



From Ecological Ontology to Social Ecology: John Dewey, Radhakamal Mukerjee, and Interscalar Ethics

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ETHICS, POWER, AND PATHOLOGIES OF SCALE

Dangerous evils of our time are linked with pathologies of scale. Global markets in labor and capital overwhelm democratic controls at local and national scales. Injustice is ever more deeply spatialized. To understand these pathologies of scale, this chapter enquires into the ontology of the interscalar. We argue for an ecological understanding of human and natural being, in which diverse spatio-temporal scales intertwine to generate a transformative fabric of interscalar co-being. To do this, we put the Indian sociologist Radhakamal Mukerjee into dialogue with the American philosopher John Dewey. Both thinkers made original contributions which can help build a transformative ontology of the interscalar for the twenty-first century. We call for theoretical genealogies to re-embodiment and replace social theory in our actual lives—lives embedded in, and emergent from, ecological being that is complex, historical, paradoxical, and dynamic in its scaling.

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Dangerous evils of our time are linked with pathologies of *scale*. On the surface, this has to do with the expansion and mobility of vast forces on a global scale. Runaway human production of greenhouse gases is a global threat to the ecosystemic fundamentals of food production, biodiversity, human security, and democratic change—with concatenating, multi-scalar effects which far exceed our scientific, cultural, and moral imagination. Global markets in labor and capital overwhelm democratic controls on local and national scales. Injustice is ever more deeply spatialized. Some regions and neighborhoods become sacrifice zones where toxins and externalities are dumped, and where people suffer erratic and disabling waves of overwork or no work. Meanwhile, everywhere in the world, new and old elites are increasingly able to seize new global resources to stake meritocratic and/or cronyistic claims to global labor and investment markets. But emerging and established elites usually ride paradoxical geographies. On the one hand, they can cultivate a mobile cosmopolitanism geared to global competitiveness and consumption. On the other, global power and wealth of all sorts increasingly rests on violently privileged enclaves—as elites barricade themselves and their families in high-status places, shopping malls and schools that groom bodies and minds for global mobility and consumerist status regimes, while ignoring the plight of immobilized, immiserated others and growing inequalities.

In this chapter, we argue that these pathologies of scale require careful theoretical inquiry into the *ontology of the interscalar*. We argue for an ecological understanding of human and natural beings, in which diverse spatio-temporal scales intertwine to generate a transformative fabric of interscalar co-being. To do this we retrieve some neglected genealogies and debates of social theory. Specifically, we put the Indian sociologist Radhakamal Mukerjee into dialogue with the American philosopher John Dewey. Both thinkers made original contributions which can help build a transformative ontology of the interscalar for the twenty-first century. In our book *Recovering the Commons: Democracy, Place, and Global Justice*, we argue that much of social theory has made a wrong turn in the last several decades, too often tending to reinforce rather than engage the globalizing knowledge regimes and global elitism of transnational corporate states (Reid and Taylor 2010). We call for different theoretical genealogies to help us reembody and replace social theory in our actual lives—lives embedded in, and emergent from, ecological being that is complex, historical, paradoxical, and dynamic in its scaling.

Before we can engage these two thinkers, we will briefly set the stage by asking three questions. First, what are the pathologies of scale in the

twenty-first century? Second, in what ways is social theory complicit in these pathologies, rendering it unable to contribute to democratic agency projects that are trying to institute alternatives? Third, what social theoretic notions can help us understand a just, sustainable, and prosperous rescaling of our economies, politics, and societies? Of particular urgency is the challenge to understand how people move away from reactionary, defensive “pseudo-populisms” to become participants in a new translocal and transnational politics of just transitions.

EMERGING PATHOLOGIES OF SCALE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

At first glance, our collective problem seems to be that global forces have slipped out of the control of democratic forces at other levels. If this is so, then the solution is to equalize and realign the powers of local, regional, national, and global forces. In this understanding of the interscalar, the different levels are rather like boxes, or vertebrae, in which stability comes from the vertical alignment of discrete and relatively equalized entities.

