

SPACE AS A KEY WORD**David Harvey**

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If Raymond Williams were contemplating the entries for his celebrated text on *Keywords* today, he would surely have included the word “space.” He may well have included it in that short list of concepts, such as “culture” and “nature”, to be listed as “one of the most complicated words in our language.” How, then, can the range of meanings that attach to the word “space” be expanded upon and clarified without losing ourselves in some labyrinth (itself an interesting spatial metaphor) of complications?

Space is, of course, one of those words that frequently elicits modification. The complications perhaps arise more out of the modifications (which all too frequently get omitted in the telling or the writing) rather than out of any inherent complexity of the notion of space itself. When, for example, we write of “material”, “metaphorical”, “liminal”, “personal”, “social” or “psychic” space (just to take a few examples) we thereby indicate a considerable diversity of contexts which so inflect matters as to seem to render the meaning of space itself entirely contingent upon the context. Similarly, when we designate its range of applications in terms such as spaces of fear, of play, of cosmology, of dreams, of anger, of particle physics, of capital, of geopolitical tension, of hope, of memory, or of ecological interaction (again, just to indicate a few of a seemingly infinite range of potential sites of deployment of the term) then we seem to be saying that the arena of application defines something so special about the meaning of space as to render any general consideration of its properties a hopeless task.

Important and influential though all these modifiers are, some more general exploration of the meaning of the term seems necessary. Only then will we be able to disperse some of the fog of mis-communication that seems to bedevil use of the word.

It is, however, difficult to decide where to begin. That determination is not innocent since how enquiry is situated (to deploy yet another spatial metaphor) defines a particular perspective that highlights some matters while occluding others. And while it may be correct in the long run to accord a certain privilege to the realm of, say, philosophical reflection, as an arena of thought whose mission is primarily to rise above the various and divergent fields of human practices and partial knowledges to tell us something more definitive about the categories to which we may appeal, I have formed the impression that there is sufficient dissension and confusion amongst the philosophers as to make that anything but an unproblematic starting point. Furthermore, since I am by no means qualified to contemplate the concept of space from within the philosophical tradition, it seems best to begin where I can best begin and then see what others make of it. I therefore begin from the standpoint of the geographer, not because this is a privileged site that somehow has a proprietary right (as some geographers sometimes seem to claim) over

the use of spatial concepts, but because that is where I happen to be and it is in this arena where I have had to wrestle most directly with the complexity of what the word space might be all about. I have, of course, frequently sought assistance and inspiration from others operating elsewhere in the complex division of academic and practical labor. But my aim in appropriating the ideas of others has never been some grand synthesis of meanings. I have sought, rather, meanings that work, as satisfactorily as possible, for the theoretical and practical topics of primary concern to me.

I began reflecting upon this problem many years ago. In *Social Justice and the City*, published in 1973, I argued that it was crucial to reflect on the nature of space if we were to understand urban processes under capitalism. Drawing upon ideas previously culled from a study of the philosophy of science I identified a tripartite division in the way space could be understood:

“If we regard space as absolute it becomes a “thing in itself” with an existence independent of matter. It then possesses a structure which we can use to pigeon-hole or individuate phenomena. The view of relative space proposes that it be understood as a relationship between objects which exists only because objects exist and relate to each other. There is another sense in which space can be viewed as relative and I choose to call this relational space - space regarded in the manner of Leibniz, as being contained in objects in the sense that an object can be said to exist only insofar as it contains and represents within itself relationships to other objects.”

I think this tripartite division is well-worth sustaining not so much as an abstraction but as a mix of means to understand events occurring around us and to formulate ways of thinking and theorizing about geographical phenomena and processes. The arguments I have had with architects and with sociologists and others over the years often boil down, I have found, to arguments predicated on looking at the nature of space in these different ways.

So let me begin with a brief elaboration on what each of these categories might entail. Absolute space is fixed and we record or plan events within its frame. This is the space of Newton and Descartes and it is usually represented as a pre-existing and immoveable grid amenable to standardized measurement and open to calculation. Geometrically it is the space of Euclid and therefore the space of all manner of cadastral mapping and engineering practices. It is a primary space of individuation - *res extensa* as Descartes put it - and this applies to all discrete and bounded phenomena including you and me as individual persons. Socially this is the space of private property and other bounded territorial designations (such as states, administrative units, city plans and urban grids). When Descartes' engineer looked upon the world with a sense of mastery, it was a world of absolute space (and time) from which all uncertainties and ambiguities could in principle be banished and in which human calculation could uninhibitedly flourish.

