

Extract for study

Co-revolution across seven domains of co-evolution

David Harvey (2011), *The enigma of capital and the crises of capitalism*, London: Profile Books, 228-235 (Chapter 8: What is to be done? And who is going to do it?).

Editor's note: All headings, bold highlights and bulleted lists have been added by this editor for easier reference.

Let's take another look at the theory of co-evolution laid out in chapter 5. Can this form the basis for a co-revolutionary theory? A political movement can start anywhere:

- in **labour processes**,
- around **mental conceptions**,
- in the relation to **nature**,
- in **social relations**,
- in the design of revolutionary **technologies and organisational forms**,
- out of **daily life** or
- through attempts to reform **institutional and administrative structures** including the reconfiguration of **state** powers.

The trick is to keep the political movement moving **from one sphere of activity to another** in usually reinforcing ways. This was how capitalism arose out of feudalism and this is how something radically different - call it communism, socialism or whatever - must arise out of capitalism. Previous attempts to create a communist or socialist alternative fatally failed to keep the dialectic between the different activity spheres in motion and also failed to embrace the unpredictabilities and uncertainties in the dialectical movement between the spheres. Capitalism has survived precisely by keeping that dialectical movement going and by embracing the inevitable tensions, including crises, that result.

Imagine, then, some territory within which a population wakes up to the probability that endless capital accumulation is neither possible nor desirable and that it therefore collectively believes another world not only is but must be possible. How should that collectivity begin upon its quest to construct alternatives? **Change arises out of an existing state of affairs** and it has to harness the possibilities immanent within an existing situation. Since the existing situation varies enormously from Nepal, to the Pacific regions of Bolivia, to the deindustrialising cities of Michigan and the still booming cities of Mumbai and Shanghai and the damaged but by no means destroyed financial centres of New York and London, so **all manner of experiments** in social change in different places and at different geographical scales are both likely and potentially illuminating as ways to make (or not make) another world possible. And in each instance it may seem as if one or other aspect of the existing situation

CRISIS — in actual places Rippling across institutional spheres + in geography

- Concerned with the material distribution of activity in geographical space - uneven development.
- This is a picture of the forces of production - a fabric of many threads, which are . .
 - material practices in actual locations, interwoven
 - simultaneously, cultural practices, drawing on and constituting knowledges
 - all arising in and animating the 'moral economy'.

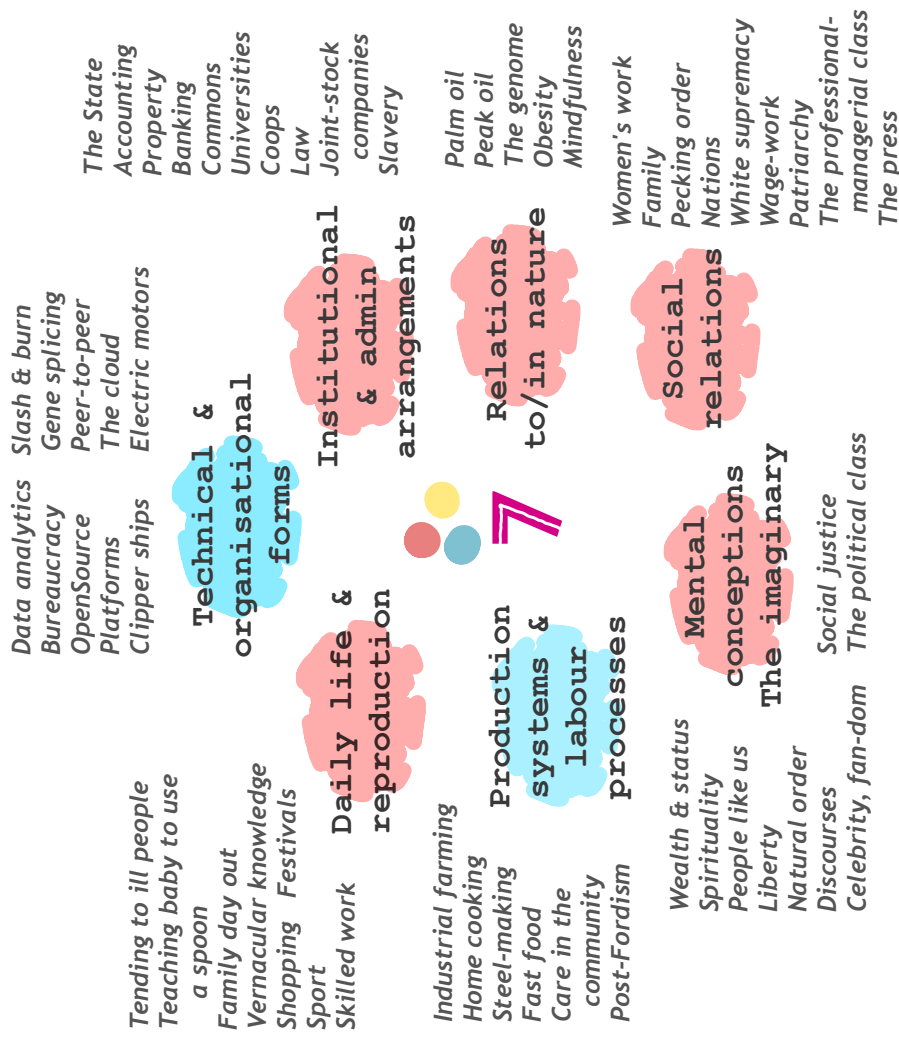
The seven spheres run in & across locations.

