Neil Smith, 1954-2012:
Radical Geography, Marxist Geographer, Revolutionary Geographer

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"Although we found it easy to be brilliant, we always found it confusing to be good."

Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*
(quotation found pinned to the bulletin board in
Neil Smith's study when passed away)

Neil Smith hated hagiography. He would rail against it in his history and theory of geography seminars at Rutgers University in the early 1990s, holding up what he thought were particularly egregious examples: obituaries published in the *Annals*. Hagiography for Neil was the antithesis of what our disciplinary history ought to be: it was uncritical and celebratory, when what were needed were hard-nosed engagements with ideas, with real histories that understood ideas as the product of struggle and error as well as genius and insight. Even worse, hagiography extracted its subject from history, setting him (usually him) apart from the world as a lone genius rather than fully ensconcing him in messy social (and personal) practices, situating ideas within the social (and personal) histories from which they emerged. Hagiography had little room to show how what *was* genius in someone's ideas might be inextricably linked to, indeed very much a function of both social context and what was flawed or less savory in that person. Hagiography denies that ideas are embodied. Neil's ideas were embodied.

Indeed, David Harvey calls Neil "the perfect practicing Marxist – completely defined by his contradictions."[1]

Born in Leith, the old port of Edinburgh, and raised one of four children of a school teaching father and homemaking mother in Dalkeith, a small working-class town to the southeast of the city, Neil had an indestructible passion for the natural world, starting with his native Midlothian landscape and quickly spiraling out, for birdwatching, and for gardening, and he became geography's preeminent urban theorist. Never interested in the accumulation of things for accumulation's sake, he made lists of the birds he saw and collected their eggs (and in later years relished telling how he smuggled his collection into the U.S. by planting a decoy of bacon in his bag for customs officials to be distracted by). Deeply sympathetic to feminism (especially in its socialist formulations), his personal sexual politics could be troubling, perhaps even at times destructive. A fervent materialist, he always insisted that the fight for ideas was too important to be left aside.

As a boy Neil was endlessly fascinated with the volcanic underpinnings and glacial re-workings of the Midlothian landscape – his "backyard" as he sometimes called it – as well as with the flora and fauna that lived in it. He had a particular fondness for Firth of Forth and for the basaltic North Berwick shoreline. It was the contrasts of the landscape, its shifting shape and form over space and time that caught his attention. This love of the natural landscape led Neil to the study of geography, and when he entered St. Andrews University, he was pretty sure he would become a glacial geomorphologist, or maybe an expert on American silage systems.

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[1] Nonetheless, I have not been able to entirely avoid the hagiographic. As much as I have tried to contextualize Neil's work, and as much as I have tried to name and describe his flaws, the sheer power of his work, and the sheer force of his personality for those of us who were his friends, makes it hard, even at a year's remove, to do anything *except* make him sound extraordinary (which, in fact, he was). I have not done a good enough job of grounding Neil's extraordinariness in the flaws that gave it shape. Nor have I done nearly enough to describe the fullness of Neil beyond his ideas.

Gentrification and the Rent Gap

Yet he was equally steeped in the vibrant culture of Scottish Socialism – it's militancy as well as its folksongs – and his innate sense of what was just and right, and what was not, grew steadily in this soil, a soil watered by more than a few pints of "heavy." The soil of Scottish Socialism was also well-fertilized by a more global sense struggle, and Neil remembered well the outrageous TV images of police dogs attacking Civil Rights activists and the later urban insurrections in America, the early stirrings of the anti-apartheid struggle (which took root in the UK earlier than in the US), the promise of May 1968 as well as the bloody massacre of Mexican university students a few months later. By the time he enrolled in Joe Doherty's lectures at St. Andrew's in the early 1970s, he was poised to see, and passionately wanted to understand the faultlines in the human landscape as much as – and increasingly more than – the faultlines of the physical landscape. Joe nurtured this desire while also, through lectures, tutorials, and sessions at the pub stoked the flames of Neil's radicalism, convincing him, as Neil wrote in the introduction to *The New Urban Frontier* (1996e, xx), his major book on gentrification, that this was a topic he could "get his teeth into," that there was real radical potential in human geography and that gentrification was crying out for careful study.