The relative notion of space is mainly associated with name of Einstein and the non-Euclidean geometries that began to be constructed most systematically in the 19th century. Space is relative in the double sense: that there are multiple geometries from which to choose and that the spatial frame depends crucially upon what it is that is being relativized and by whom. When Gauss first established the rules of a non-Euclidean spherical geometry to deal with the problems of surveying accurately upon the curved surface of the earth, he also affirmed Euler's assertion that a perfectly scaled map of any portion of the earth's surface is impossible (incidentally validating Borges' later fantasy of the perfect map that in order to guarantee perfection has to be exactly the same scale as the territory being mapped). Einstein took the argument further by pointing out that all forms of measurement depended upon the frame of reference of the observer. The idea of simultaneity in the physical universe, he taught us, has to be abandoned. It is impossible to understand space independent of time under this formulation and this mandates an important shift of language from space *and* time to space-time or spatiotemporality. It was, of course, Einstein's achievement to come up with exact means to examine such phenomena as the curvature of space when examining temporal processes operating at the speed of light. But in Einstein's schema time remains fixed while it is space that bends according to certain observable rules (much in the same way as Gauss devised spherical geometry as an accurate means to survey through triangulation on the earth's curved surface).

At the more mundane level of geographical work, we know that the space of transportation relations looks and is very different from the space of private property relationships. The uniqueness of location and individuation defined by bounded territories in absolute space gives way to a multiplicity of locations that are equi-distant from, say, some central city location. We can create completely different maps of relative locations by differentiating between distances measured in terms of cost, time, modal split (car, bicycle or skateboard) and even disrupt spatial continuities by looking at networks, topological relations (the optimal route for the postman delivering mail), and the like. We know, given the differential frictions of distance encountered on the earth's surface, that the shortest distance (measured in terms of time, cost, energy expended) between two points is not necessarily given by the way the legendary crow flies over physical distance. Furthermore the standpoint of the observer plays a critical role. The typical New Yorker's view of the world, as the famous Steinberg cartoon suggests, fades very fast as one thinks about the lands to the west of the Hudson River or east of Long Island.

All of this relativization, it is important to note, does not necessarily reduce or eliminate the capacity for calculability or control, but it does indicate that special rules and laws are required for the particular phenomena and processes under consideration. Difficulties do arise, however, as we seek to integrate understandings from different fields into some more unified endeavor. The spatiotemporality required to accurately capture energy flows through ecological systems, for example, may not be compatible with that of financial flows through global markets. Understanding the spatio-temporal rhythms of capital accumulation requires a quite different framework to that required to understand global climate change.

Such disjunctions, though extremely difficult to work across, are not necessarily a disadvantage provided we recognize them for what they are. Comparisons between different spatio-temporal frameworks can illuminate problems of political choice (do we favor the spatiotemporality of financial flows or that of the ecological processes they typically disrupt, for example).

The relational concept of space is most often associated with the name of Leibniz who, in a famous series of letters to Clarke (effectively a stand-in for Newton) objected vociferously to the absolute view of space and time so central to Newton's theories. The relational view of space holds there is no such thing as space outside of the processes that define it. Processes do not occur *in* space but define their own spatial frame. The concept of space is embedded in or internal to process. This very formulation implies that, as in the case of relative space, it is impossible to disentangle space from time. We must therefore focus on the relationality of space-time rather than of space in isolation. The relational notion of space-time implies the idea of internal relations; external influences get internalized in specific processes or things through time (much as my mind absorbs all manner of external information and stimuli to yield strange patterns of thought including dreams and fantasies as well as attempts at rational calculation). An event or a thing at a point in space cannot be understood by appeal to what exists only at that point. It depends upon everything else going on around it (although in practice usually within only a certain range of influence). A wide variety of disparate influences swirling over space in the past, present and future concentrate and congeal at a certain point to define the nature of that point. Identity, in this argument, means something quite different from the sense we have of it from absolute space. Thus do we arrive at an extended version of Leibniz's concept of the monad.

Measurement becomes more and more problematic the closer we move towards a world of relational space-time. But why would it be presumed that space-time only exists if it is measurable and quantifiable in certain traditional ways? This leads to some interesting reflections on the failure (perhaps better construed as limitations) of positivism and empiricism to evolve adequate understandings of spatio-temporal concepts beyond those that can be measured. In a way, relational conceptions of space-time bring us to the point where mathematics, poetry, and music converge. And that is anathema to those of a positivist or crudely materialist bent. But Leibniz's return to popularity and significance not only as the guru of cyberspace but also as a foundational thinker in relationship to more dialectical approaches to mind-brain issues and quantum theoretical formulations signals some sort of urge to go beyond absolute and relative concepts and their more easily measurable qualities. But the relational terrain is an extremely challenging and difficult terrain upon which to work. There are, however, many thinkers who, over the years, have applied their talents to reflecting upon the possibilities of relational thinking. Deleuze, for one, has made much of these ideas both in his reflections on Leibniz (with reflections on baroque architecture and the mathematics of the fold in Leibniz's work) as well as of Spinoza. Here he is, for example, writing on the latter:

“The important thing is to understand life, each living individuality, not as a form, but as a complex relation between different velocities, between decelerations and accelerations of particles. A composition of speeds and slownesses on a plane of immanence.”