- In tech paradigms, five of these are secondary. For Harvey any may have primacy in any given location in society or economy.

This is the located view, from 'here', from inside.

David Harvey (2011), The enigma of capital and the crises of capitalism

Seven "spheres of activity"



holds the key to a different political future. But the first rule for an anti-capitalist movement is: **never rely on the unfolding dynamics of one moment** without carefully calibrating how relations with all the others are adapting and reverberating.

Feasible future possibilities arise out of **the existing state of relations between the different spheres**. Strategic political interventions within and across the spheres can gradually move the social order on to a different developmental path. This is what wise leaders and forward-looking institutions do all the time in local situations, so there is no reason to think there is anything particularly fantastic or utopian about acting in this way. It must first be clearly recognised, however, that **development is not the same as growth**. It is possible to develop differently on the terrains, for example, of social relations, daily life and the relation to nature, without necessarily resuming growth or favouring capital. It is false to maintain that growth is a precondition for poverty and inequality reduction or that more respectful environmental policies are, like organic foods, a luxury for the rich.

Secondly, transformations within each sphere will require a deep understanding of both the internal dynamics of, for example, institutional arrangements and technological change in relation to all the other spheres of action. Alliances will have to be built **between and across those working in the distinctive spheres**. This means that an anti-capitalist movement has to be far broader than groups mobilising around social relations or over questions of daily life in themselves. Traditional hostilities between, for example, those with technical scientific and administrative expertise and those animating social movements on the ground have to be addressed and overcome. Third, it will also be necessary to confront the impacts and feedbacks (including political hostilities) coming from **other spaces in the global economy**. Different places may develop in different ways given their history, culture, location and political-economic condition. Some developments elsewhere can be supportive or complementary, while others might be deleterious or even antagonistic. Some inter-territorial competition is inevitable but not all bad. It depends on what the competition is about - indices of economic growth or the liveability of daily life? Berlin, for example, is a very liveable city but all the usual capitalist-inspired indices of economic success depict it as a backward place. Land values and property prices are lamentably low which means that people of little means can easily find not bad places in which to live. Developers are miserable. If only New York or London were more like Berlin in that regard!

There have to be, finally, some loosely agreed upon **common objectives**. Some general guiding norms can be set down. These might include

- respect for **nature**,
- radical egalitarianism in **social relations**,
- institutional arrangements based in some sense of **common interests**,
- **democratic administrative procedures** (as opposed to the monetised shams that now exist),
- labour processes **organised by the direct producers**,

- daily life as the free exploration of new kinds of social relations and **living arrangements**,
- mental conceptions that focus on **self-realisation in service to others** and
- **technological and organisational innovations** oriented to the pursuit of the common good rather than to supporting militarised power and corporate greed.

These could be the co-revolutionary points around which social action could converge and rotate. Of course this is utopian! But so what! We cannot afford not to be.

For example, achieving radical egalitarianism . . .

Suppose the preferred form of social relations is that of radical egalitarianism, between both individuals and self-defined social groups. The case for this presumption arises out of centuries of political struggle in which the principle of equality has animated political action and revolutionary movements, from the Bastille to Tiananmen Square. Radical egalitarianism also grounds an immense literature and the idea seems to transcend many geographical and cultural differences. In the United States, polls show a deep attachment to the principle of equality as the proper foundation for political life and as the bedrock for organising social relations between both individuals and social groups. The extension of civil and political rights to former slaves, to women, to gays, to the handicapped, may have taken 200 years, but the claim for progress on these fronts is undeniable, as is the continuing quest for equality not only between individuals but also between social groups. Conversely, the way in which contempt for elites in the US is politically mobilised (and often perverted) derives from this egalitarianism.

'Groups' and class

While the principle of radical egalitarianism may appear unassailable in itself, problems arise out of the way in which it gets **articulated with other spheres of action**. The definition of social groups is always contested, for example. While multiculturalism can accommodate the ideal of equality between most self-identified social groups, the one persistent divide that creates the greatest difficulty is that of class. This is so because class is the foundational inequality necessary to the reproduction of capitalism. So the answer of existing political power is either to deny that class exists, or to say that the category is so confusing and complicated (as if the other categories like race and gender are not) as to be analytically useless. In this way, the question of class gets evaded, denied or ignored, whether it be so in hegemonic intellectual constructions of the world (in, say, the field of economics) or in practical politics. Class consciousness, unlike political subjectivities given by race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual preference, age, consumer choices and social preferences, is the least discussed and the most actively denied except as some quaint residual from former political times and places (like 'old' Europe).

