



WHAT'S LEFT?

Neo-Critical Geography, Or, The Flat Pluralist World of Business Class

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If you construct a career raging against the system, you can't stop
raging just because the system has accepted you.

Louis Menand (2005)

Power is like a violin. It is held in the left hand and played by the
right.

Argentinian aphorism

... a heterarchical Left perceives a flatter world. ... So, first of all, no
more policing.

Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (2005)

Love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal ...
but don't talk about revolution,
that's going a little bit too far ...
And that's why I'm turning you in ...
I'm a liberal.

Phil Ochs (1966)

When Tony Blair was re-elected in 2001, he promised to continue
the moral crusade of "New Labour" as a force for political and moral
regeneration in Britain and the world. Workers, women, immigrants,
Asian and Caribbean Britons, many in the middle class, all caught the
wave. The nightmare of Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberal revolution of
the 1980s was still visceral in many people's minds, and a sweeping
majority still thought Blair the best of a motley crew. It was becoming

increasingly clear, however, to a wide swath of people including disaffected members of his own party and eventually cabinet, that Blair was not the answer to Thatcher but was in many ways continuing her neo-liberal policies. Not only did he not roll back Thatcher's travesties but he sought to complete various ambitions of the Thatcher government in a way that neither the Iron Lady nor her successor John Major could ever have hoped for. Blair's second term in office consummated many of these goals, further shambolizing a Thatcherized National Health Care system and initiating university privatisation with student fees.

Instead of standing-up for the needs of his voters, Blair took his place as a leader of global neo-liberalism, sufficiently so that he easily transferred his allegiance from a dilettantish Bill Clinton to a dangerously cowboyish George Bush. By the same token, Blair's moral and christian crusade was not only unperturbed by the Bush decision to invade Iraq, but he evidently did his best to comply with the Washington agenda at the expense of many thousands of lives. A report in the prestigious British medical journal, *The Lancet*, estimates that as many as 100,000 Iraqi lives were lost in the first 18 months of the war, an estimate made before the 2004 expulsion of Falluja's 300,000 residents and consequent levelling of the city (Al-Rubeyi, B. 2004). The atrocious London bombings of July 2005 gave Blair no cause to consider that the war in Iraq had escalated rather than resolved global terror, but instead provided the pretext for a crackdown on free speech at home. At best, Blair's has been a moralism of convenience, able to justify every twist and turn of the neo-liberal advance as well as the state terror perpetrated on prisoners, from Basra to Abu Ghraib, Bell Marsh to Guantánamo.

The idea of neo-liberalism sprouting from the spores of a nominally socialist party was at first stunning but is now an old story. Social democrats all over Europe, and from New Zealand to Brazil, have in various ways made pacts with the neo-liberal devil. And one day soon, the Chinese Communist Party will surely announce that capitalism is actually the highest stage of communism.

Neo-Critical Geography?

Could the discipline of geography be on a similar trajectory? Once quite staid, geography has become one of the most vibrant disciplines—"the sexiest", according to marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton (1997). It presents a perfect case of uneven academic development: in the 1970s, radicals, anti-war activists, marxists, feminists, humanists, socialists, environmentalists and many others sprouted in the fertile soil of a long-fallow discipline, often displacing a budding positivism. There was no effective resistance. Geography had long cut itself off from social theory, and so, when social theory blossomed,

the discipline lacked any immune system to neutralize the invader. Sociology, anthropology, history, political science, psychology—all had had their marxists, assorted radicals and feminists, so while the broad radicalization of the academy in the 1970s certainly affected these disciplines, the effect was less profound and less lasting than in geography. Geography's gatekeepers were overwhelmed by new and radical ideas they could barely comprehend and could not staunch. Their moss-ridden portcullises of disciplinary defense crumbled in the withering stare of world-wanting ambition: social theory of so many different stripes swarmed through the gates of geography galvanizing hope, intellectual excitement and political intent. It is extraordinary, in retrospect, that in the reactionary 1980s of Thatcher and Reagan and Kohl, marxist, feminist and broadly radical research (eventually including postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial and many other kinds of progressive social theory) pretty much defined the research frontier in human geography. The policers of disciplinary propriety had been vanquished, at least temporarily.

