not a reflex of nourishment; rather, in being a proper receptacle for nourishment, the nourished person bears witness to the effectiveness of a relationship with the mother, father, sister's husband or whoever is doing the feeding . . . Consumption is not a simple matter of self-replacement, then, but the recognition and monitoring of relationships . . . The self as individual subject exists . . . in his or her capacity to transform relations. (Strathern, 1988, 302)

This relational conception of the body, of self, individual, and, consequently, of political identity is captured in the Western tradition only in dialectical modes of argumentation. Traces of it can also be found in the contemporary work of deep ecologists (cf. Naess and Rothenberg, 1989) and the view is now widespread in literary and feminist theory. It constitutes a rejection of the world view traditionally ascribed to Descartes, Newton, and Locke, which grounds the ideal of the 'civilized' and 'individualized' body (construed as an entity in absolute space and time and as a site of inalienable and bounded property rights) in much of Western thought.

It then follows that the manner of production of spacetime is inextricably connected with the production of the body. 'With the advent of Cartesian logic,' Lefebvre (1991, 1) complains, 'space had entered the realm of the absolute . . . space came to dominate, by containing them, all senses and all bodies.' Lefebvre and Foucault (particularly in *Discipline and Punish*) here make common cause: the liberation of the senses and the human body from the absolutism of that produced world of Newtonian/Cartesian space and time becomes central to their emancipatory strategies. And that means challenging the mechanistic and absolute view by means of which the body is contained and disciplined. But by what bodily practices was this Cartesian/Newtonian conception of spacetime produced? And how can such conceptions be subverted?

We here encounter a peculiar conundrum. On the one hand, to return to the human body as the fount of all experience (including that of space and time) is presently regarded as a means (now increasingly privileged) to challenge the whole network of abstractions (scientific, social, political-economic) through which social relations, power relations, institutions,

and material practices get defined, represented, and regulated. But on the other hand, no human body is outside of social processes of determination. To return to it is, therefore, to instantiate the social processes being purportedly rebelled against. If, for example, workers are transformed, as Marx suggests in *Capital*, into appendages of capital in both the work place and the consumption sphere (or, as Foucault prefers it, bodies are made over into *docile bodies* by the rise of a powerful disciplinary apparatus, from the eighteenth century onwards) then how can their bodies be a measure, sign, or receiver of anything outside of the circulation of capital or of the various mechanisms that discipline them? Or, to take a more contemporary version of the same argument, if we are all now *cyborgs* (as Haraway in her celebrated manifesto on the topic suggests), then how can we measure anything outside of that deadly embrace of the machine as extension of our own body and body as extension of the machine?

So while return to the body as the site of a more authentic (epistemological and ontological) grounding of the theoretical abstractions that have for too long ruled purely as abstractions may be justified, that return cannot in and of itself guarantee anything except the production of a narcissistic self-referentiality. Haraway (1991, 190) sees the difficulty. 'Objectivity,' she declares, 'turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility.' So whose body is it that is to be the measure of all things? Exactly how and what is it in a position to measure? These are deep questions to which we will perforce return again and again. We cannot begin to answer them, however, without some prior understanding of how bodies are socially produced.

2 The theory of the bodily subject in Marx

Let us suppose that Marx's categories are not dismissed as 'thoroughly destabilised.' I do not defend that supposition, though I note that from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* onwards Marx (1964 edition, 143) grounded his ontological and epistemological arguments on real sensual bodily interaction with the world:

Sense-perception must be the basis of all science. Only when it proceeds from sense-perception in the two-fold form of *sensuous* consciousness and of *sensuous* need – that is, only when science proceeds from nature – is it *true* science.

Marx also elaborated a philosophy of internal relations and of dialectics consistent with the relational conception of the body outlined above (particularly by Strathern). The contemporary rush to return to the body

as the irreducible basis of all argument is, therefore, a rush to return to the point where Marx, among many others, began.

While he does not tell us everything we might want to know, Marx does propose a theory of the production of the bodily subject under capitalism. Since we all live within the world of capital circulation and accumulation this has to be a part of any argument about the nature of the contemporary body. To evade it (on the specious grounds that Marx's categories are destabilized or, worse still, outmoded and unfashionable) is to evade a vital aspect of how the body must be problematized. And while Marx's theorizing in *Capital* is often read (incorrectly, as I shall hope to show) as a pessimistic account of how bodies, construed as passive entities occupying particular performative economic roles, are shaped by the external forces of capital circulation and accumulation, it is precisely this analysis that informs his other accounts of how transformative processes of human resistance, desire for reform, rebellion, and revolution can and do occur.

A preparatory step is to broaden somewhat the conventional Marxian definition of 'class' (or, more exactly, of 'class relation') under capitalism to mean *positionality in relation to capital circulation and accumulation*. Marx often fixed this relation in terms of property rights over the means of production (including, in the laborer's case, property rights to his or her own body), but I want to argue that this definition is too narrow to capture the content even of Marx's own analyses (Marx, recall, avoided any formal sociological definitions of class throughout his works). Armed with such a definition of 'positionality with respect to capital circulation and accumulation' we can better articulate the internal contradictions of multiple positionalities within which human beings operate. The laborer as person is a worker, consumer, saver, lover, and bearer of culture, and can even be an occasional employer and landed proprietor, whereas the laborer as an economic role – the category Marx analyses in *Capital* – is singular.

Consider, now, one distinctive systemic concept that Marx proposed. *Variable capital* refers to the sale/purchase and use of labor power as a commodity. But as Marx's analysis proceeds it becomes evident that there is a distinct circulation process to variable capital itself. The laborer (a person) sells labor power (a commodity) to the capitalist to use in the labor process in return for a money wage which permits the laborer to purchase capitalist-produced commodities in order to live in order to return to work . . . Marx's distinction between the laborer (*qua* person, body, will) and labor power (that which is extracted from the body of the laborer as a commodity) immediately provides an opening for radical critique. Laborers are necessarily alienated because their creative capacities are appropriated as the commodity labor power by capitalists. But we can broaden the question: what effect does the circulation of variable capital

(the extraction of labor power and surplus value) have on the bodies (persons and subjectivities) of those through whom it circulates? The answer initially breaks down into a consideration of what happens at different moments of productive consumption, exchange, and individual consumption.

Productive consumption

Productive consumption of the commodity labor power in the labor process under the control of the capitalist requires, *inter alia*, the mobilization of 'animal spirits,' sexual drives, affective feelings, and creative powers of labor to a given purpose defined by capital. It means: harnessing basic human powers of cooperation/collaboration; the skilling, deskilling, and reskilling of the powers of labor in accord with technological requirements; acculturation to routinization of tasks; enclosure within strict spatiotemporal rhythms of regulated (and sometimes spatially confined) activities; frequent subordinations of bodily rhythms and desires 'as an appendage of the machine;' socialization into long hours of concentrated labor at variable but often increasing intensity; development of divisions of labor of different qualities (depending upon the heterogeneity or homogeneity of tasks, the organization of detailed versus social divisions of labor); responsiveness to hierarchy and submission to authority structures within the work place; separations between mental and manual operations and powers; and, last but not least, the production of variability, fluidity, and flexibility of labor powers able to respond to those rapid revolutions in production processes so typical of capitalist development.