Clearly, class identities, like racial identities, are multiple and overlapping. I work as a labourer but have a pension fund that invests in the stock market and I own a house that I am improving with sweat equity which I intend to sell for speculative gain. Does this make the concept of class incoherent? Class is a role not a label that attaches to persons. We play multiple roles all the time. But **we do not say because most of us play the roles of both car drivers and pedestrians that it is impossible to plan a decent city around an analysis of relations between drivers and pedestrians.** The role of the capitalist is to use money to command the labour or the assets of others and to use that command to make a profit, to accumulate capital and thereby augment personal command over wealth and power. The relation between the roles of capital and labour need to be confronted and regulated even within capitalism. A revolutionary agenda entails rendering the relation truly redundant as opposed to hidden and opaque. **Designing a society without capital accumulation is no different in principle to designing a city without cars.** Why can't we all just work alongside each other without any class distinction?

Institutional arrangements - private property and the market

The way radical egalitarianism articulates with other spheres in the co-evolutionary process therefore complicates matters at the same time as it illuminates how capitalism works. When the individual liberty and freedom it promises is mediated through **the institutional arrangements of private property and the market**, as it is in both liberal theory and practice, then huge inequalities result. As Marx long ago pointed out, the liberal theory of individual rights that originated with John Locke, writing in the seventeenth century, underpins surging inequalities between an emergent class of owners and another class made up of those who have to sell their labour power in order to live. In the neoliberal theory of the Austrian philosopher/economist Friedrich Hayek, writing in the 1940s, this connectivity is tightly coupled: the only way, he argues, to protect radical egalitarianism and individual rights in the face of state violence (that is, fascism and communism) is to install inviolable private property rights at the heart of the social order. This deeply entrenched view has to be challenged head on if capital accumulation and the reproduction of class power are to be effectively challenged. In the field of institutional arrangements, therefore, a wholly new conception of property - of **common rather than private property rights** - will be required to make radical egalitarianism work in a radically egalitarian way. The struggle over institutional arrangements, then, has to move to the centre of political concerns.

Within the labour process - autogestion, self-management, autonomistas

This is so because the radical egalitarianism to which capitalism subscribes in the market place breaks down when we move inside of what Marx called 'the hidden abode' of production. It disappears on the building sites, down the mines, in the fields and in the factories, offices and retail stores. The *autonomista* movement is quite correct to insist, therefore, that the achievement of radical egalitarianism **within the labour process** is of paramount importance to the construction of any

anti-capitalist alternative. Schemes of *autogestion* and worker self-management here fit the bill, particularly when interwoven with the other spheres in democratic ways. The same applies when we try to connect principles of radical egalitarianism to the conduct of daily life. When mediated through private property and market arrangements, radical egalitarianism produces homelessness for the poor and gated communities of MacMansions for the rich. That, surely, is not what radical egalitarianism in daily life should mean.

A critique of labour processes and of everyday life shows how the noble principle of radical egalitarianism is impoverished and debased under capitalism by the **institutional arrangements** with which it is articulated. This finding should not be surprising. Private property and a state dedicated to preserving and protecting that institutional form are crucial pillars to the sustenance of capitalism, even as capitalism depends upon a radical entrepreneurial egalitarianism to survive. The UN Declaration of Human Rights does not protect against unequal outcomes, turning the distinction between civil and political rights on the one hand and economic rights on the other into a minefield of contested claims. 'Between equal rights,' Karl Marx once famously wrote, 'force decides'. Like it or not, class struggle becomes central to the politics of radical egalitarianism.

Ways must be found to cut the link between radical egalitarianism and private property. Bridges must be built with institutions based, say, in the development of common property rights and democratic governance. The emphasis must shift from radical egalitarianism to the institutional sphere. One of the aims of the right to the city movement, to take one example, is to create a new urban commons to displace the excessive privatisations and exclusions (associated as much with state ownership as with private property) that put much of the city off limits to most of the people most of the time.

Nature

In like fashion, the connectivity between radical egalitarianism and **the organisation of production and the functioning of labour processes** has to be rethought along the lines advocated by workers' collectives, autonomista organisations, cooperatives and various other collective forms of social provisioning. The struggle for radical egalitarianism also requires a reconceptualisation of **the relation to nature**, such that nature is no longer viewed as 'one vast gasoline station', as the German philosopher Martin Heidegger complained in the 1950s, but as a teeming source of life forms to be preserved, nourished, respected and intrinsically valued. Our relation to nature should not be guided by rendering it a commodity like any other, by futures markets on raw materials, minerals, water, pollution credits and the like, nor by the maximisation of rental appropriations and land and resource values, but by the recognition that nature is the one great common to which we all have an equal right but for which we all also bear an immense equal responsibility.

What now seems pie in the sky can, however, take on an entirely different meaning once our mental conceptions and our institutional and administrative arrangements are opened up to transformative political possibilities. So can shifts in mental conceptions change the world?