But let us look at a recent article by Swapna Banerjee-Guha titled “Contradictions of ‘development’ in contemporary India” (Banerjee-Guha 2011). She argues that there are interconnections between several different geographies of oppression built into the models of development that enthrall current government planning in India. She sees similar patterns in: the top-down seizing of tribal lands so they can be leased to global mining corporations; the creation of Special Economic Zones which enclose biodiverse rich coastal areas to allow global chemical production centers; the seizure of commons and multi-use land for specialized hi-tech corporate activities under almost total control by transnational corporations. She says that a “typical neoliberal construction of space, place and scale is taking place in India that is reconstructing a new geography of centrality and marginality.” An image of development is being projected onto special areas which are conjured as glamorous openings onto smooth, vast, and wealthy circuits of global production, capital flows, and consumerist prestige symbols. On the surface, such a neo-liberalized utopia seems to be a seamless and lavish space which reaches strongly into the future. But, underneath this apparent expansiveness, these new economic spaces create a geography of exclusion and constriction. In reality, Banerjee-Guha says, this is “enclave development, once a mainstay of the colonial state” (see also Ferguson on enclave development, Ferguson 2006). Despite the claims to represent the big, the stable, and the new,

these are spaces which insert themselves precariously and violently into the thick matrix of existing economies—by displacement, pollution, and dispossession of many and jobs for few. The negative effects of this neo-liberal development model are starkly evident in post-1970s USA, which is still facing escalating inequality, chronic structural unemployment, decay of public goods and services, civic alienation, and massive corporate intervention in government and media. (For discussion of the historical roots of neo-liberal globalization in the nineteenth-century rise of corporate power in the USA, see Reid and Taylor 2010, Chaps. 2–4.)

Ontologically, then, the spatio-temporal patterns of neo-liberalism are contradictory—a jumble of discrete space-times which have fundamentally different logics but somehow co-exist in the same space and time. What is called global economic space is almost like a *trompe l'œil* painting, which is designed to trick the eye. Look at it from one ontological perspective and it is an endless, flat, open, Cartesian field of market rationality in which anything can be exchanged according to universal principles that transcend the particularities of place and time. Look at it from another perspective and it is a violent, highly localized congeries of embattled places—with elites barricading themselves off with the wealth seized from erratic global traffic, while neo-liberal “place-managers” groom their locales, resources, and peoples for sale in the highly uneven and foggy terrains of global production and waste disposal regimes (for more on place management, see Reid and Taylor 2010, 35, 49, 162).

COMPLICITY OF SOCIAL THEORY IN PATHOLOGIES OF THE INTERSCALAR

One response to this curious piling together of heterogeneous, contradictory space-times in our era has been the postmodern or post-structural focus on randomness, disjuncture, flatness, circulation, and unstable flicking between aggregation and dissolution. Doreen Massey describes place primarily as a constant movement of social/economic/political processes that entangle and disentangle in contingent nexuses that defy durable description (Massey 1994). Deleuze and Guattari build an elaborate ontology of capitalist space-times as constant decentering movements, generating rapidly nomadic but unstable assemblages, striated space, and plateau zones (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). The notion of governmentality was something of a side comment by Foucault, but it has been seized upon and widely redeployed as a way to understand the State under neo-liberalism as

a “code for conduct” which, like a successful virus, has a wide and flat circulatory transmission, shaping life and thought through horizontal capillary movements (Foucault 1991 [1978]).¹ As we explore in detail in Chap. 7 of *Recovering the Commons*, this fascination with flatness has led social theory into problematic cul-de-sacs where epistemological courage fails:

In reaction against entangled hierarchies of knowledge, state, market, and empire, some social theory ... has tried to dismantle levels within epistemology and ontology, for fear of meta-levels that purport to control ... “lower” levels. Closely related to this are efforts to dismantle the notion of the subject out of fear that a notion of unitary selfhood requires the perfect adequation of ... selves that author themselves from some Archimedean vantage point like an ideal cartographer, and selves that can be known because they are adequated to their objects. (166)

Another problematic trend in social theory has been a tendency to let divisions between scales become sites for projecting problematic dualisms. For instance, there is a recurrent tendency in the work of David Harvey to equate the local/translocal divide with the difference between agency/structure and particular/universal. Despite his best efforts, he ends up seeing the translocal as the scale at which vision and action can generate the broad solidarities that are needed and are able to engage the underlying causal mechanism of oppression. For Harvey, the “militant particularisms” of grassroots struggle might supply the energy of solidarity but not its forms of understanding (Harvey 1996, Chap. 2). Conversely, it is undeniable that many in the grassroots struggle have a libertarian (especially in the USA) or anarchist tendency to see the local as the only reliable scale at which agency can be democratic—so that the local becomes a literal geographic boundary around concerns, culture, social relations, and organizational structure. While we follow Dewey in privileging the local as the spring of democracy, it is not in this sense of local *bounded*, monadic or autarchic ecolocalism. As we argue in our book, Dewey’s view of the Local as “ultimate universal” has to be understood in terms of both his ecological ontology and his theory of democratic culture (Reid and Taylor 2010, 121–128).