Perhaps in part because of this success and geographers' new insistence on grappling with politics after the debacles of environmental determinism and 1930s geopolitics, the discipline today is much more integrated into mainstream political debates, especially in Britain, and closer perchance to the temptations of Blairism. There, unlike in the United States, the radicalized generation of the 1970s has some access to the ruling government; in the US most academics don't even have access to the opposition.

We still live today with the bountiful results of the broad social theory revolution in geography and the discipline is a far better place for it. The multiplicity of social theoretical perspectives makes it an enviable domicile compared with the doctrinaire narrowness of economics, say, or political science. Gone since the postwar era is the withering definitional retort: "but is it geography?" And yet a significant backlash has already set in. Some of it rides on the back of Geographical Information Sciences (GISci), reasserts the power of a narrow scientific positivism, and reframes the discipline as a spatial science in the service of technocratic power. The disciplinary power of GISci is undoubtedly greatest in the United States, but it is also strong in East and South Asia as well as Eastern Europe. Yet there are other avenues back toward neo-liberal officialdom; the backlash comes more stealthily from within. Academics are no less capable than Tony Blair of backtracking from radical critic to establishment doyen.

In an attempt to oppose the emerging backlash by bringing together quite divergent oppositional political voices, a number of geographers in the 1990s organized the International Critical Geography group (I call it the ICG but many others call it the ICGG: this presumably offers a sense of how dangerously organized we are as a threat to the global

status quo). A Nordic Human Geography conference was already in existence; a British “critical geography forum” was organized on the internet in the 1990s and continues as a place for debate and information sharing; in the US a graduate student conference inaugurated in the late 1980s has blossomed into an annual critical geography mini-conference; regional critical geography conferences have been held in Hong Kong, Osaka and Tokyo and others are planned. The broad strategy behind this mobilization of a “critical geography” was to galvanize a common front where a broad range of radical critiques could not only respond to the backlash from within the discipline but thrive as a place where new ideas and political engagements could be discussed, debated and developed. “Critical geography” provides a broad group identity for scholars and activists committed to a radical restructuring of the societies we live in: capitalism, heteronormativity, patriarchy, imperialism, racism and many other forms of oppression represent the interlaced targets of this geographical critique. Central to critical geography is both the organization of ideas that challenge the hierarchies of our own academic labour, and the provision of a venue where activists and activism fuel critique, and vice versa. For many of us, it was imperative that this be organized internationally, giving real substance and not simply lip service to critiques of Euro-American centrism (Desbiens and Smith 1999; Garcia-Ramon 2004). The ICG has advanced this loose agenda through four international conferences, beginning in Vancouver in 1997, followed by Taegu and Békéscsaba, and most recently in Mexico City (2005). The fifth ICG conference is scheduled for Bombay/Mumbai in 2007. As one involved in the organizing I am obviously partial, but I think we have made strides toward building, within the admittedly restricted confines of geography, what the British Labour party used to champion as a “broad left.” That it is international—the Mexico City Conference had attendees from 35 countries—is even more encouraging.

Good ideas, however, have a way of being watered down. Radical ideas get mulched back into the mainstream. This is precisely what happened to notions of diversity and multiculturalism, for example. In academia, the interconnected political aspirations of “diversity” and “multiculturalism” came on the scene as very powerful and effective critiques of the social location from which hegemonic cultures and ideologies scripted the world. The sharpness of these critiques, pointing out the stunningly obvious yet blazingly invisible provenance of social ideologies, had a powerful and salutary political effect, displacing the hegemony of white, male, hetero and bourgeois slants on the world with a multiplicity of perspectives, challenges and claims. The very power of these challenges made them a target, however, and through a long process of acceptance, generalization and erosion, their power diminished. Notions of diversity and multiculturalism

have long since been ground into the corporate language and images of CNN and MacDonalds, and become favourite fodder for George Bush's and Tony Blair's speech writers. Once the potent weapon of an oppositional politics, they are now emblems of establishment neo-liberalism, largely emptied of radical potential. The first rule of the market is to make every customer or client feel special, valued, and sufficiently appreciated that they will fork over their money, and the language of diversity and multiculturalism has become an ideal means for this quest.