Neil had already noticed the phenomenon, even if he did not yet put a name on it, during summer, 1972. As he also wrote in *New Urban Frontier* (p. xviii; for an excellent discussion, see Slater 2012):

> In retrospect I suppose I first saw gentrification in 1972 while working for the summer in an insurance office in Rose Street in Edinburgh. Every morning I took the 79 bus in from Dalkeith and walked half the length of Rose Street to the office. Rose Street is a back street off majestic Princes Street and long had a reputation with some long-established traditional pubs and a lot more dingy howffs – watering holes – and even a couple of brothels, although these were rumored to have decamped to Danube Street by the early 1970s. It was *the* place in Edinburgh

> for a pub crawl. My office was above a new bar called "The Galloping Major" which had none of the cheesy décor or sawdust on the floor of the old-time bars. This one was new. It served quite appetizing lunches adorned with salad, still a novelty in most Scottish pubs at the time. And I began to notice after a few days that a number of other bars had been "modernized"; there were a couple of new restaurants, too expensive for me – not that I went to restaurants much in any case. And narrow Rose Street was always clogged with construction traffic as some of the upper floors were renovated. I didn't think much of this at the time, and only several years later in Philadelphia, by which time I had picked up a little urban theory as an undergraduate, did I begin to recognize what I was seeing not only as a pattern but a dramatic one.

Philadelphia was decisive for Neil. He went there on an exchange ("very much a journey away from home": Smith 1996e, xx), spending 1974-75 at the University of Philadelphia which was sandwiched between a Center City shocked by the recession but using the upcoming Bicentennial celebrations as a lever of development – and retrenchment of ideology (see Smith 1977a) – and largely African American, poor, and disinvested West Philly. But it was Society Hill that most caught his attention (1977b).

Society Hill was one of America's earliest and clearest examples of gentrification. What Neil noticed most, however, was not just the pattern of gentrification, which indeed seemed internationally congruent, but the differences or distinctions within that pattern. If gentrification in Britain was, at least as portrayed in much of the literature in the 1960s and 1970s, largely an affair of private capital, Neil found that in Society Hill it seemed to be a deeply *public* phenomenon: capital either came directly from public sources or was organized through public agencies (goaded into being or action by factions of private capital) (Smith 1979a, 1979c). This realization led Neil to seek to understand gentrification not (only) as a process of changed consumer demand as much popular literature and neoclassically-based studies understood it, nor (only) as a transformation in the relations of urban production as some more

critical work at the time was beginning to do – the "production-consumption dialectic" (Smith 1979a, 24) was not enough – but instead as a moment in the reworked *circulation* of capital: "The circulation process is a strong regulatory force on both production and consumption" (Smith 1979a, 24), and hence a close focus on the pathways of finance capital and "the patterning of urban space according to patterns of profitable investment" was necessary if gentrification was to be properly understood (Smith 1979a, 24). In turn this led Neil to a reexamination of the classic Chicago School models of city morphology and to reconceptualize the "zone of transition" – or Homer Hoyt's "valley in the land-value curve between the [CBD] and outer residential areas" (Hoyt 1933, p. 356, in Smith 1979c, 542) – as a *rent gap* in the circulatory patterns of capital in urban space (rather than merely a phenomenon of rent-paying ability by consumers). Moreover, he showed how such gaps, usually just outside the city center, were actively produced through the actions of specific social actors ranging from landlords to bankers to urban property speculators. With the development of a "wide enough" rent gap, he argued, "gentrification may be initiated in a given neighborhood by several different actors in the land and housing market. And here we come back to the relationship between production and consumption, for the empirical evidence suggests strongly that the process is initiated not by the exercise of those individual consumer preferences much beloved of neoclassical economists, but by some form of collective social action at the neighborhood level" (Smith 1979c, 545). In Society Hill, that collective action was coordinated through public mortgage financing and the development of public-private institutions to direct that financing (Smith 1979a). In London and other sites of early gentrification such public-financing may not have been as prominent, but the rent gap was.