OPENING UP PLACED EXPERIENCE AND THE INTERSCALAR

In *Recovering the Commons*, we argue that powerful ontologies for interscalar transformation are emerging in the global justice movement. We call for an intercultural, transversal conversation between activists and social

theorists, and between Global South and North—to clarify and share ways of understanding, acting, and being.

We define the stuff of human being as “body~place~commons”:

subjectivity as intersubjectivity arising in embodied practices in concrete places within heterogeneous temporalities of the ecological commons. *To be a creature—human or nonhuman—is to be hinged between one’s own embodiment and the particularity of places that accrue the grounds for life from unruly and ruly cycles of interdependence, mortality, and nationality of the ecological commons.* Our being is not “in” us, like something poured in a bag of skin, nor is it “outside” our skin in signs, economies, machines, or powers. The stuff of our being arises as dynamic infrastructures of forms of life that we share with nonhuman creatures—generative matrices of co-constitution among particular bodies within the chaotic piling up of particular conditions of ecological relations within particular places. (5)

This results in a complex and heterogeneous ontology of the interscalar. For one thing, the constitutive logic is essentially habitational and ecological—in the sense that creatures and places sediment out forms of life that have remarkable durability and continuity. These forms of life are built over long periods of time and allow security within habitational limits—as well as unique and emergent kinds of creativity that can be resilient and innovative in the face of change. This involves both organic and inorganic processes. For instance, the ways in which a watershed develops has many of the feedback patterns of life processes. Therefore, the feedback interactions between climate, rainfall, soil composition, and the emergence of a water commons for multiple species shows a certain continuity and durability of being, as a complex adaptive system which is partly biological and partly inorganic. A watershed, like life forms, is also strongly path dependent—once water flows through the earth, it cuts out certain paths on which later waterflows tend to depend. Therefore, unique forms emerge from past history. All of this means that there is a synergistic rather than dualistic relationship between continuity and contingency of form. Contrary to the postmodern/post-structuralist tendency to see contingency as antithetical to holism, integrity, and durability of form, this ontological stuff sees them as emergent from, and embedded in, contingency, creativity, and unruliness.

But, most importantly for this chapter, subjectivity as body~place~commons has powerfully architectonic ontological qualities. This is the basis for the bigness of the scaling of this ontology. The very form and

rhythms of our bodies are the product of millennia of co-constitution between creature and habitat. This is a habitational logic that is thoroughly cultural and natural. Our basic posture is within a world that allows the world to imbue us with the horizontal dimension of our possible being, as well as the earth grounds of the tacit given. This is a necessary and non-dualistic strife between sky and earth, which provides the unconscious habits of embodied being and our conscious creation of cosmos—as a space from which our imagination can chart uniquely new paths in uncertain worlds. We argue in Chap. 5 of *Recovering the Commons* that our biggest philosophic and moral ideas arise from the immanent forms of the praxical architectonics of body~place~commons. This means that cosmos is immanent in, and emergent from, the most creaturely forms of life. The biggest moral questions—such as the distinction between friend and enemy—ride on habitational logics which delineate the boundaries of one’s world (defining what is “inside” and what is “outside” the world that constitutes us, and which we constitute).