There is nothing inevitable about this process, although it does repeat with some predictability. In general the best ideas of the radical left, those propositions we take for granted, our shibboleths, are the most vulnerable to this kind of flattening and co-option. It is vital to contest the dilution of such powerful ideas, and much progressive effort is necessarily taken up with this task. Yet it is also vital to recognise the power of capitalism's ideological combine-harvester which flattens all before it, uses the news industry, advertising, government propaganda, and the media (with the considerable if often unintended assistance of we academics and the students who graduate from our classes) to bale free flowing ideas into marketable commodities. We need always to see the ideological Massey-Ferguson as it churns behind us and to judge deftly the moment to defend and the moment to move on, reinvent, re-sow politically modified seed. This is not an excuse for following the corporations into a genetically modified politics but an opportunity to reinvent the appeal of our message. As many scholars and activists have now remarked, identity politics, in part precisely because of its very success, is passing or has passed through a similar process to multiculturalism. Once a highly effective political intervention, identity politics was recycled in the 1990s as advertising script for Benetton or MTV. None of this makes the political struggle for women's rights, class politics, queer politics, or struggles against racism obsolete, far from it; but it does suggest that we always need to be several steps ahead of the capitalist mulching machine, reinventing these struggles, devising new language, new political strategies, new ideas, new forms of activism.

The radical upsurge in geography that emerged more than three decades ago is not exempt from this process. The baling of (and from) good ideas is an occupational hazard of critical intellectual activity, and the more effective the idea, the more it becomes a target. The sharpness of feminist critiques in the 1970s and 1980s, marxist critiques in the same period, poststructuralist and postcolonialist theories in the 1990s—all have been blunted as much by we scholars who embraced these ideas as by those who despised them. In part this resulted from the very success of radical ideas in geography. Indeed, such ideas were so powerful that they exercised their own authority in

the academic market. Marginalized radical journals such as *Antipode*, once mimeographed long into the night by dedicated Clark University graduate students, are now leading journals in the discipline and the profitable pride of publishers, such as Blackwell, which colonized radical geography from the beginning while firing the inspired editor who showed them the way. Aspiring graduate students, to write a publishable dissertation or get a good job, have to be swimming in the backwash of the right academic shark who edits the right journals and can place articles, knows the right publishers, and has the names of search committee members worldwide on his or her rolodex. These academic sharks can guarantee publication-meat, which translates into job-meat, and trans-oceanic success. Jaws academic style.

Some who swarmed through the gates of geographical radicalism in the 1980s when everybody was doing it, and who on the way achieved disciplinary power both for themselves and on behalf of radicals, are now tip-toeing backward, looking for an exit. Having made new friends in higher places, older friends are less convenient, and they seem to want to wriggle back through the same portcullis they came in by. In these neo-liberal times, they've been caught on the wrong side of a political curfew wall (significantly of their own making); as they defect they deflect—offloading the blame for their supposed predicament onto others. My money's on them. I think they'll make it. Having become gatekeepers themselves, they know where the weaknesses are and they have Blairism as a model. But the implications of such alibis for for critical geography need to be seriously considered.