The theory of the rent gap was destined to mark a turning point in gentrification studies, and indeed in the study of the production of urban space more generally; it would also prove to be of lasting value to anti-gentrification and other urban activists seeking to undermine urban financial capital's increasing hegemony and the changes in class and race structure it inevitably brought in its train

(Rameau 2012). It would also remain a point of significant dispute among gentrification scholars: over whether it really possessed the explanatory value Neil claimed for it, whether it turned attention too far away from the cultural transformations wracking Western society and therefore leading to a social revaluing of the city, whether it could be so easily empirically verified, and whether it was in any sense a global, universal, or general, rather than a merely local or specific, phenomenon.[2] For Neil, however, while the theory of the rent gap would remain central to his ongoing theoretical and empirical studies of gentrification – even as it was modified and recontextualized, often culturally, in the course of his "battle for ideas" with his critics – it became foundational for his broader (or more general) explorations into theorizing the dynamics of capitalism's uneven spatial development.

Uneven Development

Neil largely formulated his studies of Society Hill's gentrification and began to intuit, if not yet formulate the theory of the rent gap, while still an undergraduate student at St. Andrews (Smith 1977b). These studies of Society Hill were published, however, after he moved to Baltimore to study for a PhD with David Harvey at the Johns Hopkins University (see Harvey 2012), by which time he had fully fleshed out his rent-gap thesis (Smith 1979c). At Hopkins he deepened his political involvements – particularly his involvement with the International Socialist Organization (until he was booted out in 1984 for pushing for a stronger feminist line) – while also seeking out a broad spectrum of scholars and students across the campus with whom he could explore his interests in Marxist philosophy and the philosophy of knowledge, and with whom he could deeply read Marx and all the debates swirling around Marxism at the time (cf. Smith 1979b; Harstock and Smith 1979/80).

[2] A number of key articles in the myriad debates around gentrification, which therefore give a sense of how thoroughly Neil shaped the theoretical and empirical discourse can be found in Lees, Slater, and Wyly (2010); a full discussion of the evolution of, and contentions over, gentrification theory and the explanatory power of the rent gap can be found in Lees, Slater, and Wyly (2008).

His explorations of Marxist theory at Hopkins were shaped by his political and social commitments. He managed the bar at the graduate club and was famous for hosting endless after-hours parties that were perhaps more like salons; he was equally famous for dragging his somewhat-reluctant advisor to just about every political demo in the region. In both venues, as well as in reading groups, he honed his political sensibilities, as well as his rather ferocious debating style, one that could as quickly make enemies out of allies as it could win over skeptics. All through his career he struggled with how to balance his tenacious commitment to, and desire to win, the battle for ideas and to shape political sensibilities and actions – a desire that could sometimes alienate him from comrades – with his natural gregariousness, his desire to be liked, and his real, if too often contradictory, commitment to solidarity.

These explorations were multifaceted. Spurred by a fundamental disagreement with Althusser's reading of Marx (a disagreement rooted in part Neil's fairly flexible Trotskyism), by his deep and interdisciplinary reading of Marx's work, and by his still incipient love-hate fascination with the history and ideas of his home discipline of geography, Neil dove into any number of debates live within Marxism – and geography – at the moment but he particularly focused on the question of nature (Smith 1980; Smith and O'Keefe 1980). Paying close attention to the theoretical interventions of the Frankfurt School especially Schmidt's (1971, see also Leiss 1974) reworking of the concepts of first and second nature, Neil (in collaboration with Phil O'Keefe) theorized nature – including now first nature – as produced from *within* and as a necessary foundation for, the capitalist mode of production. Neil's arguments evinced not only a deeply critical and analytical reading of Marx's own works and Marxist theory, but also of the sociology of scientific knowledge and the history of geography, which, in what would become a hallmark of his work, he combined in truly original ways. At the heart of his argument was an examination of the ways in which, within Western ways of knowing including much Marxism, nature was understood as a largely-unexamined, but fateful, duality: "On the one hand, nature is external, non-