But why would I, as a mundane working geographer, find the relational mode of approaching space-time useful? The answer is quite simply that there are certain topics, such as the political role of collective memories in urban processes, that can only be approached this way. I cannot box political and collective memories in some absolute space (clearly situate them on a grid or a map) nor can I understand their circulation according to the rules, however sophisticated, of relative space-time. If I ask the question: what does Tiananmen Square or “Ground Zero” *mean*, then the only way I can seek an answer is to think in relational terms.

So is space absolute, relative or relational? I simply don’t know whether there is an ontological answer to that question. Even if there were I do not have the intellectual means to make or even evaluate that determination. In my own work I think of it as being all three. This was the conclusion I reached thirty years ago and I have found no particular reason (nor heard any arguments) to make me change my mind. This is what I wrote in 1973:

“space is neither absolute, relative or relational in itself, but it can become one or all simultaneously depending on the circumstances. The problem of the proper conceptualization of space is resolved through human practice with respect to it. In other words, there are no philosophical answers to philosophical questions that arise over the nature of space - the answers lie in human practice. The question “what is space?” is therefore replaced by the question “how is it that different human practices create and make use of different conceptualizations of space?” The property relationship, for example, creates absolute spaces within which monopoly control can operate. The movement of people, goods, services, and information takes place in a relative space because it takes money, time, energy, and the like to overcome the friction of distance. Parcels of land also capture benefits because they contain relationships with other parcels...in the form of rent relational space comes into its own as an important aspect of human social practice.”

Are there rules for deciding when and where one spatial frame is preferable to another? Or is the choice arbitrary, subject to the whims of human practice? The decision to use one or other conception certainly depends on the nature of the phenomena under investigation. The absolute conception may be perfectly adequate for issues of property boundaries and border determinations but it helps me not a whit with the question of what is Tiananmen Square or Ground Zero. I therefore find it helpful - if only as an internal check - to sketch in justifications for the choice of an absolute, relative, or relational frame of reference. Furthermore, I often find myself presuming in my practices that there is some hierarchy at work among

them in the sense that relational space can embrace the relative and the absolute, relative space can embrace the absolute, but absolute space is just absolute and that is that. But I would not confidently advance this view as a working principle let alone try to defend it theoretically. I find it far more interesting in principle to keep the three concepts in dialectical tension with each other and to think the interplay among them. Ground Zero is an absolute space at the same time as it is relative and relational in space-time. When I look at a house, for example, I recognize it as a physical and legal entity that situates it in absolute space. I also recognize its position in relative space given its location with respect to places of employment, recreation, services and the flows of people, electricity, water, and money that sustain it as a living habitat. But then I also understand its relationality to global property markets, changing interest rates, climatic change, the sense of what is or is not a historic building, and its significance as a place of personal and collective memories, sentimental attachments, and the like. What happens to the house over time can only be fully understood, I argue, by working through effects constituted through the three forms of spatio-temporality simultaneously. While this is hard to do in any easy empiricist or positivist sense, the insights that come from such a dialectical approach are as exciting and innovative as they are often stunning.

Let me try to put this all more personally. There are absolute spaces all around us and we cannot evade their significance. I talk within a room and the reach of my words is bounded by the absolute space of the walls that are impervious to sound waves. People who cannot get in cannot hear me and those that did get in are individuated according to the absolute space each occupies at a moment in time. But I am also in a relative space with respect to my audience. I am here and they are there, and I try to communicate across this space but find all manner of differential effects. I talk softly and the back row can't hear and eye-contact is hard with those in the front row so I know my words are being received differentially in relative spacetime. If there is a video-feed to Aberdeen I can be heard there but nowhere in between. But then there is the relational component too. Somebody out there has something else going on in his or her head: he cannot stop thinking of the argument over breakfast, she cannot erase from her mind the awful images of death and destruction on last night's news, something about the way I talk reminds someone else of a traumatic event lost in some distant past. My own words express the internalization of a certain fury about what is going on in the world. I find myself thinking while talking that everything we are doing in this room is stupid and trivial. Why aren't we out there bringing the government down? If the Bolivians can force a President to resign, why can't we? I have to make an effort to extricate myself from that relational space because I wax angrier and angrier. I bring myself back into the absolute and relative spaces of the room and try to address the topic of space as a key word. There is, I mean to show by this example, bound to be a liminality about spatiality itself because we are inexorably situated in all three frameworks simultaneously but not necessarily equally so. We may end up, often without noticing it, favoring one or other definition through our practical actions. In an absolutist mode, I will do one thing; in a relative mode, I'll do another; and if taken with the relational, something else.