As best can be discerned, the central message of "What's left? Just the future" (Amin and Thrift 2005) is a beautiful promise that if we renounce past indiscretions, forget about any kind of radical social change, get with our ethical selves, embrace a playful and pluralist agonism, and just let a hundred flowers bloom, the future will surely be rosy. A host of traditional liberal sentiments turns up here: they are against too much corporate power, but handwringingly unsure what determines "too much"; they're all for environmental protection but at what cost?; they tut-tut at "runaway consumption"; and they seem strangely agnostic—affectively agonistic?—concerning the "travails of the globalization movement." Their alternatives by contrast are quite mercurial: "new forms of humanity," "new forms of property rights," "new geographies of affect," "an ecology of hope," "democratic experimentalism," a "politics of mundane transcendence," a "politics of immanence." Who could be against this rich gumbo of good stuff, but what exactly does it mean? What politics lurks in the gray of this gatekeeper anti-gatekeeperism?

The world is not made of hierarchies, they insist, but needs to be seen in "heterarchial" terms. If it is not clear exactly who gets to be included in Amin's and Thrift's "heterarchial Left," it is blatantly obvious who is

to be excluded. It is not a hundred flowers that bloom in the brave new heterarchical world but only 99. They rightly oppose the one-dimensionality of today's global ideological narratives, but they curiously lay this result to the door of the very dead Karl Marx rather than, for example, the quite alive Rupert Murdoch. Marxism is clearly the elephant in the room of these ruminations (feminism is not even in the room). One might have expected, given the central role of marxism in opening up geography to social theory in the 1970s, that a sustained (or even cursory) analysis of marxism's pros and cons would be merited. Instead, we get a nervously defensive, rhetorical dismissal that hardly builds confidence about the intellectual calibre of the rest of the polemic. Marxism (without either reference or explanation) is the one flower that should not to be allowed to bloom but should instead be choked in its bed. At the same time, just as numerous scholars are rethinking feminist notions of social reproduction and political economy, the legacy of feminism is nimbly side-stepped. As Tony Blair is fond of saying, they are of course entitled to their opinion.

The Flat Earth

The "heterarchical left," for Amin and Thrift, "perceives a flatter world ..." (p. 237). This prescription is far from innocent, and it anchors the larger political framework the authors are pushing. It turns out to be a quite revealing metaphor and while not a new story it performs considerable political work in ways that are not always immediately obvious.

It is a striking historical fact that at the various apices of US global ambition over the last century, powerful discourses emerged to the effect that the world is devoid of geographical hierarchies and that it should be seen instead as a plain of equal opportunity for all. This describes the idea of a "global Monroe Doctrine" promoted by the liberal Woodrow Wilson at the end of World War I and the guiding vision of Franklin Roosevelt's "New World Order" twenty five years later which envisaged a similar "patchwork" of nation states in the postwar world. All in the world were supposedly equal in this beautiful vision, perpetrated by powerful ruling class men who sat at the top of a global hierarchy and who clearly had an interest in seeing no privilege. Today the language of a US-led neo-liberal globalization revisits this fantasy; its favourite slogan tells us that globalization provides "a level playing field." In all three moments of US global ascension, the public discourse has been characterized by an acute geographical contradiction: on the one side, there is an intense focus on the power of geography, often animated by war in places that the American populace can barely find on a map; on the other side there are powerful and quite contradictory claims that the world is "beyond

geography.” On a level playing field, no-one has a spatial advantage. The public sensibility registers a lost geography (Smith 2003, 2005).

Neo-liberal pundit Thomas Friedman (2005) provides the apogee of this “flat earth” argument today. Gobsacked by the genius of Indian capitalism in the last decade and its potential ability to out-compete the United States, Europe, and Japan, Friedman rediscovers the pre-Columbian world. We live in a “shrinking world,” he says, and are seeing a dramatically “flattening playing field.” With globalization, he reports, those parts of the world previously excluded from wealth and access are suddenly equal players, even advantaged competitors insofar as their wage rates and cost structures are lower.