I supply this list (drawn from Marx's *Capital*) mainly to demonstrate how the exigencies of capitalist production push the limits of the working body – its capacities and possibilities – in a variety of different and often fundamentally contradictory directions. On the one hand capital requires educated and flexible laborers, but on the other hand it refuses the idea that laborers should think for themselves. While education of the laborer appears important it cannot be the kind of education that permits free thinking. Capital requires certain kinds of skills but abhors any kind of monopolizable skill. While a 'trained gorilla' may suffice for some tasks, for others creative, responsible workers are called for. While subservience and respect for authority (sometimes amounting to abject submission) is paramount, the creative passions, spontaneous responses, and animal spirits necessary to the 'form-giving fire' of the labor process must also be liberated and mobilized. Healthy bodies may be needed but deformities, pathologies, sickness are often produced. Marx highlights such contradictions:

[L]arge scale industry, by its very nature, necessitates variation of labour, fluidity of functions, and mobility of the worker in all directions. But on the other hand, in its capitalist form it reproduces the old division of labour with ossified particularities. We have seen how this absolute contradiction does away with all repose, all fixity and all security as far as the worker's life situation is concerned . . . But if, at present, variation of labour imposes itself after the manner of an overpowering natural law, and with the blindly destructive action of a natural law that meets with obstacles everywhere, large scale industry, through its very catastrophes, makes the recognition of variation of labour and hence of the fitness of the worker for the maximum number of different kinds of labour into a question of life and death.

(Marx, 1976 edition, 617)

Marx sees these contradictions being worked out historically and dialectically (largely though not solely through the use of coercive force and active struggle). But part of what the creative history of capitalism has been about is discovering new ways (and potentialities) in which the human body can be put to use as the bearer of the capacity to labor. Marx observes (1976 edition, 617), for example, that 'technology discovered the few grand fundamental forms of motion which, despite all the diversity of the instruments used, apply necessarily to every productive action of the human body.' Older capacities of the human body are reinvented, new capacities revealed. The development of capitalist production entails a radical transformation in what the working body is about. The unfinished project of the human body is pushed in a particular set of contradictory directions. And a whole host of sciences for engineering and exploring the limits of the human body as a productive machine, as a fluid organism, has been established to explore these possibilities. Gramsci (1971 edition), among others, thus emphasizes again and again how capitalism is precisely about the production of a new kind of laboring body.

While such contradictions may be internalized within the labor force as a whole, this does not necessarily mean that they are internalized within the body of each laborer. Indeed, it is the main thrust of Marx's own presentation that the 'collective body' of the labor force is broken down into hierarchies of skill, of authority, of mental and manual functions, etc. in such a way to render the category of variable capital internally heterogeneous. And this heterogeneity is unstable. The perpetual shifting that occurs within the capitalist mode of production ensures that requirements, definitions of skill, systems of authority, divisions of labor, etc. are never stabilized for long. So while the collective laborer will be fragmented and segmented, the definitions of and relations between the segments will be unstable and the movements of individual laborers within and between segments correspondingly complex. It is not hard to see that in

the face of these contradictions and multiple instabilities, capitalism will require some sort of disciplinary apparatus of surveillance, punishment and ideological control that Marx frequently alludes to and which Foucault elaborates upon in ways that I find broadly complementary rather than antagonistic to Marx's project. But the instability never goes away (as witnessed by the whole historical geography of skilling, deskilling, reskilling, etc.). While the instability is disconcerting, sometimes destructive, and always difficult to cope with, it provides multiple opportunities for subversion and opposition on the part of the laborers.

But whose body is inserted into the circulation of variable capital and with what effects? Marx does not provide any systematic answer to that question in part because this was not the primary object of his theoretical enquiry (he largely dealt with economic roles rather than with persons). Who exactly gets inserted where is a detailed historical-geographical question that defies any simple theoretical answer. Marx is plainly aware that bodies are differentiated and marked by different physical productive capacities and qualities according to history, geography, culture, and tradition. He is also aware that signs of race, ethnicity, age, and gender are used as external measures of what a certain kind of laborer is capable of or permitted to do. The incorporation of women and children into the circulation of variable capital in nineteenth-century Britain occurred for certain distinctive reasons that Marx is at pains to elaborate upon. This in turn provoked distinctive effects, one of which was to turn the struggle over the length of the working day and the regulation of factory employment into a distinctive struggle to protect women and children from the impacts of capitalism's 'werewolf hunger' for surplus value. The employment of women and children as wage laborers, furthermore, not only provided 'a new foundation for the division of labor' (Marx, 1976, 615), it also posed (and continues to pose) a fundamental challenge to many traditional conceptions of the family and of gender roles:

However terrible and disgusting the dissolution of the old family ties within the capitalist system may appear, large scale industry, by assigning an important part in socially organized processes of production, outside the sphere of the domestic economy, to women, young persons and children of both sexes, does nevertheless create a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes . . . It is also obvious that the fact that the collective working group is composed of individuals of both sexes and all ages must under the appropriate conditions turn into a source of humane development, although in its spontaneously developed, brutal, capitalist form, the system works in the opposite direction, and becomes a pestiferous source of corruption and slavery, since here the worker exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the worker.

In remarks on slavery, colonialism, and immigrants (e.g. the Irish into Britain), Marx makes clear that constructions of race and ethnicity are likewise implicated in the circulation process of variable capital. Insofar as gender, race, and ethnicity are all understood as social constructions rather than as essentialist categories, so the effect of their insertion into the circulation of variable capital (including positioning within the internal heterogeneity of collective labor and, hence, within the division of labor and the class system) has to be seen as a powerful force reconstructing them in distinctively capitalist ways.

There are a number of corollaries. Firstly, the productiveness of a person gets reduced to the ability to produce surplus value. To be a productive worker, Marx (1976, 644) ironically notes, 'is therefore not a piece of luck but a misfortune;' the only value that the laborer can have is not determined in terms of work done and useful social effect but through 'a specifically social relation of production . . . which stamps the worker as capital's direct means of valorization.' The gap between what the laborer as person might desire and what is demanded of the commodity labor power extracted from his or her body is the nexus of alienation. And while workers as persons may value themselves in a variety of ways depending upon how they understand their productivity, usefulness and value to others, the more restricted social valuation given by their capacity to produce surplus value for capital necessarily remains central to their lives (as even highly educated middle-level managers find out when they, too, are laid off). Exactly what that value is, however, depends on conditions external to the labor process, hinging, therefore, upon the question of exchange.

Secondly, lack of productivity, sickness (or of any kind of pathology) gets defined within this circulation process as inability to go to work, inability to perform adequately within the circulation of variable capital (to produce surplus value) or to abide by its disciplinary rules (the institutional effects elaborated on by Rothman [1971] and Foucault [1995] in the construction of asylums and prisons are already strongly registered in Marx's chapters on 'The Working Day' and the 'So-Called Primitive Accumulation'). Those who cannot (for physical, psychic, or social reasons) continue to function as variable capital, furthermore, fall either into the 'hospital' of the industrial reserve army (sickness is defined under capitalism broadly as inability to work) or else into that undisciplined inferno of the lumpenproletariat (read 'underclass') for whom Marx regrettably had so little sympathy. The circulation of variable capital, being so central to how capitalism operates as a social system, defines roles of employed 'insiders' and unemployed 'outsiders' (often victimized and stigmatized) that have ramifications for society as a whole. This brings us back to the moment of 'exchange.'

Exchange of variable capital

The commodity which the laborer (*qua* person) exchanges with the capitalist is labor power, the capacity to engage in concrete labor. The basic condition of the contract is supposedly that the capitalist has the right to whatever the laborer produces, has the right to direct the work, determine the labor process, and have free use of the capacity to labor during the hours and at the rate of remuneration stipulated in the contract. The rights of capital are frequently contested and it is interesting to see on what grounds. While capitalists may have full rights to the commodity labor power, they do not have legal rights over the person of the laborer (that would be slavery). Marx insists again and again that this is a fundamental principle of wage labor under capitalism.

The laborer as person should have full rights over his or her own body and should always enter the labor market under conditions of freedom of contract even if, as Marx (1976, 272-3) notes, a worker is 'free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale, i.e. he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realization of his labour power.' But the distinction between laborer as person and labor power has further implications. The capitalist has not the formal right to put the body of the person at risk, for example, and working practices that do so are open to challenge. This principle carries over even into the realm of the cultural and bodily capital (as Bourdieu defines them): hence much of the resistance to de-skilling, redefinitions of skill, etc. Of course, these legalities are continually violated under capitalism and situations frequently do arise in which the body and person of the laborer is taken over under conditions akin to slavery. But Marx's point is that preservation of the integrity and fullness of the laboring person and body within the circulation process of variable capital is the fulcrum upon which contestation and class struggle both within and without the labor process occurs. Even bourgeois legality (as incorporated in the Factory Acts then and in, say, Occupational Safety and Health regulations now) has to concede the difference between the right to the commodity labor power and the non-right to the person who is bearer of that commodity.