This makes for what we call a “folded ontology” of scale rather than the post-structural “flat ontology.” It is a heterogeneous and topological scaling. Cosmos is both the farthest reach of the horizon and also intimately within our nearest habitats and habits. It is praxeomorphic, not cartographic (although we might make cartographic representations of it). Public space is understood to be emergent from civic and environmental commons. The civic and environmental commons is understood as that concatenation of (human and non-human) flows of production, reproduction, and, social and ecological reproduction *in which communities (human and non-human) discover and create continuities of life*. These continuities are not holisms which impose a coherent script upon social and natural ecologies. Rather, they arise from partial and uncertain orchestrations of multiple material practices by creatures anticipating futures, based on habituated pasts, hedged by risk and patchy knowledge. In other words, we propose a praxeomorphic causality,² arguing that the legitimating, constitutive frameworks of public space arise from *the shaping power of the embodied, material practices of everyday life* on imagination, philosophy, identity, affective attachments, and capabilities.

This ontology of the interscalar allows for a non-dualistic relationship between the actual/ideal and between the natural/cultural. Both Mukerjee and Dewey have made important contributions in this area, with their lifelong interest in understanding values as emergent from, and embedded in, the pragmatics of actual life and action, but as also having an ideal

dimension. In our ecological understanding of human being as body~place~commons, we understand human being in the world as a very complex “kiltering” of disparate spatio-temporal rhythms—in which the habitational logics of material and social production and reproduction are orchestrated in an ongoing, unique, creative, and emergent way. The morality of this orchestration is in the conscious choices made; but it is also in our openness (collectively and individually) to the tacit dimensions of our finitude as mortal beings who are constrained, sustained, and constituted by the great cycles of the commons (ecological and civic).

For instance, it is urgent that we should let ourselves be open to the horror of the fossil fuel cycle. It takes reflexive labor of moral and scientific thought to make conscious our place in the links of the energy system—from extraction (with all its attendant displacement, ecological devastation, and labor injustice in extracting coal, oil, etc.) to transportation and use (with pollution of land and the atmospheric commons leading to climate chaos), to the spiritual consequences of our energy system (dependency on community-destroying cars and suburbanization, especially in the USA), to the political consequences (in the strong tendency towards inequality, repression, and political corruption in fossil fuel dependent regions). An ecological view of humanity, then, understands us to be embedded in given natural processes of far greater temporal and spatial reach than our individual being. However, this immanence of involuntary ecological being in our very nature is also a hinge to transcendent ideals and possibilities. In *Recovering the Commons* we speak of an ecological hermeneutics that is infused with the local and cosmic surround, one that anticipates regenerative capacities drawn from a shared earth and building on global regional endeavors instituting new solidarities. At this nexus of the environmental and civic commons, such democratic public spaces grounded in cosmogenesis retrieve (1) a holistic understanding of the Local and (2) put “places” in cosmogenic perspective, reintroducing or reaffirming the global dimension as ecological reality and possibility (cf. Reid and Taylor 2010, 214, 153).

CLIMATE CHAOS AND THE FLIGHT FROM FINITUDE

The twenty-first century is bringing us ecological challenges that we cannot face without a more ecological understanding of humanity. This requires, first, a capacity to calibrate ideals and actuality in non-dualistic and empowering ways. Second, it requires the ability to accept our finitude as mortal creatures embedded in, and ethically responsible for, the natural commons, tending to both the inside and outside of place(s).

We live in a time of world history when the idea and reality of the Atmospheric Commons has asserted itself. Most scientists around the world are clear that the threat of anthropogenic climate change augurs the collapse of whole ecosystems, with impacts rippling across all legal and political boundaries. Already our world is beginning to be torn asunder by increasingly chaotic climate change and by globalizing forms of socio-economic inequality. For climate scientists such as James Hansen the political challenge is finding the policies that will rapidly phase out coal's carbon dioxide emissions (Hansen 2009). The most dramatic effect of what has been called "global warming," according to scientist Peter D. Ward, will be sea-level rise. This species-extinction expert argues in *The Flooded Earth* that even if we stopped all carbon dioxide emissions today, the seas will rise 3 ft by 2050 and 9 ft by 2100 (Ward 2010). One of the concerns he takes up is the impact on world agricultural yields.

In *Recovering the Commons* we mark the political and ethical challenge of food security programs for people most beset by the tsunamis of a world food crisis which could be defined as profiteering in the context of scarcity. This, however, points up the larger question of climate justice, or what for us is the compelling argument that future ecological sustainability and multilateral environmental governance require climate equity (whatever form is given to the latter). Two American scholars have noted the key 1991 contribution of the late Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain (Athanasios and Baer 2002). Their case for "equal per capita rights to the atmospheric commons" might be said to have constituted the highest ethical standard for decarbonizing energy systems, at least alleviating the horrors facing future generations.