human reality, pure and god-given; on the other, nature is more abstract, incorporating human as well as non-human spheres of reality" (Smith and O'Keefe 1980, 30). Much history and sociology of science traded in just this dualism, as Neil showed in relation to Kuhn's (1962) influential *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Smith 1980, 78 n59). However, any mode of production – capitalism in particular – acknowledges no such duality, as important as that duality is for imperialist capitalism ideologically (Smith and O'Keefe 1980, 30-31). In capitalism, nature is produced as a unity. Within Marxism, but even more within Marx's own writing, Neil argued, an alternative, non-dualistic concept of nature, adequate to the task of understanding nature in capitalism, could be glimpsed. It is a long argument, and a thorough one, played out over several articles (and eventually consolidated into *Uneven Development* [1984c]) that shows how, in the end

> it is not just this "second nature" that is increasingly produced as part of the capitalist mode of production. The "first nature" is also produced. Indeed the "second nature" is no longer produced *out of* the first nature, but rather the first is produced *by* and within the confines of the second. … In a quite concrete sense, this process of production transcends the ideal distinction between a first and a second nature. The form of all nature has been altered by human activity and today this production is accomplished not for the fulfillment of needs in general but for the fulfillment of one particular "need:" profit (Smith and O'Keefe 1980, 35).

These arguments have proved to be enormously influential (even if subsequent theorists have not always accepted Neil's full-throated Marxism or been as keen to delve into the intricacies of secondary Frankfurt School theorists as Neil was, thereby often evacuating the theory of the production of nature of much of its intellectual foundation). Indeed they are in many senses foundational for the forms of political ecology that began to develop around the same time and for the rise of a more critical study of "natural" hazards, a primary concern of Neil's collaborator in the development of the production of nature thesis, Phil O'Keefe (see also Smith 1998a, 2005e, 2005f).

But the production of nature was only one part of the story. Another part consisted of arguments about the production of space, the embryos of which were there in Neil's early studies of gentrification, but which only began to develop as he undertook his graduate studies. In the article where the production of nature thesis is first laid out, Smith and O'Keefe (1980, 37-38) argued that if we understand space as relational (rather than as abstract or as fixed), then:

> the theory of [the production of] nature holds within it an integral theory of space. We need no longer view space as an abstract universal, but can now see it as historically altered along with the human alteration of nature. The *production of space* by which is meant the alteration of spatial relations brought about by the simultaneous alteration of the form of concrete pieces of matter, is an integral part of the production of nature.

Moreover:

> An abstract theory of the production of space would be as limited as an abstract theory of nature … and would risk the same philosophical contradictions that eventually plagued Schmidt [who hung his hat on the duality of first and second nature]. As with nature, a sophisticated understanding of how space is produced depends on an equally sophisticated understanding of the capitalist mode of production. Space and place are produced as part of this mode of production (Smith and O'Keefe 1980, 38).[3]

As a result, "An understanding of *uneven development* is therefore central" (Smith and O'Keefe 1980, 28). Theories of the production of nature and the production of space were foundational for understanding geographically uneven development within capitalism, and the integrated development of both held out the hope for a more robust analysis than was possible in extant theories such as the

[3] The related work of Lefebvre concerning the production of space played little role in Neil's development of the theory, largely because little of Lefebvre's urban work had yet been translated. The major exception was *The Survival of Capitalism* (Lefebvre 1976) and that usually limited to his famous line about how "we cannot at what price" capitalism's growth has come in the years since *Capital* was published, "but we do know the means: *by occupying space, by producing space*."

theory of combined and unequal development as developed by Trotsky, Leninist arguments about the accumulation and concentration of capital, dependency theory, and the "Third Worldist" theory associated with Samir Amin (Smith 1982b).