This struggle carries over into the determination of the value of variable capital itself, because here the 'neediness' of the body of the laborer forms the datum upon which conditions of contract depend. In *Capital*, Marx, for purposes of analysis, presumes that in a given place and time such needs are fixed and known (only in this way can he get a clear fix upon how capital is produced through surplus value extraction). But Marx well understood that these conditions are never fixed but depend on physical

circumstances (e.g. climate), cultural and social conditions, the long history of class struggle over what is a liveable wage for the laborer, as well as upon a moral conception as to what is or is not tolerable in a civilized society. Consider how Marx (1976, 341) presents the matter in his chapter on 'The Working Day':

During part of the day the vital force must rest, sleep; during another part the man has to satisfy physical needs, to feed, wash and clothe himself. Besides these purely physical limitations, the extension of the working day encounters moral obstacles. The worker needs time in which to satisfy his intellectual and social requirements, and the extent and number of those requirements is conditioned by the general level of civilization. The length of the working day therefore fluctuates within boundaries that are physical and social.

Marx's primary point of critique of capitalism is that it so frequently violates, disfigures, subdues, maims, and destroys the integrity of the laboring body (even in ways that can be dangerous to the further accumulation of capital). It is, furthermore, in terms of the potentialities and possibilities of that laboring body (its 'species being' as Marx [1964 edition] called it in his early work) that the search for an alternative mode of production is initially cast.

But surplus value depends upon the difference between what labor gets (the value of labor power) and what labor creates (the value of the commodity produced). The use value of the commodity labor power to the capitalist is that it can engage in concrete labor in such a way as to embed a given amount of abstract labor in the commodity produced. For the capitalist it is abstract labor that counts and the value of labor power and the concrete practices of the laborer are disciplined and regulated within the circulation of variable capital by the 'laws of value' which take abstract labor as their datum.

Abstract labor – value – is measured through exchange of commodities over space and time and ultimately on the world market. Value is a distinctive spatiotemporal construction depending upon the development of a whole array of spatiotemporal practices (including the territorialization of the earth's surface through property rights and state formation and the development of geographical networks and systems of exchange for money and all commodities, including that of labor power itself). The value of labor power to the capitalist is itself contingent upon the realization of values across a world of socially constructed spatiotemporal political-economic practices. This limits the value that the laborer can acquire in a particular place both in production and in the market. Furthermore, the conditions of exchange of labor power are limited in labor markets both by

systematic biases (gender and racial disparities in remuneration for comparative work are well documented) and by mobilization of an industrial reserve army (either *in situ* or through the migratory movements of both capital and labor searching for 'better' contractual conditions).

It is exactly at this point that the connection between what we now refer to as 'globalization' (see Chapter 4) and the body becomes explicit. But how should this be thought about? Marx depicts the circulation of variable capital as a 'commodity for commodity' exchange: the worker exchanges the use value of labor power for the use value of the commodities that can be bought for the money wage. Exchanges of this sort are usually highly localized and place-specific. The worker must take his or her body to work each day (even under conditions of telecommuting). But labor power is inserted as a commodity into a Money-Commodity-Money circulation process which easily escapes the spatiotemporal restraints of local labor markets and which makes for capital accumulation on the world stage. Accumulation accelerates turnover time (it shortens working periods, circulation times, etc.) while simultaneously annihilating space through time while preserving certain territorialities (of the factory and the nation state) as domains of surveillance and social control. Spatiotemporality defined at one scale (that of 'globalization' and all its associated meanings) intersects with bodies that function at a much more localized scale. Translation across spatiotemporal scales is here accomplished by the intersection of two qualitatively different circulation processes, one of which is defined through the long historical geography of capital accumulation while the other depends upon the production and reproduction of the laboring body in a far more restricted space. This leads to some serious disjunctions, of the sort that Hareven (1982) identifies in her analysis of *Family Time and Industrial Time*. But as Hareven goes on to show, these two spatiotemporal systems, though qualitatively different from each other, have to be made 'cogredient' or 'compossible' (see Harvey, 1996, for a fuller explication of these terms) with each other. Thus do links between the 'local' and the 'global' become established. Different bodily qualities and modes of valuation (including the degree of respect for the bodily integrity and dignity of the laborer) achieved in different places are brought into a spatially competitive environment through the circulation of capital. Uneven geographical development of the bodily practices and sensibilities of those who sell their labor power becomes one of the defining features of class struggle as waged by both capital and labor.

Put in more direct contemporary terms, the creation of unemployment through down-sizing, the redefinitions of skills and remunerations for skills, the intensification of labor processes and of autocratic systems of surveillance, the increasing despotism of orchestrated detailed divisions of

labor, the insertion of immigrants (or, what amounts to the same thing, the migration of capital to alternative labor sources), and the coerced competitive struggle between different bodily practices and modes of valuation achieved under different historical and cultural conditions, all contribute to the uneven geographical valuation of laborers as persons. The manifest effects upon the bodies of laborers who live lives embedded in the circulation of variable capital is powerful indeed. Sweatshops in New York mimic similar establishments in Guatemala and subject the workers incorporated therein to a totalizing and violently repressive regime of body disciplines. The construction of specific spatiotemporal relations through the circulation of capital likewise constructs a connection between the designer shirts we wear upon our backs, the Nike shoes we sport, and the oriental carpets upon which we walk, and the grossly exploited labor of tens of thousands of women and children in Central America, Indonesia, and Pakistan (just to name a few of the points of production of such commodities).

The moment of consumption

The laborer does not only lie in the path of variable capital as producer and exchanger. He/she also lies in that circulation process as consumer and reproducer of self (both individually and socially). Once possessed of money the laborer is endowed with all the autonomy that attaches to any market practice:

It is the worker himself who converts the money into whatever use-values he desires; it is he who buys commodities as he wishes and, as the *owner of money*, as the buyer of goods, he stands in precisely the same relationship to the sellers of goods as any other buyer. Of course, the conditions of his existence – and the limited amount of money he can earn – compel him to make his purchases from a fairly restricted selection of goods. But some variation is possible as we can see from the fact that newspapers, for example, form part of the essential purchases of the urban English worker. He can save and hoard a little. Or else he can squander his money on drink. Even so, he acts as a free agent; he must pay his own way; he is responsible to himself for the way he spends his wages. (Marx, 1976, 1,033)

This is an example of Marx's tacit appeal to 'positionality in relationship to capital accumulation' as a practical definition of class relations. As the focus shifts so does the meaning of class positionality. The laborer has limited freedom to choose not only a personal lifestyle but also, through the collective exercise of demand preferences, he/she can express his/her desires (individually and collectively) and thereby influence the capitalist choice of what to produce. Elaboration on that idea permits us to see, as we

look at the circulation of variable capital as a whole, that what is true for the individual laborer is rather more limited when looked at from the standpoint of the collectivity:

The capitalist class is constantly giving to the working class drafts, in the form of money, on a portion of the product produced by the latter and appropriated by the former. The workers give these drafts back just as constantly to the capitalists, and thereby withdraw from the latter their allotted share of their own product . . . The individual consumption of the worker, whether it occurs inside or outside the workshop, inside or outside the labour process, remains an aspect of the production and reproduction of capital . . . From the standpoint of society, then, the working class, even when it stands outside the direct labour process, is just as much an appendage of capital as the lifeless instruments of labour are.