What we do as well as what we understand is integrally dependent upon the primary spatio-temporal frame within which we situate ourselves. Consider how this works in relation to that most fraught of socio-political concepts we call “identity.” Everything is clear enough in absolute space and time, but things get a bit more awkward when it comes to relative space-time and downright difficult in a relational world. But it is only in this last frame that we can start to grapple with many aspects of contemporary political consciousness. To begin with there is all of the ambivalence that Du Bois long ago identified in his theory of double consciousness - what it means to be both black and American or a woman and working class. And when we consider the complex ways in which political consciousness forms - of migrants, diasporic groups, tourists and travellers and those that watch the contemporary global media and partially filter or absorb its cacophony of messages - then the primary question we are faced with is understanding how this whole world of experience and information gets internalized within the political subject to support this or that line of action. This relationality has nothing to do with a concept like “hybridity” which, it seems to me, entirely misses the point even as it resurrects in coded terms ideals of purity. But it does help us to move to a different level of understanding even as it reveals something about the shifting terrain upon which new political subjectivities might be formed.

If the contrast between absolute, relative and relational conceptions of space is the only way to unpack the meaning of space as a key word, then matters could safely be left here. Fortunately or unfortunately, there are other and equally cogent ways to analyze the problem. Many geographers in recent years, for example, have pointed to a key difference in the deployment of the concept of space as an essential element in a materialist project of understanding tangible geographies on the ground and the widespread appropriation of spatial metaphors within social and literary theory and cultural studies to disrupt those dominant metanarratives and discursive strategies in which the temporal dimension typically prevails. It is not my intention here to get into any detailed discussion of the significance of the so-called “spatial turn” in social and literary theory and cultural studies. But I think we can shed some illumination on it by considering other foundational distinctions that have long been in play. Cassirer, for example, sets up a tripartite division of modes of human spatial experience, distinguishing between *organic*, *perceptual* and *symbolic* spaces. Under the first he arranges all those forms of spatial experience given biologically (hence materially and registered through the particular characteristics of our sense perceptions). Perceptual space refers to the ways we process sense perceptions neurologically and register them in the world of thought. Symbolic space is abstract (and may entail the development of an abstract symbolic language like geometry or the construction of architectural or pictorial forms). Symbolic space generates distinctive meanings through readings and interpretations. The question of aesthetic practices here comes to the fore. In this domain, Langer, for her part, distinguishes between “real” and “virtual space.” The latter, in her view, amounts to a “created space built out of forms, colours, and so on” so as to produce the intangible images and illusions that constitute the heart of all aesthetic practices. Architecture, she argues, “is a plastic art, and its first achievement is always, unconsciously and inevitably, an illusion: something purely imaginary

or conceptual translated into visual impression.” What exists in the real space can be described easily enough but in order to understand the affect that comes with exposure to the work of art we have to explore the very different world of virtual space. And this, she holds, always projects us into a distinctively ethnic domain.

It is out of this tradition of spatialized thought that Lefebvre (almost certainly drawing upon Cassirer) constructs his own distinctive tripartite division of material space (the space of experience and of perception open to physical touch and sensation); the representation of space (space as conceived and represented); and spaces of representation (the lived space of sensations, the imagination, emotions, and meanings incorporated into our everyday lives and practices).

If I focus on Lefebvre here it is not because, as so many now suppose in the sphere of cultural studies, that Lefebvre provides the originary moment from which all thinking about the production of space derives (such a thesis is manifestly absurd), but because I find it most convenient to work with Lefebvre’s distinctions in my own geographical practices. Material space is, for us humans, quite simply the world of tactile and sensual interaction with matter, it is the space of experience. We can reasonably assume that the elements, moments and events in that world are constituted out of a materiality of stable and finite qualities. How we represent this world is an entirely different matter, but here too we do not conceive of or represent space in arbitrary ways, but seek some appropriate if not accurate reflection of the material realities that surround us through abstract representations (words, graphs, maps, diagrams, pictures, etc.). But Lefebvre, like Benjamin, insists that we do not live as material atoms floating around in a materialist world; we also have imaginations, fears, emotions, psychologies, fantasies and dreams. These spaces of representation are part and parcel of the way we live in the world. We may also seek to represent the way this space is lived through emotions and the imagination. The spatiotemporality of a dream, a fantasy, a hidden longing, a lost memory or even a peculiar thrill as we walk down a street can be given representation through works of art.