The theory of uneven development as Neil propounded it is founded on an analysis of a permanent dialectic within capitalism: the simultaneous struggle for equalization and differentiation of both space and social processes (Smith 1982c, 1984c). In the midst of their discussion of the production of nature, Smith and O'Keefe (1980, 35) slyly comment: "Over forty years ago, this exchange-value relation with nature was intuitively recognized and unwittingly encapsulated by that great imperial geographer, Isaiah Bowman who declared that human beings 'cannot move mountains' – not that is, without first 'floating a bond issue.'" Two years later in an article seeking to provide a more solid theoretical basis for the "intensive" empirical research on gentrification that had developed over the past decade, Neil wrote that "With the transformation of the earth into a near universal means of production, no corner is immune from the search for raw materials; every inch of the land surface as well as the sea, the air, and the geological substratum is reduced in the eyes of capital to real or potential means of production, each with a price tag" (Smith 1982a, 143). Bond issues were central to the production of capitalist nature, but also to its exploitation. Given the uneven distribution of "naturally occurring" resources across the surface of the earth, bond issues and the like were what "lie behind the tendency toward equalization" within capitalism (p. 143). The tendency toward equalization is the imperative within capitalism to draw more and more of the earth's surface, and the people on it, into commodity and wage relations. It is an imperative of capitalist growth to press pre-capitalist (or here-to-for uncapitalized) regions, societies, and portions of social life "into the service of capital" and to subjugate them "through the world market to the wage relation" (p. 143).

But this is only half the equation. The other half is the equally strong tendency – and imperative – toward differentiation. While "deeply interwoven [with] remnants from earlier nature-based patterns

of differentiation" (e.g. localized power sources such as waterfalls, varied soil fertilities and climate conditions, mineral-rich geological strata, etc.), capitalist differentiation "involves the progressive division of labor at various scales, the spatial centralization of capital in some places at the expense of others, the evolution of a spatially differentiated pattern of wage rates, the development of a ground rent surface that is markedly uneven over space, class differences, and so forth" (Smith 1982a, 144). The drive toward differentiation in capitalism is just as powerful, and just as necessary, as the drive toward equalization, and it was just this dialectic that was at the root of spatially uneven development, both as a theoretical proposition and in its on-the-ground patterns. The dialectic of equalization and differentiation was the centerpiece of Neil's theory of uneven development – and the *point* of his theories of the production of nature and space – as he promulgated it first in his PhD dissertation (Smith 1982c) and then shortly thereafter in his first major, and perhaps most theoretically important, book, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (1984c).

Even before he finished his dissertation (and according to Harvey, pretty much even before he really started it), Neil landed a job in the geography department at Columbia University. At the time, Harvey was travelling regularly to Yale University. He would meet Neil at Penn Station in New York on his way north to pick up a chapter. On the way back to Baltimore they would meet again to discuss his work. Harvey was taken somewhat by surprise by the centrality – and the length – of the arguments about nature, since he thought Neil was writing a dissertation about gentrification (which in the end occupies a relatively small portion of the work). Neil worked furiously, late at night, often with a beer in hand (and his cat Leon working hard to distract him), even as he prepared and taught his classes and began to seek out political allies and to understand the dynamics of gentrification in his newly adopted New York, especially in its incipient form in Harlem and around Columbia University (Schaffer and Smith 1986). The resulting dissertation – though prefigured by his published work on gentrification and the

production of nature – is a remarkable work, and it was quickly published by Blackwell with few substantive changes (chapter 4 of the dissertation was broken in two).

Political Geographies

Smith and O'Keefe's invocation of Isaiah Bowman in the midst of their arguments about the production of nature was not accidental. During his years at Hopkins Neil had become fascinated – obsessed, really – with Bowman and his role both in Geography and in the construction of American imperialism. Or more generally, and as he put it later, *Uneven Development* (and therefore his dissertation) "involve[d] a tight dialectic between historical geography and the history of geographical thought" (Smith 2011, 262). This was true of all his work. Not only was the battle for ideas too important to be left to others, but the history of battles for ideas could not be separated from the exercise of geopolitical power (at whatever scale): the dialectic was tight indeed. Throughout his dissertation, as with so much of his work, Neil was especially concerned with contesting idealist (or as he sometimes put it, "metaphysical") approaches which he saw as the "hallmark of bourgeois ideology" (Smith 1982c, 200) and especially of much human geography in the 20th century. It was not merely that idealist or metaphysical accounts were wrong; rather it was that such accounts accorded with, and were put to use in the service of, particular exercises of power. Bowman's life and work, Neil quickly intuited, provided a vital window into this tight dialectic.[4]