(Marx, 1976, 713, 719)

Deeper consideration of what amounts to a 'company store' relation between capital and labor is instructive. The disposable income of the laborers forms an important mass of effective demand for capitalist output (this is the relation that Marx explores at great length in Volume 2 of *Capital*). Accumulation for accumulation's sake points towards either an increasing mass of laborers to whom necessities can be sold or a changing standard of living of the laborers (it usually means both). The production of new needs, the opening up of entirely new product lines that define different lifestyles and consumer habits, is introduced as an important means of crisis avoidance and crisis resolution. We can then see more clearly how it is that variable capital has to be construed as a circulation process (rather than as a single causal arrow) for it is through the payment of wages that the disposable income to buy the product of the capitalists is partially assured.

But all of this presumes 'rational consumption' on the part of the laborer – rational, that is, from the standpoint of capital accumulation (Marx, 1978 edition, 591). The organization, mobilization, and channeling of human desires, the active political engagement with tactics of persuasion, surveillance, and coercion, become part of the consumptuary apparatus of capitalism, in turn producing all manner of pressures on the body as a site of and a performative agent for 'rational consumption' for further accumulation (cf. Henry Ford's obsession with training social workers to monitor the budgets of his workers).

But the terms of 'rational consumption' are by no means fixed, in part because of the inevitable destabilizing effects of perpetual revolutions in capitalist technologies and products (revolutions which affect the household economy as well as the factory), but also because, given the

discretionary element in the worker's use of disposable income, there is as much potential for social struggle over lifestyle and associated bodily practices as there is in the realm of production itself. Struggles over the social wage – over, for example, the extent, direction, and distributional effects of state expenditures – have become critical in establishing the baseline of what might be meant by a proper standard of living in a 'civilized' country. Struggles over the relation between 'housework' and 'labor in the market' and the gender allocation of tasks within domestic settings also enter into the picture (cf. Marx's 1976 edition, 518, commentary on how the importance of domestic labor gets 'concealed by official political economy' and the revived debate in the 1970s on the role of housework in relation to the circulation of variable capital).

This moment in the circulation of variable capital, though not totally absent in Marx's account, is not strongly emphasized. With the United States (and, presumably, much of the advanced capitalist world) in mind, Lowe (1995, 67) now argues that:

Lifestyle is the social relations of consumption in late capitalism, as distinct from class as the social relations of production. The visual construction and presentation of self in terms of consumption relations has by now overshadowed the class relations of production in the workplace . . . [Consumption] is itself dynamically developed by the design and production of changing product characteristics, the juxtaposition of image and sign in lifestyle and format, and the segmentation of consumer markets.

This suggests a double contradiction within the advanced capitalist world (and a nascent contradiction within developing countries). First, by submitting unquestioningly and without significant struggle to the dictates of capital in production (or by channeling struggle solely to the end of increasing disposable income), workers may open for themselves wider terrains of differentiating choice (social or individual) with respect to lifestyle, structures of feeling, household organization, reproductive activities, expressions of desire, pursuit of pleasures, etc. within the moment of consumption. This does not automatically deliver greater happiness and satisfaction. As Marx (1965 edition, 33) notes:

[A]lthough the pleasures of the labourer have increased, the social gratification which they afford has fallen in comparison with the increased pleasures of the capitalist. Our wants and pleasures have their origin in society; we therefore measure them in relation to society; we do not measure them in relation to the objects which serve for their gratification. Since they are of a social nature, they are of a relative nature.

Conversely, by locking workers into certain conceptions of lifestyle, consumer habits, and desire, capitalists can more easily secure compliance

within the labor process while capturing distinctive and proliferating market niches for their sales.

Struggles arise between how workers individually or collectively exercise their consumer and lifestyle choices and how capitalist forces try to capture and guide those choices towards rational consumption for sustained accumulation. Marx does not scrutinize such conflicts but no particular difficulty attaches to integrating them into his framework. Plainly, the process is marked by extraordinary heterogeneity at the same time as it is fraught with instability. For example, whole communities of lifestyle (such as those shaped by working classes in industrial settings or by distinctive cultural traditions) may be created within the circulation of variable capital only ultimately to be dissolved (even in the face of considerable resistance) by the same processes that led to their initial formation. The recent history of deindustrialization is full of examples of this.

A wide range of bodily practices and cultural choices with respect to consumption can in principle be embedded in the circulation of variable capital. The range depends, of course, upon the amount of discretionary income in the laborer's possession (and, plainly, the billion or so workers living on less than a dollar a day cannot exercise anywhere near the amount of influence as well-paid workers in the advanced capitalist countries). Variable capital does not determine the specific nature of consumer choices or even of consumer culture, though it certainly works to powerful effect. This means that production must internalize powerful effects of heterogeneous cultural traditions and consumer choices, whether registered collectively through political action (to establish a 'social wage' through welfare programs) or individually through personal consumption choices. It is in this sense that it is meaningful to speak of the moments of production and consumption as a matter of internal relations, the one with the other.

The circulation of variable capital as a whole

Consider, then, the figure of the laborer caught within the rules of circulation of variable capital as a whole. The experiential world, the physical presence, the subjectivity and the consciousness of that person are partially if not predominantly forged in the fiery crucible of the labor process, the passionate pursuit of values and competitive advantage in labor markets, and in the perpetual desires and glittery frustrations of commodity culture. They are also forged in the matrix of time-space relations between persons largely hidden behind the exchange and movement of things. The evident instabilities within the circulation of variable capital coupled with the different windows on the world constructed through moments of production, exchange, and consumption place the

laboring body largely at the mercy of a whole series of forces outside of any one individual's control. It is in this sense that the laboring body must be seen as an internal relation of the historically and geographically achieved processes of capital circulation.

When, however, we consider the accumulation process as a whole, we also see that 'the maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital.' The working class is, in effect, held captive within a 'company store' relation to capital accumulation that renders it an appendage of capital at all moments of its existence. The capitalist, in short, 'produces the worker as wage laborer.' Marx (1973 edition, 717–18) continues:

The capital given in return for labour-power is converted into means of subsistence which have to be consumed to reproduce the muscles, nerves, bones and brains of existing workers, and to bring new workers into existence. Within the limits of what is absolutely necessary, therefore, the individual consumption of the working class is the reconversion of the means of subsistence given by capital in return for labour-power into fresh labour power which capital is then again able to exploit. It is the production and reproduction of the capitalist's most indispensable means of production: the worker.

The issue of reproduction is then immediately posed. Marx was less than forthcoming on this question leaving it, as the capitalist does, 'to the worker's drives for self preservation and propagation.' The only rule he proposes is that the laboring family, denied access to the means of production, would strive in times of prosperity as in depression, to accumulate the only form of 'property' it possessed: labor power itself. Hence arises a connexion between expanded accumulation and 'maximum growth of population – of living labor capacities' (Marx, 1973 edition, 608).

But it is also clear that as laborers acquire property on their own account or move to acquire cultural as well as 'human capital' in the form of skills, that this equation will likely change and generate different reproductive strategies, together with different objectives for social provision through class struggle within the working classes of the world. Furthermore, Marx's occasional commentaries on 'the family' as a socially constructed unit of reproduction (coupled with Engels's treatise on *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* with its emphasis upon division of labor between the sexes and propagation of the species) indicates a material point at which questions of sexuality and gendering intersect with political economy. Elaborations by socialist feminists in recent years here assume great importance. If the circulation of variable capital as a whole is about the reproduction of the working class in general, then the

question of the conditions of its biological and social reproduction must be posed in ways that acknowledge such complexities (cf. the controversy between Butler, 1998, and Fraser, 1997).

Potentialities for reaction and revolt against capital get defined from the different perspectives of production, exchange, consumption, or reproduction. Nevertheless, in aggregate we can still see how the pernicious capitalistic rules that regulate the process of circulation of variable capital as a whole operate as a constructive/destructive force (both materially and representationally) on laboring bodies across these different moments. Capital continuously strives to shape bodies to its own requirements, while at the same time internalizing within its *modus operandi* effects of shifting and endlessly open bodily desires, wants, needs, and social relations (sometimes overtly expressed as collective class, community, or identity-based struggles) on the part of the laborer. This process frames many facets of social life, such as 'choices' about sexuality and biological reproduction or of culture and ways of life even as those 'choices' (if such they really are) get more generally framed by the social order and its predominant legal, social, and political codes, and disciplinary practices (including those that regulate sexuality).