It would indeed be nice if the world were flat and non-hierarchical. Many of us have long been struggling for just such a result, and it is a vision we can easily identify with. But it is precisely the self-serving trick of neo-liberalism to assume that such a flat world is already here, hierarchy is gone, equality rules. The world may be flat for those who can afford a business class ticket to fly around it, gazing down on a seemingly flat surface, while for those gazing up at passing airplanes in Sub-Saharan Africa or the Indian countryside, the opportunity represented by London or Bombay or New York is an impossible climb to a destination visible only as mediated television or movie fantasy, if even that. For those in Bombay’s shanties, or for that matter in New York’s Harlem or London’s East End, the price of the same business class ticket to see the world as flat is just as prohibitive.

In the neo-liberal vision, it is fairly clear what political work the idea of a flattened, non-hierarchical earth does. The despatialization of our global purview represents a simultaneous depoliticization: when all places are co-equal, geographical difference may persist—cities versus jungles—but no longer as a vector of gross inequality and no longer therefore as a vector of political opposition. The target of political revolt is made to disappear. One can read Friedman without ever grasping the depth and breadth of poverty in India or the fact that one-third of the world’s child malnutrition can be found there. Insofar as neo-critical geographers see no hierarchy, then, they can show us no location of power that needs to be talked back to, challenged, or transformed. Or as Amin and Thrift candidly concede: “we cannot even be sure where prevalent models of democracy arose from” (p. 222). This astonishing admission is the academic’s equivalent of the Seinfeldian “whatever.” “Proceed ethically” becomes the strongest of political admonitions when confronted with the question, “what is to be done.” Politics is flattened into a feel-good ethics—“mundane transcendence,” a “politics of imminence” (p. 232) indeed. A moralism of convenience transmutes into a politics of convenience.

It was Margaret Thatcher who announced in the 1980s that “there is no alternative” (TINA), while Frances Fukuyama announced the

“end of history”: liberal democracy had won. Tony Blair now repeats the same resignation about the lack of alternatives: if you can’t beat Bush, be his poodle. What is astonishing this time around, however, is that unlike in the first two moments of US global ambition, European intellectuals seem to have become enamoured by some aspects of these flat earth ideologies. From Latour’s actor network theory to Paul Virilio’s “death of geography,” from Castells’ network society to Jean Beaudrillard’s “end of geography,” leftists and ex-leftists have variously refracted visions of a flat playing field. (Beaudrillard at least practiced what he preached, famously confusing the mountainous Rockies of Montana with the prairies of Minnesota). This particular Americanization of European intellectual life is surely to be lamented. That neo-critical geography follows suit is as tragic as it is astonishing insofar as geographical adherents of the flat earth seem to be collaborating in the obliteration of the very insights that put geography on the political and theoretical map after the 1970s—namely the core belief that socially divided societies reproduce their forms of social differentiation in geographical space and, by corollary, that hierarchially produced geographies reaffirm and reproduce social differences. Such a crucial insight has little meaning in a “flat world” that refuses the reality of social hierarchies.

Yet like all ideologies, the flat earth contains a grain of truth. Three decades ago, who would have believed that South Korea would become one of the world’s most powerful and advanced economies? Three decades ago, who would have believed that burned out or deindustrialized central cities would become the new epicenters of hip urbanism, from Toronto to the Thames? The question is not whether such a “flatter world” is happening, for some people in some places, but what else is happening alongside and in blatant contradiction with it. The gap between rich and poor, whether in the US or South Africa or China, is expanding at the speed of light while the integration of parts of East Asia into the global capitalist heartland is matched by the further marginalization of sub-Saharan Africa and rural (and most urban) India. The flattening of the world is matched on every side by a capitalist orogeny that heaves elite wealth—and with it class, race and gender privilege and perspective—high into the stratosphere above the ordinary lives of the world’s billions, and this too is a highly geographical process obscured by flat earth ideologies. Nor is the origin of such unevenness a mystery. We have a broad range of theories concerning uneven geographical development which can help to explain this contradictory process. To accede to the one-dimensional portrait of a flat earth is to blind oneself in one eye and refuse the parallax that allows us to discern the depth of the scene, the multidimensionality of the world. (It is also important to stay in touch with public sensibilities, and so there is also

the more “mundane” question whether we want the press releases from the next RGS or AAG conference to read: “GEOGRAPHERS DISCOVER THE EARTH IS FLAT.”)