It is tempting, as with the first tripartite division of spatial terms we considered, to treat of Lefebvre’s three categories as hierarchically ordered, but here too it seems most appropriate to keep the three categories in dialectical tension. The physical and material experience of spatial and temporal ordering is mediated to some degree by the way space and time are represented. The oceanographer/physicist swimming among the waves may experience them differently from the poet enamored of Walt Whitman or the pianist who loves Debussy. Reading a book about Patagonia will likely affect how we experience that place when we travel there even if we experience considerable cognitive dissonance between expectations generated by the written word and how it actually feels upon the ground. The spaces and times of representation that envelop and surround us as we go about our daily lives likewise affect both our direct experiences and the way we interpret and understand representations. We may not even notice the material qualities of spatial

orderings incorporated into daily life through deep familiarities and unexamined routines. Yet it is through those daily material routines that we absorb a certain sense of how spatial representations work and build up certain spaces of representation for ourselves. We only notice when something appears radically out of place. It is, I want to suggest, the dialectical relation between the categories that really counts, even though it is useful for purposes of understanding to crystallize them out as distinctive moments to the experience of space and time and, hence, to understanding the different ways “space” might be used as a key word.

This mode of thinking about space helps me interpret works of art and architecture. A picture, like Munch’s *The Scream* is a material object but it works from the standpoint of lived space, a psychic state, and attempts through a particular set of representational codes to take on a physical form that says something to us about that lived space. Many contemporary artists, making use of multimedia and kinetic techniques, create experiential spaces in which several modes of experiencing space-time combine. Here, for example, is how Judith Barry’s contribution to the 3rd Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art is described in the catalogue:

“In her experimental works, video artist Judith Barry investigates the use, construction and complex interaction of private and public spaces, media, society, and genders. The themes of her installations and theoretical writings position themselves in a field of observation that addresses historical memory, mass communication, and perception. In a realm between the viewer’s imagination and media-generated architecture, she creates imaginary spaces, alienated depictions of profane reality.....In the work *Voice Off*.....the viewer penetrates the claustrophobic crampedness of the exhibition space, goes deeper into the work, and, forced to move through the installation, experiences not only cinematic but also cinemaesthetic impressions. The divided projection space offers the possibility of making contact with different voices. The use and hearing of voices as a driving force, and the intensity of the psychic tension - especially on the male side of the projection, - conveys the inherent strength of this intangible and ephemeral object. The voices demonstrate for spectators how one can change through them, how one tries to take control of them and the loss one feels when they are no longer heard.”

Barry, the catalogue concludes, “stages aesthetic spaces of transit that leave the ambivalence between seduction and reflection unresolved.”

But to grapple with arguments of this kind, we need to take the examination of space and space-time to an even deeper level of complexity. I propose, therefore, a speculative leap in which we place the threefold division of absolute, relative and relational space-time up against the tripartite division of experienced, conceptualized and lived space identified by Lefebvre. The result is a three-by-three matrix within which

points of intersection suggest different modalities of understanding the meanings of space (and time). Of course, it will properly be objected, I am here confining possibilities because a matrix mode of representation is confined to absolute space. And insofar as I am here engaging in a representational practice (conceptualization) I cannot do justice to either the experienced or the lived realms of spatiality by appeal to a formal structure of this kind. By definition, therefore, the matrix I set up is limited and limiting if not defective in terms of its revelatory possibilities. But with all that conceded, I find it both helpful to contemplate the combinations that arise at different intersection points within the matrix. I illustrate the sort of thing I have in mind (in a somewhat condensed and schematic form) in Figure 1. The entries within the matrix are meant to be suggestive rather than definitive.

I do not propose here to attempt any definitive survey of what emerges from the nine different intersecting moments within this formal framework. Others may find it amusing if not interesting to consider how the intersections work in relation to matters of interest to them. Nor will I attempt to explore what happens when the dialectical relations operative within each of the three axes are put into motion. But it should be obvious, just to emphasize this latter point, that the visions, dreams, fantasies and psychic states (such as agoraphobia) identified in the lower right corner are by no means independent of the existence of the walls, bridges, doors, etc. set out in the upper left corner of the matrix. Indeed the psychic state of agoraphobia was classically described as a mental relational encounter with physical material phenomena of a certain sort. Even if that classical account has now been abandoned, the issue remains of how to link material phenomena to emotional and psychic states.