Study of the circulation of variable capital cannot, in and of itself, tell us everything we need to know. It is, to begin with, just one subset of a slew of different circulation processes that make up the circulation of capital in general. Productive, finance, landed, and merchant capitals all have their own modalities of motion and the circulation of bourgeois revenues generates complex relations between 'needs,' 'wants,' and 'luxuries' that affect lifestyle choices, status symbols, and fashions as set by the rich, powerful, and famous. These set relative standards for the laboring poor since, as Marx also insists, the sense of well-being is a comparative rather than an absolute measure and the gap between rich and poor is just as important as the absolute conditions of sustenance. Furthermore, the mediating activities of states (as registered through the circulation of tax revenues and state-backed debt) in determining social wages and setting 'civilized' and 'morally acceptable' standards of education, health, housing, etc. play crucial roles on the world stage of capital accumulation and in setting conditions within which the circulation of variable capital can occur. The point here is not to insist on any complete or rigorous accounting – either theoretical or historical – of these intersecting processes. But an understanding of the conditions of circulation of variable capital is indisputably a necessary condition for understanding what happens to bodies in contemporary society.

There are innumerable elaborations, modifications, reformulations, and even outright challenges to Marx's limited but tightly argued theory

of the production of the laboring body and of individual and collective subjectivities. There is much that is lacking (or only lightly touched upon) in Marx's schema, including the sexual and erotic, the gendering and racial identifications of bodies, the psychoanalytic and representational, the linguistic and the rhetorical, the imaginary and the mythical (to name just a few of the obvious absences). The roles of gender within the spatial and social divisions of labor have been the focus, for example, of a considerable range of studies in recent years (see, e.g., Hanson and Pratt, 1994) and the question of race relations or ethnic/religious discriminations within segmented labor markets has likewise been brought under the microscope (see, e.g., Goldberg, 1993) in ways that have given much greater depth and purpose to Marx's (1976 edition, 414) observation that 'labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin.' So there are plenty of other processes – metabolic, ecological, political, social, and psychological – that play key roles in relation to bodily practices and possibilities.

But these absences cannot be cured by an erasure of either the method or substance of Marx's approach. The latter is something to build upon rather than to negate. The human body is a battleground within which and around which conflicting socio-ecological forces of valuation and representation are perpetually at play. Marx provides a rich conceptual apparatus to understand processes of bodily production and agency under capitalism. Just as important, he provides an appropriate epistemology (historical-geographical as well as dialectical) to approach the question of how bodies get produced, how they become the signifiers and referents of meanings, and how internalized bodily practices might in turn modify the processes of their self-production under contemporary conditions of capitalistic globalization.

Body politics and the struggle for a living wage

1 The political body in the body politic

Bodies embedded in a social process such as the circulation of variable capital are never to be construed as docile or passive. It is, after all, only through the 'form-giving fire' of the capacity to labor that capital is produced. And even if labor under the domination of capital is condemned for the most part to produce the conditions and instruments of its own domination (as much in the realm of consumption and exchange as in production itself), the transformative and creative capacities of the laborer always carry the potentiality (however unimaginable in the present circumstances) to fashion an alternative mode of production, exchange, and consumption. Those transformative and creative capacities can never be erased. This poses acute problems for the maintenance of capitalism's authority while providing multiple opportunities for laborers to assert their agency and will. It is no accident, therefore, that Marx attaches the appellation 'living' to the labor embedded in the circulation of variable capital to emphasize not only its fundamental qualities of dynamism and creativity but also to indicate where the life-force and the subversive power for change resides.

An analysis of the circulation of variable capital shows that 'body politics' looks different from the standpoints of production, exchange, and consumption. Trade-offs plainly exist between how laborers submit to or struggle with the dictates of capital at one moment to enhance their powers at another. Abject submission to the dictates of capital within production, for example, may for some be a reasonable price to bear for adequate pleasures and fulfillment of desires (presuming such are possible given the multiple fetishisms of the market) in the realm of consumption. But what dictates whether that price is judged too high? The working body is more than just 'meat' as William Gibson so disparagingly refers to it in his dystopian novel *Neuromancer* and laborers are more than just 'hands' (presuming they have neither head nor belly as Charles Dickens mockingly observes in *Hard Times*). The concept of the body is here in danger of

losing its political purchase because it cannot provide a basis to define the *direction* as opposed to the *locus* of political action. Those (like Foucault and Butler) who appeal to the body as a foundational concept consequently experience intense difficulty in elaborating a politics that focuses on anything other than sexuality. Concern for the broader issues of what happens to bodies inserted into the circulation of variable capital typically disappears in such accounts (although Butler [1998] has recently taken pains to point out the connections between body politics and political economic questions). Yet a concept of variable capital which posits the laborer as the pure subject of capital accumulation cannot help solve the problem either. 'Body politics' in this narrow reductionist sense then becomes just as disempowering *vis-à-vis* capital accumulation as the idea of globalization. Something else is required to translate from the realm of body as 'meat' for accumulation to the concept of laborer as political agent.

The body cannot be construed as the locus of political action without a notion of what it is that 'individuals,' 'persons,' or social movements might want or be able to do in the world. Concepts such as *person*, *individual*, *self*, and *identity*, rich with political thought and possibilities, emerge phoenix-like out of the ashes of body reductionism to take their places within the firmament of concepts to guide political action. Marx has this in mind as he contrasts the deadly passivity of the concept of variable capital with the concept of 'living labor' or, more broadly, of 'class for itself' struggling to redefine the historical and geographical conditions of its own embeddedness within capital accumulation. It is the laborer as *person* who is the bearer of the commodity labor power and that person is the bearer of ideals and aspirations concerning, for example, the dignity of labor and the desire to be treated with respect and consideration as a whole living being, and to treat others likewise.

Some may be tempted at this point to abandon the relational view for, as Eagleton (1997, 22) complains, 'to dissolve human beings to nexuses of processes may be useful if you had previously thought of them as solitary atoms, but unhelpful when you want to insist on their moral autonomy.' Marx (1973 edition, 84) demurs:

[T]he more deeply we go back into history, the more does the individual, and hence also the producing individual, appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole . . . Only in the eighteenth century, in 'civil society', do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity. But the epoch that produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relations. The human being is in the most literal sense a [political animal], not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal that can individuate

itself only in the midst of society. Production by an outside individual outside society . . . is as much an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living *together* and talking to each other.

Marx here builds on Aristotle's view that human beings are both social and political animals needing intimate relations with others and that such forms of social relating constitute and sustain civil society. How human beings have gone about this task has varied historically and geographically. The sense of self and of personhood is relational and socially constructed (and Marx here anticipates Strathern's formulation cited above) in exactly the same way as the body is a social construct except that the forces at work (and it is no accident that Marx cites language as his parallel) are significantly different. The notion of 'individuals possessed of moral autonomy,' for example, is not a universal but arose in the eighteenth century in Europe as commodity exchange and capital accumulation became more generalized. The task of active politics, in Marx's view, is to seek transformations of social relations in the full recognition that the starting point of political action rests upon achieved historical-geographical conditions.

We here encounter a reflexive point from which to critique certain versions of that 'return to the body' that has been so strongly evidenced in recent years. The dangers of 'body reductionism' – the idea that the body is the *only* foundational concept we can trust in looking for an alternative politics – become plain to see. But, in contrast, in searching for associative concepts (such as those of 'person', 'self', and 'individual') there is an equal danger of reconstituting the liberal eighteenth-century ideal of the 'individual' endowed with 'moral autonomy' as the basis for political theory and political action. We have to find a path between 'body reductionism' on the one hand and merely falling back into what Benton (1993, 144) calls 'the liberal illusion' about political rights propagated with such devastating effects through the crude association of capitalism and bourgeois democracy on the other:

In societies governed by deep inequalities of political power, economic wealth, social standing and cultural accomplishments, the promise of equal rights is delusory with the consequence that for the majority, rights are merely abstract, formal entitlements with little or no *de facto* purchase on the realities of social life. In so far as social life is regulated by these abstract principles and in so far as the promise is taken for its fulfillment, then the discourse of rights and justice is an ideology, a form of mystification which has a causal role in binding individuals to the very conditions of dependence and impoverishment from which it purports to offer emancipation.