It is indisputable that the Global North bears greater responsibility for this ecological crisis than the Global South. This is probably not the most adequate frame for proceeding because, for one, inequality extends all the way down, shaping politics and political decisions in every nation-state, north or south. The French journalist Hervé Kempf bluntly makes the main point: the "predatory oligarchy is the main agent of the global crisis" (Kempf 2008). His view is that our present situation is in dire need of the principle "Consume less; share better." We agree, but have to note that in the USA the national oligarchy's support is deeply rooted in the corporate consumer culture. It is also the case that in the USA citizen action politics for food democracy and for decarbonizing energy systems overlap and increasingly make connections with the global justice movement. That is why a well-known ethicist such as Michael S. Northcott, instead of excoriating the "Global North," astutely focuses on ways in which the "global

market empire” structurally and pervasively impacts our stressed climate system (and more) (Northcott 2007).

But our purpose here is not to review the burgeoning scientific literature but simply to mention a few aspects that underline the global urgency of this unprecedented challenge. Nor do we intend to pursue further the global complexities of climate policy politics. However, we do want to keep contemporary questions of climate justice in mind as we devote most of our attention to two thinkers who by the middle of the twentieth century had made powerful cases for a pragmatic and hermeneutical social theory sounding earth ground and world horizon, social ecology and ecological ontology. We refer to the Indian sociologist Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889–1968) and the American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952).

DEWEY AND MUKERJEE: REVOLUTIONARY ONTOLOGY AND SOCIAL ECOLOGY

Ramachandra Guha’s book of 2006 closes with the observation that by the middle decades of the present century intellectual and political debates will resound with clashing ideas and values about consuming less and sharing better (Guha 2006). The contributions of Dewey and Mukerjee, if understood, would facilitate such a development in both India and the United States. However, in the first decade of our century Guha found “a tremendous backlash against environmentalists” in India and a deep interest in “the successful Americanization of Indian society” (69). A *New York Times* column of the same year by Pankaj Mishra lamented that India, beset by a “culture of greed,” was putting growth ahead of morality and losing sight of the powerless and the oppressed (Mishra 2006). From Guha’s map of the “Indian road to sustainability” we learn of key ideas from Patrick Geddes and Mukerjee to Madhav Gadgil, with whom he has generated important studies of ecology and equity.

Guha’s documentary and analytical efforts make clear that Mukerjee, influenced early on by the socio-ecological approach of Geddes, founded the discipline of “social ecology.” In the years between the two world wars, Mukerjee’s work toward an integration of ecology with the social sciences was “considerably ahead of its time” (Guha 1994, 12). Mukerjee’s idea of “regional balance” issued from his deep interests in the ecological infrastructure of social life. Human action without regard for the ecological process was the path of folly and social regression. As Guha puts it, and as our own studies of Mukerjee confirm, he argued that “ecological

adjustment [must be] raised from an instinctive to an ethical plane” (Guha 2006, 46). It is in this context that Mukerjee was particularly interested in what he called “valuation,” the aspect of John Dewey’s work that seems to have been of most interest to him.

An interplay of ideas between these two thinkers may be reconstructed by giving attention to Mukerjee’s two works of the 1950s, *The Social Structure of Values* and *The Dynamics of Morals* (Mukerjee 1950, 1952). It is in these two studies that he gives attention to several of Dewey’s works. But first we want to note that in the second of these titles he says: “Social ecology is the biological aspect of ethics or evolutionary ethics.” Ecology teaches us that it is by attuning ourselves “to the social and environmental interrelations” that we can assure a sustainable world (88). As he explains in a later chapter, our “ecological relationships and cultural patterns [considered] parts of one dynamic ‘region,’ ‘field,’ ‘social and moral space’” enable us to engage problems of regional balance or unbalance (223–225).