The study of Bowman presented Neil with a problem. He was too young. Bowman had stipulated that his papers – housed in the archives of Johns Hopkins University – were to be open only to scholars over the age of 40. Neil was fifteen years shy. Harvey provided cover, claiming the project was

[4] Of course neither Neil's fascination with Bowman nor his interest in linking history of ideas to historical geographies—and to power – arose somehow *sui generis*. Neil specifically credits Alan Werrity at St. Andrews for opening his eyes to the potential of disciplinary history (Smith 2003, xxiv), and David Harvey had of course long been interested this relationship (Harvey 1969). As Neil was beginning to pursue Bowman, Harvey (1983) was simultaneously reconsidering the life and persecution of Owen Lattimore as well as entering his brief for a more thoroughly materialist historical geography as the centerpiece of all human geography (Harvey 1984).

his and that Neil was merely his research assistant (Smith 2003, xxiii); apparently the librarians figured out the truth early on, but turned a blind eye (other papers were held in the archives of the American Geographical Society and were less restricted).[5] Neil's goals in this research were, at first, a bit inchoate. But as he quickly found, through Bowman's life a new, critical story of the discipline's development in the 20th century could be told, one that (as he later put it) was less defensive, for "defensive history admits no lessons from the past, no sense of where the present is leading, and no understanding of how we ourselves might help to fashion the future" (Smith 1987a, 156).[6] More pointedly, Bowman's life and work offered sharp insight into not just our disciplinary history, but how that history, which was thoroughly social and political, was intertwined with the history of America's growing imperialism of the 20th century and particularly the new, increasingly geo-economic form that imperial power was beginning to take (Smith 1984b, 1986a).

He also found, in Bowman's papers, especially those held at Hopkins, rich insight into the closing of Harvard's geography department in 1948, an episode that had long troubled American geographers and had particular relevance during the 1980s when a fresh spate of department closings was coursing through the elite academy, including closings at Chicago, Northwestern, and Neil's own new academic home, Columbia. Neil had joined the Columbia faculty at a moment of weakness and threat. While the retirement of former department chair William Hance had made it possible to hire two new faculty members at the outset of the 1980s (first Sarah McLafferty in 1980, then Neil two years later), the department was institutionally weak, considered intellectually marginal within the larger campus

[5] Over the course of his research on Bowman, Neil befriended Bowman's son, Robert, and through him gained access to a rich trove of then-privately held papers that were central to the major book he later wrote. The Robert Bowman collection was later integrated into the Bowman papers at Hopkins.

[6] Neil was often eviscerating in his judgment of the "official" history of our discipline, and of its official historians. In his Rutgers class on the History of Geography at the end of the 1980s, he rarely let an opportunity pass to comment on what he saw as the intellectual bankruptcy of geography's disciplinary history. In print such evisceration – bordering on ridicule – was typically made more subtly, for example: "A full descriptive list of [Bowman's] achievements, honours and positions would be article length and an annotated list book length (Martin, 1980)" (Smith 1986a, 70). The lesson Neil sought to teach in his histories of geography, that defensiveness is self-defeating, has not been appreciated by all (e.g. Dobson 2012).

community, and academically adrift. By 1986 it had been closed, with senior faculty reassigned, McLafferty's tenure left to languish, and Neil's contract not renewed (Porter 2002). In private, and sometimes in public, Neil was excoriating in his assessment of the role of senior faculty members at Columbia. But mostly he directed his energy to his research, both ongoing research into uneven development and gentrification (Smith 1984a, 1986b, 1986d, Smith and LeFaivre 1984, Schaffer and Smith 1986, Smith and Williams 1986) and his examination of Bowman (Smith 1984b, 1986a): this was an enormously productive time in Neil's career, and one hardly limited to straight-ahead academic work either (see, http://vimeo.com/50446009). There was rarely a battle for ideas that Neil stepped back from. For him the production of knowledge was political, and politically vital, through and through (Smith 1986c, 1987b, 1987c, 1987d, 1987e, 1987f, 1988a, 1988d). Indeed sometimes it could seem like he was in one long fight with his intellectual and political opponents, a fight that both shaped his work and in which he would give little or no ground.