The need for the relational view does not disappear but deepens. For while Benton has one side of the picture he loses sight of the ways in which

socially embedded notions of personal autonomy and of the power of individuals to regulate their own lives in accordance with their own beliefs and desires can also operate as persistent even if subterranean pressures subverting dominant ideologies in surprising ways. Marx (1964 edition, 181) pioneered such a relational conception in his early works when, for example, he argued:

To say that man is a *corporeal*, living, real, sensuous, objective being full of natural vigor is to say that he has *real, sensuous, objects* as the objects of his being or of his life, or that he can only *express* his life in real, sensuous objects. *To be* objective, natural and sensuous, and at the same time to have object, nature and sense outside oneself, or oneself to be object, nature and sense for a third party, is one and the same thing . . . A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a natural being, and plays no part in the system of nature. A being which has no object outside of itself is not an objective being. A being which is not itself an object for some third being has no being for its *object*; i.e. it is not objectively related. Its being is not objective. An unobjective being is a nullity – an *un-being*.

While the prose is convoluted the meaning is clear enough – no body exists outside of its relations with other bodies and the exercise of powers and counterpowers among bodies is a central constitutive aspect of social life. In more recent times we can see in Ricoeur's (1992) trenchant criticism of Parfitt and, by implication, Locke and Hume, a critical reminder of how the clash between the liberal conception of personal identity and, in Ricoeur's case, a relational conception of narrative identity produces a dramatically alternative reading of how body politics might be constructed.

All of this returns us, though via a different path, to the point at which we arrived in our analysis of the phenomenon of globalization. From the standpoint of the laborer, embedded as a political person within the circulation of capital, politics is rooted in the positionalities that he or she assumes and the potentialities that attach thereto. On the one hand there is the revolutionary urge to become free of that embeddedness within the circulation of capital that so circumscribes life chances, body politics, and socio-ecological futures. On the other, there is the reformist demand for fair and proper treatment within that circulation process, to be free, for example, of the ugly choice between adequate remunerations in consumption and abject submission in production. And for those billion or so workers in the world who must live on less than a dollar a day (cf. Chapter 3), the struggle for dignity in the workplace, for adequate life chances, for a living wage, and for some broader conception of human, civil, and political rights becomes a minimalist political program. But different moments generate different political arguments and so the

potential coherency and singularity of the worker's voice has the awkward habit of dissolving into different opinions as political persons choose their positions and assumptions about identities and interests (cf. Unger, 1987b, 548). Such politics, as I argued at the end of Chapter 3, are necessarily a global as well as a local affair. So it is to a local manifestation of such a struggle that I now turn.

2 Struggling for a living wage

Ever since Thomas Hobbes roundly declared that 'the value of a man is his price,' the question of the proper value of labor power has hovered over capitalism as a problem as difficult to resolve theoretically as it has been practically. The classical political economists could never quite resolve the confusion that arose from on the one hand equating value with labor and on the other hand having to recognize that the value of labor as an input to production was somehow less than the value it generated (thus leaving room for rents, profits, interest, and the like). Marx neatly solved that problem by recognizing a difference between labor as the substance of value and labor power (the capacity to create value) as a commodity sold by laborers to capitalists. Equally neatly, the neoclassicals eviscerated the political message that came from Marx's formulation by equating proper wages with the marginal return on labor as an input to production (leaving open therefore the possibility for a 'fair' rate of return for capital and land). That idea never worked well for, as Marx pointed out, labor is not a commodity like any other. A host of moral, social, historical and geographical circumstances enters into its formulation and valuation. Chief among these is a long and widespread historical geography of class struggle.

In the United States, for example, the concept of an adequate 'living wage' (alongside that of a socially regulated working day) was fundamental to the agitation that began in cities like Baltimore and Pittsburgh with the massive railroad strike of 1877. As Glickman (1997) shows, this was the kind of agitation that ultimately led to minimum wage legislation, at first at State and then subsequently at the Federal level during the New Deal years.

There has always been controversy as to what properly constitutes a living wage. Since 1968, as Pollin and Luce (1998) document, the value of the minimum wage established at the Federal level has declined by some thirty percent in real terms, placing those with full time minimum wage jobs now well below the poverty level. Its 1997 increase (to \$5.15 from a baseline of \$4.25 an hour in 1994) still kept it well below 1968 standards. With a good deal of frustration at the ability to assure an adequate living wage at the Federal scale, a whole series of local campaigns and agitations

at a more local level have in recent years broken out across the United States. One of the pioneers in this movement exists in my home town of Baltimore. I provide, then, an account of this local struggle as an illustration of how a theory of uneven geographical developments might work in conjunction with arguments for a universal system of human rights (cf. Chapter 5).

The circumstances regulating wages and living conditions in Baltimore underwent significant alterations from the late 1960s onwards (see Chapter 8). Severe deindustrialization of the economy (connected with processes of globalization) meant some radical shifts in the circulation of variable capital within the metropolitan region. In addition to widespread structural unemployment (and the production of a so-called and much stigmatized 'underclass') the effect was to move employment away from the blue collar (largely white male and unionized) industrial sector and into a wide array of service activities, particularly those connected to the so-called 'hospitality sector' (hotels, tourism, conventions, museums) that underpinned the redevelopment effort in Baltimore. The result (in line with much of the US economy – see, e.g., Wilson, 1996, and Kasarda, 1995) was widespread long-term structural unemployment and a shift towards non-unionized and female employment in low-paying 'unskilled' jobs. Low-income job opportunities arose in areas such as cleaning, janitorial, parking, and security services. Paying only minimum wages and often resting on temporary work which yielded even less on a weekly basis (with no health, security, or pension benefits) the growth of this form of employment produced an increasing number of 'working poor' – individuals or families fully employed whose incomes were often well below the official poverty line (a recent report put the number of children of the working poor in the United States at 5.6 million in 1994 as opposed to 3.4 million in 1974 – see Holmes, 1996). African-American women, drawn from the impoverished zones of the inner city, became the main source of this kind of labor in Baltimore, indicating a discursive and largely racist-sexist construction of the inherent 'value' of *that* kind of labor power from *that* kind of place. This stereotyping was automatically reinforced and framed within a circulation process of variable capital and capital accumulation that insisted that this was the kind of labor power that was essential to its own valorization.

These broad economic trends were paralleled by a nation-wide political attack upon working-class institutions and government supports (see, e.g., Edsall, 1984) and a general shift by a whole range of public and private institutions towards political-economic practices that emphasized capital accumulation. One effect was spiraling social inequalities of the sort symbolized by the declining value of the minimum wage in real value terms.

A particular instance of this political economic shift is worth recording. In 1984, the Johns Hopkins University and the Johns Hopkins Hospital (both non-profit and educational institutions) in Baltimore formed a for-profit wholly-owned subsidiary called Dome Corporation, which provides security, parking, cleaning, and janitorial services through another subsidiary called Broadway Services Inc. This firm does some of the cleaning and janitorial work in the Johns Hopkins System as well as in a number of City schools, downtown offices, and the like. Most of the employees are women and African-American, drawn from the impoverished zones of Baltimore City. Most were paid at or slightly above the then-prevailing minimum wage of \$4.25 (raised to \$4.75 in 1996 and then \$5.15 in 1997). Full-time employees paid circa \$5 per week for minimal health insurance, but a significant portion of the work was done by temporary workers with no benefits. The Johns Hopkins System has by this strategy achieved cost-savings on its cleaning bills and a healthy rate of return (circa 10%) on its investment (debt plus equity). It has since been cited by other universities as a successful model of how to cut costs by out-sourcing its cleaning work while also making a profit.