It is often helpful to read across or down the matrix of categories and to imagine scenarios of combination. Imagine, for example, the absolute space of a very affluent securely gated community on the New Jersey Shoreline. Many of the inhabitants move on a daily basis across relative space into the financial district of Manhattan where they set in motion movements of credit and investment moneys that have a mix of positive and devastating effects upon social life across the globe, earning thereby the immense money power that permits them to import back into the absolute space of their gated community all of the energy, exotic foods and wondrous commodities they need to secure their privileged lifestyle. The inhabitants support a government that in turn supports this manner of life, but feel vaguely threatened because they sense that there is a visceral, undefinable and unlocatable hatred for all things American arising in the world around them. They become more and more paranoid about the hostile forces that seem to surround them and more deeply attached to their absolute space, even hire guards to protect its borders. Meanwhile, their profligate consumption of energy, while it only makes a small marginal contribution to the problem, proves the straw that breaks the back of global climate change and atmospheric patterns of circulation shift dramatically. Then, in the compelling but rather inaccurate popularized depiction of chaos theory, a butterfly flaps its wings in Hong Kong and a devastating hurricane hits the New Jersey Shore and wipes out the gated community. Many residents die because they felt so secure where they were and so fearful of the

outside that they ignored the warnings to evacuate. If this were a Hollywood production, of course, a lone scientist would recognize the danger and rescue the woman he adores but who has hitherto ignored him.....

The point of this example is to illustrate how even in the material world it is hard to remain confined to just one modality of spatial thinking and capture all of the complexity of material processes. But in this case, the idea of lived space also had to be invoked. Even more interesting, therefore, is the situation in which all nine intersecting points in the matrix are kept in dialectical tension. Let me illustrate this by way of a couple of examples.

Consider, as a first case, a prose poem written by Baudelaire entitled "The Eyes of the Poor." I select it because it is one of those great literary vignettes of urban life. I want to explore it for what it tells me about the urban experience more generally. The poet begins by asking his lover if she wants to know "why I hate you today?" He says it will be harder for her to understand than for him to explain because she is "the most perfect example of feminine impermeability that exists." They had spent a long and evidently beautiful day together wandering the city and they had agreed to try and share their thoughts and feelings as if they were one, a dreamed of union of two people that, the poet observes, has never actually been realized:

"That evening, a little tired, you wanted to sit down in front of a new café forming the corner of a new boulevard still littered with rubbish but that already displayed proudly its unfinished splendors. The café was dazzling. Even the gas burned with all the ardor of a debut, and lighted with all its might the blinding whiteness of the wall, the expanse of mirrors, the gold cornices and moldings...nymphs and goddesses bearing on their heads piles of fruits, pates, and game...all history and all mythology pandering to gluttony.

On the street directly in front of us, a worthy man of about forty, with tired face and greying beard, was standing holding a small boy by the hand and carrying on his arm another little thing still too weak to walk. He was playing nurse-maid, taking the children for an evening stroll. They were in rags. The three faces were extraordinarily serious, and those six eyes stared fixedly at the new café with admiration, equal in degree but differing in kind according to their ages.

The eyes of the father said: 'How beautiful it is! How beautiful it is! All the gold of the poor world must have found its way onto those walls.' The eyes of the little boy: 'How beautiful it is! How beautiful it is! But it is a house where only people who are not like us can go.' As for the baby, he was much too fascinated to express anything but joy....

Song writers say that pleasure ennoble the soul and softens the heart. The song was right that evening as far as I was concerned. Not only was I touched by this family of eyes, but I was even a little ashamed of our glasses and decanters, too big for our thirst. I turned my eyes to look into yours, dear love, to read *my* thoughts in them; and as I plunged my eyes into your eyes, so beautiful and curiously soft, into those green eyes, home of Caprice and governed by the Moon,

you said: 'Those people are insufferable with their great saucer eyes. Can't you tell the proprietor to send them away?'

So you see how difficult it is to understand one another, my dear angel, how incommunicable thought is, even between two people in love."

This prose poem is, of course, a representation. But it evokes absolute material spaces such as the boulevard and the café, while the reference to the "impermeability" of the poet's lover takes up the condition of individuation in absolute space and time that defines the gap between self and other that the lovers dream of overcoming while strolling the spaces of the city. The aura and image of the city, not just any city, but of Paris, hovers over the prose poem as an indefinable presence. The boundary in absolute space between the boulevard and the café is physically porous. The lovers sit in a liminal space "in front" of the café but not entirely on the boulevard either. The splendors of the boulevard refract back into the café at the same time as the brilliance of the café adds to the splendor of the boulevard. The relationality between the public and private (albeit commercial) spaces is powerfully suggested. The gilded brilliance of the café, with its historical referent - "all history and mythology pandering to gluttony" - combine with the splendors of the boulevard to create a unified space of spectacle. Behind the building of the new boulevard lies the power of capital and of the state to open up the urban space to flows of commodities and of people as well as to the spectacle of conspicuous consumption.