Writing exactly at the zenith of the Rooseveltian new world order, George Orwell understood very clearly how power thrived in the interstices of a contrived political flatness: “All are equal,” he concluded in *Animal Farm*, “but some are more equal than others.” With neo-critical geography we can, like the farm animals in Orwell’s satirical homily, dine with Tony Blair and be deluded into the ideological belief of an already existing social flatness. Or else we can do the harder work of social, political and intellectual organizing in an effort to flatten a highly uneven world in practice and not just in the mind.

For Amin and Thrift, the appeal to heterarchy seems to translate into a political pluralism: a “pluralist and forward-looking position” a “vibrant pluralism” (pp. 221, 238). Pluralism is the core politics of neo-critical geography. I am all for letting 99 flowers bloom—although I prefer the political arithmetic of the ICG which in its non-exclusionary way rounds the number up to an even hundred. The intellectual hearth of liberalism, pluralism celebrates the notion that all individuals and groups have their own equally valid take on the world, all people are equal on the same plain: Bill Gates has equal worth to an Indian peasant. Pluralism was most famously championed by John Locke in his early, progressive assault on the decrepit English aristocracy, and it invigorated the bourgeois revolution that displaced, if it did not quite topple, such charlatans (Queen Elizabeth II, remains the “patron” of the Royal Geographical Society). But Locke’s revolution and that of Adam Smith became their own bourgeois orthodoxy—things change—and the appeal to the same pluralism today becomes a conservative appeal to the past. The crucial point about pluralism is that its politics are up for sale to the highest bidder; they depend on the historical context. The crucial question therefore becomes: Plural against whom? Against feudal absolutism, pluralism is progressive; against radical critics of bourgeois (neo) liberalism which wears pluralism as its ideological garb, pluralism becomes a class weapon of a very different sort. In “What’s Left,” pluralism turns on its revolutionary seventeenth and eighteenth century roots, becomes the justificatory mulch of today’s neo-liberalism, bows to the inevitability of capitalism—one pluralism fits all—and dispatches the most egregious of enemies over the edge of the known (flat) world.

So what’s so bad about Marxism anyway? Reading Amin and Thrift we will never know. Rather than providing an analysis they opportunistically surf on a recrudescing wave of bourgeois anti-Marxism. But what really bugs them? Is it the Soviet Union they detest? Me too! I cried in joy the day the wall came down. Is some kind of engrained economism perhaps the issue? Edward Thompson or Raymond Williams, not to mention a raft of contemporary cultural geographers, could

presumably have set them straight on that score? Or is it the uncomfortable concern with class, as we 1970s generation academics become more comfortable ourselves? What's the bugaboo about Marxism? Perhaps part of the answer lies in the fact that it may be the one oppositional politics which really has not been significantly rescripted into media fodder, integrated, in greater or lesser part co-opted, but always has to be opposed. What does this tell us about the power of class as a vector of social difference and political change?

Making a flat world devoid of hierarchy takes a lot of work. The Global Social Forum aspires to a world in which hierarchies don't exist and I concur completely with that aspiration. Many other social movements have the same goal in their sights. Academics or journalists who already see no hierarchies in a flattened world are probably not the best guides in this regard. This suggests the difference between activism and idealism. If hierarchies vanish today in our academic theories, then so too vanish most of the targets of our political critique. One can't fight what one can't see or identify. As Miguel de Cervantes long ago realized, however, one can invent substitute targets to tilt at, and these might seem as real as windmills. Wanting the world different is a vital prerogative; assuming it to be already different simply by wishing it so is the luxury of those who presume, rightly or wrongly, the power to make their fantasies real. Idealism *is* the luxury of power.