This is an example of how shifts in the circulation of variable capital can occur. Such shifts have radical effects upon bodily conditions and practices. Everyone recognizes that \$4.75 an hour is insufficient to live on. To bring a family of four above the official poverty line would require a permanent job at a minimum of \$7.70 per hour (1996 values) plus benefits, in Baltimore. The lack of health benefits and elementary care translates into a chronic epidemiological condition for many inner-city neighborhoods (and the sad paradox of cleaners unable to use the services of the hospital they clean). The need to hold down two jobs to survive translates into a condition of permanent physical exhaustion from a twelve-hour working day plus travel time on unreliable public transport between job sites and residences. When two jobs could not be had, the effect was to force some of the employed to live in shelters rather than regular housing and eat at charity soup kitchens rather than at Roy Rogers or Burger Kings (the more usual places of consumption that offered cheap minimal nutrition). The demands of the labor process (often late and erratic hours) in relation to restricted locational choices for living (given rents, housing affordability, public transport availability – car ownership is not feasible, and the like) reinforced geographical segregation. The insertion of racially marked and gendered bodies into this system trapped certain social groups into the dead-end prospects associated with these impoverished zones (see Fernandez-Kelly, 1994; more generally, Hanson and Pratt, 1994).

It is hard to do justice to the appalling effects of such conditions at all points in this particular process of circulation variable capital. Lack of

respect and dignity in the workplace, negligible bargaining power in the labor market, minimal and health-threatening forms of consumption and terrible conditions of child-rearing are characteristic. The marks of all this violence upon individual bodies are not hard to read. Systematic studies again and again emphasize the stark impacts of inequalities upon life chances. Baltimore City has the lowest life expectancy of almost any other comparable jurisdiction in the United States (and comparable to many impoverished and undeveloped countries). 'In the groups we studied,' write Geronimus et al. (1996, 1555-6), after a comparative study of similar zones of Detroit, New York City, Los Angeles, and Alabama, 'the number of years of life lost generally increased with the percentage of people in the group who were living in poverty, with the poverty rate accounting for more than half the racial differences in mortality.' The data tell an appalling story: 'the probability that a 15 year old girl in Harlem would survive to the age of 45 was the same as the probability that a typical white girl anywhere in the United States would survive to the age of 65.' While it would be wrong to argue that lack of a living wage is the only factor at work here, the associations are far too strong to deny an active connection.

A campaign for a 'living wage,' organized by Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) seeks to change all this. BUILD was founded in 1978, through the coming together of the Interfaith Ministerial Alliance (predominantly though by no means exclusively African-American) that had been an important church-based force for civil rights with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF, a Chicago-based Saul Alinsky style community empowerment organization). BUILD became an activist voice for social change and economic development in the city dedicated to the improved well-being of impoverished and marginalized populations. It played an important role in struggles to regenerate failing neighborhoods and it initially joined wholeheartedly in the city and corporate-led strategy to generate employment through public investments and subsidies to business (as, e.g., in the Inner Harbor renewal, the construction of a convention center, a new ballpark, etc., all in the downtown core).

In the early 1990s, BUILD recognized that its strategies were too limited. Revitalized neighborhoods lacking adequate employment slipped back into decay. The public investment and subsidies to corporations were producing below-poverty jobs. The corporate-backed revitalization of downtown had not delivered on its promises and was increasingly viewed by BUILD as a 'great betrayal.' The churches that formed the basis of BUILD found themselves pushed to deliver more and more in the way of social services (soup kitchens, clothing, social assistance) to a population for whom Groucho Marx's witticism - 'Look at me, I've made my way up from nothing to a state of extreme poverty' - was cruel as well as a joke.

Consistent with its religious roots, BUILD decided to launch a campaign in the name of 'family values' and 'community' betterment, for a 'living wage.' They argued that business, in return for public subsidies, should commit itself to a social compact. This translated into the ideal of a minimum wage of \$7.70 per hour, permanent jobs, adequate benefits, and career opportunities for all workers. Recognizing the difficulty of achieving this overnight, BUILD proposed an immediate wage hike to \$6.10 an hour rising to \$6.60 in July 1996 and going to \$7.10 in 1997 and \$7.70 in 1999. This is actually a minimalist demand (it is worth noting that the most recent piece of living wage legislation in San Jose, California, set the level at \$10.75).

Like all such struggles, as Marx observed (1976 edition, 409), the role of 'allies in those social layers not directly interested in the question' is of considerable significance. The impetus for the campaign came from the churches. This set the tone concerning the definition of moral and civilized behavior that always enters into the determination of the value of labor power. What BUILD in effect says is that the market valuation of labor power as it now occurs in Baltimore is unacceptable as a 'moral' datum for a 'civilized' country. The focus on jobs connected immediately to the institutions of labor. A new form of labor organizing was needed which drew upon the skills of IAF, the power of AFSCME (State, County and Municipal Employees, which became a full partner in the campaign in 1994, providing personnel and resources). This meant a move away from traditional workplace industrial organizing towards a city-wide movement to change the baseline conditions for the circulation of variable capital. Jonathan Lange (1996), the labor organizer working with BUILD, outlines the strategy as follows:

Organizing is a relational activity, it takes place *in* a place among people, and it is not totally mobile like capital. Ultimately you are not organizing workplaces and factories you are organizing people so ... the industrial model does not make total sense. So you've got to figure out how to organize ... a total labor market no matter where people work, to build an organization that is transportable for people from workplace to workplace, which means that the benefit plans have to be portable, the relationships in the organization have to be portable and not built all totally on one work place, which means that you have to understand people are not going to be leaders necessarily right away but potential leaders who can develop a following in their current workplace or when they move into their new one. It means you have to target those industries and corporations where your ability to withhold labor isn't the only strength you have, that you have other sorts of ways of getting leverage to try and reach recognition and accommodation ... This is an experiment to try to figure out whether within a

certain labor market if you merge, if you ally working people with other kinds of decency and power and you carefully target institutions that are not totally mobile, that cannot just run away with their capital, can workers get themselves on a more equal footing? And if you do that enough . . . can you begin to really raise the basis, the floor of wages in a city?

The strategy is, then, two pronged. First, build a cadre of workers who can carry their leadership skills and potentialities with them. Some workers – mostly African-American women and men – immediately joined up to lead a Solidarity Sponsoring Committee that adopted as its motto ‘Climbing Jacob’s Ladder.’ But others were more reluctant. Second, push hard to create a powerful alliance of forces to change the baseline for the circulation of variable capital. Initially, BUILD’s strength lay in the churches. But the fact that it was mainly women and African-American women who were suffering conjoined questions of gender, race, and class in ways that could potentially unify a variety of social movements (including the unions as well as civil rights and women’s organizations). The campaign, moreover, made great play with the concept of the dignity of labor and of the laborer, even daring to argue sometimes that the rule that ‘any job was better than none’ ought to be brought into question when the quality, potentiality, and dignity of available labor processes was taken into account.

The campaign won significant concessions in 1995. City Hall now mandates that all city wages and all sub-contracts with the city should honor the ‘living-wage’ policy. Though the Mayor initially resisted on the grounds of keeping Baltimore competitive in the face of ‘globalization,’ he now claims the effort is cost-effective (when the reduced cost of social services to the impoverished poor is factored in). The World Trade Center (run by the State Government) has followed suit (with, interestingly, support from the business tenants in the State-operated building but heavy criticism from business leaders in the State). Early in 1998, the City School Board agreed to a living-wage clause in all its subcontracts. Now the Johns Hopkins System is faced with exactly that same question, both as the supplier of services (through Broadway Services) and, being the largest private employer in the State, as a demander of them (an interesting example of how capital so frequently operates on both sides of the supply-demand equation when it comes to labor – cf. Marx’s argument, 1976 edition, 752). To this end a campaign began early in 1996 to persuade the Johns Hopkins System to accept the living wage as part of its own contractual practices.