But the entry of the poor disrupts this easy synthesis between the public and private spaces. The poor cannot cross that porous boundary between the public and the private because of the relativity of their social position. The café is not for people like them. But seeing and being seen is unavoidable. What kind of social relation does this signal? The poet feels somewhat ashamed at the signs of affluence, splendor and superfluity that surround him. The anxiety provoked in his lover is palpable. Someone should take ownership of the public space, she says: close it down, get those people out of there. The city should have a clear spatial pattern and a moral order and in this space the poor do not belong. The contrast with the other Paris of poverty and marginalization is discomfiting. But in what space do the poor belong? Questions of control of spatiality, surveillance and exclusion, are evoked. Was it not in part military control that Haussmann had in mind in building the new boulevards anyway? Was it not on the boulevards that the utopian hopes for a social republic that would nurture the poor had been mercilessly shot down in 1848 and again in 1851? Doesn't the sudden appearance of this family in rags at this moment in space and time conjure up memories of that violent confrontation? Someone, the poet's lover insists, must protect the integrity of the spatial pattern and its associated moral order. The poet, however, has a different image of the city. It is a romantic place in which to stroll and feel at one with a lover. It is also a space of encounter and surprises, of openings to difference. The poet is entranced - "the song was right" - but she turns away.

Two images of what the city is and what it might be are evocatively contrasted. Such different images continue to beset us. Think of New York in the 1990s when rampant conspicuous consumption bore all before it at the high point of the dot.com and financial services boom, and not a few eating establishments “pandered to gluttony” with their glittering décor: this was also the time when Giuliani made a speciality of sending “those people” away. The universality of it all should hardly be a surprise. Baudelaire, after all, was the one who most strongly urged the modern artist to seek eternal and the universal truths within the fragmentary and ephemeral experiences of daily life.

Who, then, has a right to be in a space that is nominally designated as public and what does this have to do with how politics is conducted in the public sphere? What Lefebvre calls “the right to the city” has been and continues to be a persistent issue. How is that right claimed and expressed? What happens when we construe that right not only as a right of access for all to what already exists but as a right to change and transform the spaces of the city into a different kind of living environment compatible with quite different social relations by attacking both its material forms as well as dominant discourses of representation? And can we ever evade the complex relations between absolute space (the city), the processes of urbanization in relative space that build, sustain and, on occasion, dissolve it, and its its material, discursive and lived relationality in space-time?

These sorts of questions erupt strongly in my second example. How should the site known as “Ground Zero” in lower Manhattan be rebuilt? What spatial principles should be deployed in designing the site? Obviously (and most easily) it is an absolute space that can be materially constructed and to this end engineering calculations and architectural designs must be made as well as aesthetic judgements on how the space, once turned into a material artefact of some sort, might be lived as well as conceptualized and experienced. In this version the problem is to so arrange the physical space as to produce an emotive effect while matching certain expectations (commercial as well as emotive) as to how the space ought to be lived. This relation may be mediated by representational forms (such as guide books and plans) that try to explain, as explicitly as possible, the intentionality and the history behind the physical structures.

But moving dialectically across the dimension of absolute space alone is far less interesting and much less rewarding than the insights that come from appealing to the other spatio-temporal dimensionalities within the matrix of possibilities. Capitalistic responses to what might happen at Ground Zero typically focus on the relative location of the site and the prospects for commercial development, given its centrality and proximity to the command and control functions of Wall Street. The temporal horizon would in this case almost certainly be dominated by considerations of the amortization rate and the interest/discount rate applying to fixed capital investments. The centrality of the financial complex known as Wall Street would tend to dominate all else. While capitalist interests might also wish to combine these concerns with symbolic statements (that emphasize the power and indestructibility of the political-economic system that

received such a body blow on 9/11) the spatio-temporal logics prevailing within the circulation of capital and flows of people impose strong limitations on what can be done with the site.