Humanity “lives constantly in the midst of a great battle of values and ideals,” Mukerjee writes in *The Social Structure of Values*. He goes on to say that the “struggle for the higher values within the self seeking to achieve deeper and more integrated levels of experience, and the struggle for a better, juster society with more righteous social habits, customs, and laws, act and interact” (Mukerjee 1950, 146). Put another way, his view is that “valuation ...[is] the nexus of all human relations, groups and institutions” (vii). In Mukerjee’s theory each culture is “an Experiment in Value Hierarchy” (82). Mukerjee’s dialogue with Dewey is evident throughout this study (cf. pp. 12, 221, 403). Both wrote with a deep sense of what Mukerjee termed the “crisis in modern industrial civilization,” relating to “the fractionalization of self, values and society” and “the supremacy of pecuniary and instrumental” modes of consciousness (228–233).

Not surprisingly, when Mukerjee addressed an “unfortunate dualism in contemporary ethics” he turned to Dewey (Mukerjee 1952, 153). Quoting and commenting on two Dewey studies, he may be paraphrased as observing how modern capitalist economy instrumentalizes reason and value, treating moral ideals as simultaneously inept and “utopian” (152–154). Dewey’s 1925 Paul Carus lectures published as *Experience and Nature* did a remarkable job of identifying the cultural and philosophic dualisms that interfere with a stronger understanding of new place-based forms of democratic inquiry and development and their political potential (Dewey 1929 [1925]). He explains that we will not get very far if our interpretation is based on a familiar modern Western dualism

between emotion and reason, feeling and knowledge, body and mind, and nature and culture. Social scientists who allow nature only “emotional salience” for human growth would monopolize what they regard as a “scientific tradition,” but one that has roots they seldom take into account. This historical configuration of an isolated, incorporeal intellect protected from the alleged dangers of its sensorial landscape is a long story of many chapters to which we can only allude here.

Dewey (as well as Merleau-Ponty) understood that the dualism in question was bound up with a mechanistic ontology that left nature in silence. Rejecting the spectator theory of knowing, in *Quest for Certainty* he proclaimed that “Nature ... is idealizable” (Dewey 1960a [1929], 245, 302). Later, he added: “Nature and society include within themselves projection of ideal possibilities and contain the operations by which they are actualized” (306). Philosophies and religious doctrines that try to proceed on the notion of “the fixed union of the actual and ideal in Ultimate Being” make a consequential mistake. A very few years later, Dewey restated this argument in the Terry Lectures at Yale University, the basis for his book on spiritual renewal entitled *A Common Faith* (Dewey 1960a, 1960b [1934]). Instead of arguing for scientism, Dewey spoke of an “active relation between ideal and actual to which I would give the name of ‘God’” (51). In calling for “the realization of distinctively religious values inherent in natural experience,” he knew full well that “the release of these values” required a challenge to a monopoly sometimes claimed by institutional religion (27–28). It is also important to understand the expansion rather than the positivization of knowledge sought by both Dewey and Mukerjee (cf. Mukerjee 1952, 213, 217). We might observe here that Dewey outlined a pragmatic spirituality as vitally important for communities striving to be democratic. We would also contend that Mukerjee’s approach to valuation in social ecology is pointed in the same direction.

When Mukerjee writes in *The Dynamics of Morals* that “Democracy is both an institution as well as a method of social action,” Dewey’s influence is unmistakable. This statement is followed by one about the “democratic ideal of equality,” which by diminishing economic insecurity and injustice fosters “cultural democracy” (390, 392). Mukerjee’s effort here is toward a theory of political obligation which includes “political obligations in the coming polity.” The prescient moral principle of an intergenerational commons is clear in his call to reconcile “the interests of unborn generations to the present society [through] wise husbandry and improvement of physical resources and technical and scientific skills ...” (395–396).

When Dewey said that “nature is idealizable,” he marked why the enclosure of the commons is such a momentous issue. Marcuse was only partly right when he said in the 1970s that nature, too, awaits the revolution. Human life, to exist, is dependent at least on limited access to the commons. Capitalist or any authoritarian appropriation of the commons is also a matter of restricting human possibilities and imposing on the Many a highly limited range of values chiefly amenable to dominant institutional forms of power. Mukerjee apparently understood with Dewey that it is values and ideals that create and bind a public together and that the big challenge for democratic communities is keeping themselves ideally present to themselves. That is very difficult when Americans are fooled by the Right’s message that the “Free Market,” that bastard offspring of the mechanistic world picture, is best left alone.