The search for allies within the Johns Hopkins System became crucial. The Graduate Representative Organization together with some faculty and, ultimately, the Black Student Union and some representatives of the

student council took up the question. Initially there was also a surprising degree of indifference, even on the part of campus groups that ought to have been immediately interested in the question. Some economists in the University argued (rather predictably) against any interference in free-market forces, on the grounds ‘that most people earning the present minimum wage are worth just that’ (Hanke, 1996). Plainly, the outcome of the struggle depended (and continues to depend) not only on the capacities of the Solidarity Sponsoring Committee (SSC) (with AFSCME’s help) to organize and the powers of moral suasion of BUILD but also upon the ability to create a powerful alliance within Johns Hopkins itself behind the idea that a living wage is mandatory for all those who work directly or indirectly (through sub-contracts) within the institution. By 1998, most students and most faculty were persuaded of the idea but were still faced by a recalcitrant administration. By 1999, the latter, in response to both internal and external pressures (both financial and moral), had tardily recognized its responsibilities towards the appalling conditions of impoverishment and ill-health that predominated in its shadow. It also finally acknowledged that its own wage policies might have some role in the construction of such conditions. It announced it would ‘become a leader’ among the universities on the living wage issue and ensure that everyone would receive at least \$7.75 an hour (the 1996 living wage) by 2002.

The Baltimore campaign for a living wage (which is currently being replicated in some thirty or so other cities as well as at the state level elsewhere – see Pollin and Luce, 1998) offers a rather special set of openings to change the politics of how bodies are constructed/destroyed within the city. Its basis in the churches, the community, the unions, the universities, as well as among those social layers ‘not immediately concerned with the question,’ starts to frame body politics in a rather special way, by-passing some of the more conventional binaries of capital/labor, white/black, male/female, and nature/culture. Radical social constructionists should presumably relish rather than frown upon this confusion of terms. If, for example, Butler’s (1993, 9) argument for ‘a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter,’ is taken as the proper framing for understanding the body in a situation of this sort, then the ‘living wage’ campaign is a fundamental form of body politics. This is not to say its mode is unproblematic. Consistent with its religious roots and its emphasis upon a traditional conception of the family as a proper unit of reproduction, the religious side of the campaign could be viewed as or even turn exclusionary. And BUILD in general seeks its own empowerment as a political organization as well as the empowerment of the low-income population it

seeks to serve. Yet these are not reasons to abjure the living-wage objective. In practice many different interests (some secular as well as religious) now support the common goal of a decent living wage for everyone who works in Baltimore.

The 'living-wage' issue is fundamentally a class issue that has ramifications across the moments of production, exchange, and consumption. It has the power, therefore, to define what the 'work' side of current proposals for 'workfare' welfare reform might be about. Unfortunately, this potential relationship is now being inverted as the city is forced to absorb several thousand (possibly as many as 14,000) workfare recipients into its labor force (the total employment in all categories downtown is around 100,000). Both the city and Johns Hopkins began to employ workfare recipients at \$1.50 an hour (as 'trainees'), and in the first rush this meant some displacement of minimum wage workers. The effect was to create an even lower datum than that set by the legal minimum wage for the circulation of variable capital within the city. A political struggle organized by BUILD citywide and a coalition of forces within Johns Hopkins led to the commitment by the Governor and by the President of the Johns Hopkins that there would be no displacement of existing workers by workfare trainees.

This is not an easy political battle to win more generally and its unfolding is illustrative of how class struggle gets waged from the capitalist side. Burger King, for example, has one of its most profitable franchises in Baltimore. Located in an 'empowerment zone' it is eligible for government subsidies and it can employ workers off the welfare rolls as 'trainees' at a cost far below the minimum, let alone the living, wage. Yet Burger King gets cited by President Clinton in his 1997 State of the Union Address as one of the large companies willing to hire people off the welfare rolls, and the President promised to press for special tax credits for companies that did this. Later, however, under strong pressure from organized labor and many community groups around the country, the President agreed (against intense Republican opposition) to bring all workfare employment within the framework of labor laws (allowing organizing of workfare workers and protection from the grosser forms of direct exploitation). Thus does the accumulation of capital proceed, with state assistance mainly going to capital, as class struggle unfolds around one of the most contested and fraught social issues of the 1990s in the United States.

The living-wage campaign integrates race, gender, and class concerns at the level of the 'city' as a whole. In particular, it opens up potential leadership roles for African-American women to alter bodily practices and claim basic economic rights. The campaign furthermore proposes a

different spatial model of political intervention in the valuation of labor power, highlighting Munn's argument that 'bodily spacetime serves as a condensed sign of the wider spacetime of which it is a part' (1985, 17). Creating an alternative spatial frame to that of increasingly fragmented workplaces (within which the value of labor power can only be established piecemeal) becomes part of the means to alter the conditions of circulation of variable capital. The campaign offers the possibility for broad-based coalition politics at a different spatial scale.

Changing the baseline conditions of the circulation of variable capital will not change everything that needs to be changed in Baltimore either within the labor process or without. It will not automatically improve the quality of the work experience. It does not automatically confront the sexual harassment of the women on the job, the rampant racism in the city, manifestations of homophobia, the dramatic deterioration of many Baltimore neighborhoods, or even the stresses within and around the institution of the family. Nor does it open the door to revolution rather than reform of the wage system (abolition of the wages system is hardly an issue here whereas the reformist claim – of which Marx was roundly critical – for a fair day's wage for a fair day's work is). But it does create necessary conditions for the transformation of bodily practices on the part of a substantial number of working people in Baltimore. Without that, many other possibilities for social transformation are blocked. Marx (1967 edition, Volume 3, 320), recognizing the dilemma, put it this way in a remarkable passage that deserves some thought:

[T]he realm of freedom actually begins only when labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce his life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy those wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, by bringing it under common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with the realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite.

To that remarkable passage with its startlingly reformist last sentence we can also add: 'an adequate living wage is likewise a basic prerequisite.' The struggle for a living wage within the space of Baltimore has its place in a more universal struggle for rights, for justice, dignity, and decency in all the interstices of a globalizing capitalism. Its particularities make it peculiar, give it strengths and weaknesses, but they are not irrelevant to the achievement of a more universalizing politics. And while the numbers of people so far affected are small, the manner of these campaigns illustrates how frustration of politics at one scale can potentially be met by a shift to a different scale of political action.

3 Bodies in space and time

The body that is to be the 'measure of all things' is itself a site of contestation for the forces that create it. The body (like the person and the self) is an internal relation and therefore open and porous to the world. Unfortunately the relational conception of the body can all too easily take an idealist turn, particularly in academic politics. The body is not monadic, nor does it float freely in some ether of culture, discourses, and representations, however important these may be in materializations of the body. The study of the body has to be grounded in an understanding of real spatio-temporal relations between material practices, representations, imaginaries, institutions, social relations, and the prevailing structures of political-economic power. The body can then be viewed as a nexus through which the possibilities for emancipatory politics can be approached. While there are some remarkable insightful writings on that theme available to us, it is worthwhile remembering the vital insights to be had from Marx's understanding of how bodily materializations occur within the circulation of capital under capitalist social relations. The body may be 'an accumulation strategy in the deepest sense' but it is also the locus of political resistance given direction, as the example of BUILD's campaign for a living wage in Baltimore illustrates, by the basic fact that we are, in the most literal sense, political animals rendered capable of moral argument and thereby endowed with the capacity to transform the social relations and institutions that lie at the heart of any civil society. Laborers are, in short, positioned to claim rights consistent with notions of dignity, need, and contribution to the common good. If those claims are unrealizable within the circulation of variable capital then, it seems, the revolutionary demand to escape such constraints is a fundamental aspect of what body politics must be about. We shall need to consider it.

PART 3

THE UTOPIAN MOMENT