But I suspect the popular response to thinking and building in such absolute or even relative spatial terms alone would not be positive. Whatever is built at this site has to internalize at the very minimum a relational spatio-temporality of history and memory. There would almost certainly be an expectation that the site would convey a sense of future possibilities (perhaps even a prospect of eternal truths) and seek to communicate a message to future generations well beyond the time-horizon defined by the discount rate. Nor could the site ignore the issue of relational spatial connectivity to the rest of the world. What will we know about those who attacked and how far will we connect? Some accounting must be made of the forces that converged over space to produce the event known as 9/11. Can something experienced as a local and personal tragedy be reconciled with an understanding of the international forces that were so powerfully condensed within those few shattering moments in a particular place? Will we get to feel in that space the widespread resentment in the rest of the world towards the way US hegemony was so selfishly being exercised throughout during the 1980s and 1990s? Will we get to know that the Reagan administration played a key role in creating and supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan in order to undermine the Soviet occupation and that Osama bin-Laden turned from being an ally of the US into an enemy because of its support for the corrupt regime in Saudi Arabia? Or will we only learn of cowardly, alien and evil “others” out there who hated the US and sought to destroy it because of all it stood for in terms of the values of liberty and freedom?

If, as Benjamin has it, history (a relative temporal concept) is not the same as memory (a relational temporal concept) then we have a choice of whether to historicize the events of 9/11 at the site or to seek to memorialize them. If the site is merely historicized in relative space (by a certain sort of monumentality) then this imposes a fixed narrative on the space. The effect will be to foreclose on future possibilities and interpretations and through that closure constrict the generative power with which to build a different future. Memory, on the other hand, is, according to Benjamin, a potentiality that can at times “flash up” uncontrollably to reveal new possibilities. The way the site might be lived by those who encounter it then becomes unpredictable and uncertain. Collective memory, a diffuse but nevertheless powerful sense that pervades many an urban scene, can play a significant role in animating political and social movements. Ground Zero cannot be anything other than a site of collective memory and the problem for the designers is to translate that diffuse sensibility into the absolute spaces of bricks, mortar, steel and glass upon the ground. And if, as Balzac once put it, “hope is a memory that desires” then the creation of a “space of hope” on that spot requires that memory be internalized there at the same time as a space is left open for the expression of desire.

The site is and will be a presence in the world no matter what is built there and it will surely be important to reflect on how this presencing will work: will it be lived as a symbol of US arrogance or as a sign of compassion and understanding? The relational spatio-temporality of the event and the site can be exhumed with enough dedicated digging. But the manner of its representation and of its materialization is uncertain. The outcome will clearly depend upon political struggle. And the fiercest battles will have to be fought over what relational space-time the rebuilding will invoke.

This brings me to some final observations on the politics of the argument. Thinking through the different ways in which space and space-time get used as a key word helps define certain conditions of possibility for critical engagement and for class struggle. It also opens up ways to identify conflicting claims and alternative political possibilities. It invites us to consider the ways we physically shape our environment and the ways in which we both represent and get to live it. I think it fair to say that the Marxist tradition has not been deeply engaged upon such issues and that this general failure has more often than not meant a loss of possibilities for certain kinds of transformative politics. I recognize, of course, that there is a subterranean history of one sort of another in which theorists, thinkers and practitioners have raised cognate issues and that occasionally (as with Lenin's critique of Mach, the debate over socialist realist art and aesthetics) the issue has come to the fore. It would undoubtedly be of interest to scrutinize the question of the place of concepts of space and time and of spacetime in the marxian philosophical tradition more generally. But, as I stated at the outset, my aim here has not been to seek some synthetic account of this problem but simply to outline how my own particular views have evolved in relation to the political implications of the geographical and anthropological issues that generally preoccupy me.

There is, however, one final political and strategic point I would want to make. There has been, unfortunately, a great deal of play with spatial concepts within that movement loosely called "postmodernism" and some of that play has been directed towards discrediting or discounting Marxian theory *tout court*. The danger is that Marxists will in return reject any serious debate on the question of the proper conceptions of space and time and hunker down behind a particularly rigid set of definitions as the only proper "materialist" base for "true" Marxian science. Against this I would point out that even the most die-hard of postmodernists on occasion embrace the works of writers such as Benjamin and Lefebvre who, in very different ways, have complicated the ways in which space and space-time get understood from within the Marxian frame. I think it no accident either, that those who have been most concerned to integrate what are loosely referred to as "cultural" (and, it goes without saying, "geographical") questions into Marxian political economy (and I would count myself within that group) have frequently found it necessary to embrace a greater diversity of concepts of space-time than is usually the case. My sense is that many practicing artists (like Judith Barry) and cultural producers, sympathetic to the Marxist and radical traditions, can only freely practice their art by appeal to the kind of dialectics of spatio-temporality I have here (however crudely) outlined. There are, therefore, some rich rewards to be had from a more open

debate on space and time as fundamental concepts within Marxian theory. The traction and terrain upon which that theory works can be further broadened and deepened to confront many of the contemporary difficulties we face. I therefore think it high time that those who cleave both theoretically, practically and politically to the Marxian tradition reflect very seriously on their use of “space” as a key word.