Politics

Politics is local as much as global, and the presumption of a flat world has implications for the discipline of geography, especially in Britain, where I received my early geographical education. A certain rascality is presumably involved when two of the most powerful figures in the institutions of British geography, especially as regards the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) on which every department's future now depends, tell us on the one hand that the world is flat, and we better get with that, and on the other hand they insist that certain "other" ideas are to be pushed off the edge of the known world. The RAE is the most powerful arm of state power reaching into British academia, and those who wield RAE power wield the power of the state—its funding and ideological propensities. In that regard, let me just say bluntly what many others may not commit to print: the binarist "us-and-them" table comparing a so-called hierarchical with a "heterarchical" left with which Amin and Thrift concluded (2005: 237) is an intellectual and disciplinary embarrassment. "Down with binaries," is its message, "up with the opposite." Few readers will have missed the irony that despite a plaintive appeal for "no more policing" (p. 237), this article was intended precisely to police the discipline, arbitrate

who is in and who out. Only from a business class seat atop the academic world can such a “geography of affect” be sustained.

To put this even more pointedly, a number of British colleagues have related their strong disagreement with “What’s Left?”, yet they fear to respond. To do so, they worry, could put their departments in the firing line of a bad RAE assessment, incur the consequent anger of heads of department, prejudice promotion possibilities or other job opportunities, taint their students, damage their careers. They feel mad but muzzled. This is the power of the state in a “flat” world. It could well be that Ash’s and Nigel’s intervention was not intended to mobilize such power, but if the power is so viscerally felt from below, I am sure they can agree, then that power is nevertheless real. Their essay represents a manifesto for a neo-critical geography that fits us all comfortably within the fold of a supposedly “ethical” Blairite capitalism. They have every right to write what they do but we have the same right to demur, while evaluating the origins of this intervention, its motives, and its hierarchial provenance.

So what is the alternative to a flat-earth pluralism and neo-critical geography? How do we both keep a multiplicity of voices alive and at the same time create a robust body of political thought and debate that helps guide and build political struggles—a question that Amin and Thrift never ask? The point of my own response has been largely critical, in the vein of Marx’s imploration that we need a “ruthless critique of all that exists” (Marx 1843:30). But we also need more. We need a sense of how to put things back together even in the insistent continuance of critique. This is not an easy question, and it is one that most if not all of us have been grappling with for a long time. Few of us, and certainly not I, would claim to have the answers. I do believe that banishing class and existing social hierarchies of many stripes from our analyses is not just politically opportunistic but intellectually silly. The issue is not so much to arbitrate some finely worded, (neo)liberal, acceptance of philosophical equality among multiple identities in our academic journal articles, à la pluralism, while not struggling at all; rather it is to become involved in these struggles and through them to make the practical and intellectual connections among struggles, help broaden them, and at the same time to help focus their transformative potential. Major social transformations can spring from any number of sources: police abuse in Brixton, struggles over natural resources in Bolivia, religious strife in Bombay, imperialist occupation in Baghdad. The vital point for a critical geography is not an uncritical celebration of all revolts, but nor is it a tidy, detached desquamation of what counts as the only core struggle. Having said this, I also believe that as long as the class, race, gender and many other hierarchies of capitalism remain intact, we will get nowhere.

Everyone can and should have their own ideas about this, and *Antipode* has long been devoted to the combination of critique and alternatives. I would just like to propose that in addition to all of our good words—and I don't devalue these at all—the International Critical Geography (ICG)) is actually pulling geographers and non-geographers together around a broad political agenda. Its very existence scares the Association of American Geographers, bound by its national boundaries—I can't speak for the RGS—precisely because of its politics and internationalism. It represents a pole of international political activity and activism around which we can and should organize. It collates with our writing and teaching but also reaches beyond it. Let a hundred flowers bloom in the process, but let us recognize seriously that the main threat to these promising political buds comes not from allies but from the political refrigeration blown our way by a broad neo-liberal wind that capitalizes, commodifies, classes and marketizes everything. Eyes on the prize.

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