Dewey (Dewey 1929 [1925], 61), calling “every existence ... an event,” went on to view “the organism *in* nature ... as events are in history, in a moving, growing never finished process” (241). When we talk of place we mean more than a mere intersection of nature and culture but rather their chiasmic co-envelopment and ongoing temporalization, including both sedimentation and reactivation. This is why we may speak of our placed embodiment in terms of where/when temporalization of experience works as a kind of reincarnation that *finds its political ecology* by consciously reopening to and within both “commons” and “world.” An ecological hermeneutics moving between earth–ground and world–horizon illuminates and depends on landscapes co-enveloping nature and culture and their mutual reciprocities. Political theory and social ecology need ecological ontology and a post-dualist sensibility that begins in the intercorporeal field, where place and self are co-ingredients in a never finished process.

What Dewey and Mukerjee sought may be illuminated in the language of A.K. Giri. They worked toward an “ontological opening for epistemic cooperation” transcending the reifications of identity politics in recreating “civil society as a space of ethicopolitical mobilization of the subject,” the very heartbeat of transformative institutions (Giri 2002, 326–331). Democracy has a chance in this context.

As we try to show in detail in *Recovering the Commons*, in the USA the technocorporate triad of globalization/subjectivization/worldlessness undercuts the ability of potentially democratic publics to discover and identify themselves.³ When post-democratic plutocracies deploy information technologies in ways that help to dematerialize the earth’s horizon

and when consumption is structured to rob the cultural present of its traces of history, the public chances of time, memory, and place serving democratic discourse and action are minimized. When an increasingly globalized inequality is smothering a commodity-saturated pluralism, it becomes farcical for intellectuals to come along and proclaim diversity-in-itself as the new democratic totality that can do without traditional concerns with equality. This may simply demonstrate that at least some of them have yet to think through the dark side of the real comforts of junior membership in the new global investor class. But there is much more involved than this suggests.

Cultural critic Mark Dery offers a fascinating view of what he calls a new “digital zeitgeist” that includes a “collective dream life ... filled with images of a better world than this, where the mind leaves the body behind like the booster stage of a rocket” (Dery 1999). Dery and others have noticed that some of the digerati hate politics and espouse a radical libertarianism that sometimes endorses both a post-national body politic and a laissez-faire economics that is given the “force of natural law by couching it in the language of chaos theory and artificial life” (256, 236–237). Global economic space and individual market mobility hover in the background. Corporate globalization from above and its particular version of the ideology of Speed is taken for granted or held to be unquestionable. Place is negative, romantic, provincial, despised—views reaffirmed in the parodies of global corporate media and its anti-historic time. What may actually be involved in the shrunken, dematerialized culture of this faction of digerati is a peculiarly postmodern trauma of displacement that has much to do with our argument for a new ontology of the interscalar. “Perhaps,” Mukerjee wondered sixty years ago, “some kind of a technological revolution, decentralization and regionalization of industry may be necessary before ... a moral change may be brought about” (Mukerjee 1952, 504). His prescience is evident as the ecological costs of global export agriculture mount and global conversations turn to “deepening” economies as a response (cf. McKibben 2007). However, forging new forms of democratic space and political action seems necessary to launch such an agenda. The emerging movement of what Roger Gottlieb calls “environmentalism as spirituality” is raising these issues (Gottlieb 2006). Hopefully, this chapter has illuminated the relevance of Dewey and Mukerjee with regard to these concerns, and their resonance with emerging projects of the global justice movement.

NOTES

1. For instance, two excellent recent books critically engage development in the Indian context in richly historicized ethnographies—Agrawal’s *Environmentality* and Gidwani’s *Capital, Interrupted* (Agrawal 2005; Gidwani 2008). We would argue, however, that their complex ethnographic awareness of the multiple spatio-temporalities of actors and landscapes is undercut by the flattening effects of their reliance on a Foucauldian way of understanding the State.
2. We take this term from Bauman’s discussion (Bauman 1998, 27–32).
3. Our emphasis on “world” draws on Hannah Arendt’s important development of this notion. We say, “Arendt emphasizes that world is a strange mixture of history as residue from past action and history-in-the-making as sheer openness of new possibilities for action (Arendt 1958),” and we define world as “that durable architectonics of engagement that creates the background which actors need to illumine future and present as coherent settings for action, and, into which acts can transmute into remembrance (or habit) that avails past for future action” (Reid and Taylor 2010, 11).

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