It was a fight that he took right to his colleagues too. With the closing of the geography department at Columbia, Neil found a position as an assistant professor in the Department of Geography at Rutgers University, where he would stay until 2000. He was tenured and promoted to Associate Professor in 1988 and very quickly to full Professor in 1990 (at a time when he was being actively recruited by other universities). He served as department chair for three years in the early 1990s. Rutgers afforded Neil greater opportunities for graduate teaching and advising than he had available in his few years at Columbia, and sometimes it felt like he was waging his struggle against his colleagues through some of us who were his advisees. One battleground was over the history of the discipline. Neil's *Annals* article on the elimination of geography at Harvard (Smith 1987a) landed in departmental mailboxes in early summer 1987, just as Neil was completing his first year at Rutgers. His deeply researched analysis, which combined archival work at Hopkins, Harvard, in the papers held by Bowman's son Robert and elsewhere, together with dozens of interviews with geographers active in the

discipline – amusing and horrifying unpublished details of some of which he enjoyed regaling to anyone who would listen at parties – sought to clear away forty years of what he saw as mythmaking around the episode, as well as to provide a better, more materialist and contextual history of the discipline. It's a rich and impressive account, and one that does not pull punches. It provoked immediate and strong reactions, both in formal venues – including a large section of responses published in the Annals several months later – and informal ones, like the hallways of innumerable geography departments and conference hotels and "dozens" (Smith 1988a) of letters sent directly to him.[7] Passions ran high, given the departmental closings of the 1980s.

He argued for a history of geography that was not "descriptive, dull, and defensive," which in a set of comments aimed sharply if not explicitly (by name) at the keepers of geography's official history he argued it heretofore had largely been (Smith 1988a). "The 'history of geographic thought,' as it is traditionally called," he argued (1988a, 159) "should by any and all standards be one of the most intellectually stimulating branches of the discipline. Instead it is the most retarded, verging on antiquarianism." For Neil, the question of "why geography was so vulnerable in the first place" (Smith 1987a, 167) at the time of Harvard's closing (and at the time of his writing), was indeed intellectually stimulating, given the centrality of *particular* geographical visions that he argued were at the heart of "the short American century" (Smith 1988d), an American century that had been announced by *Life*'s Henry Luce only seven years before Harvard closed its department. It was, therefore, also a politically important question. To reduce the Harvard history, as had often happened in the oral lore, to a matter of personalities – Whittlesey's sexual orientation or his "quisling" behavior; the malign influence of explorer-dilettante Alexander Hamilton Rice; hostile deans, provosts, and presidents; Bowman himself – was to ignore the determinative *context* and intellectual-political history within which these personalities operated, as well as geography's own intellectual or theoretical shortcomings at

[7] A file I found in Neil's office in late September, 2013 indicates that he was not exaggerating. It's fat with correspondence over this article.

midcentury. It downplayed geography's own ongoing inability to define itself, its frequent retreat into what Glick (1983) called the "unity myth": geography as the great synthesizer. To call geography a "unifier" of social and natural science, Neil thought, was more than to invoke a shibboleth; it was to fail to come to terms with, and to define, geography's place within the intellectual division of labor (and thus leave it open for others' taking). Much of the blame for this failure could be placed on the shoulders of midcentury geographers, but Neil thought that was too easy an answer too, for it failed to understand how weak and uncritical geographical knowledge served the aims of America's developing geo*economic* empire, or what Bowman in 1940 called "*lebensraum* for all" – a new economic order in which (in Neil's words) "all were equal but America was more equal than others by virtue of its economic prowess" (Smith 1988d, 38-39). The history of geography thus needed to quit being descriptive, dull, and defensive; instead "history of geography must before all else be critical, and it must be contextual" (Smith 1988a, 162).

This was a lesson many in geography seemed unprepared to learn, not least colleagues in Neil's own department, some of whom were quite vocal in their displeasure. The point was not to rehash this history, they felt, but to get geography back at Harvard and make it a respectable university discipline again (after all Neil had ended his analysis, "Formally, the question of geography at Harvard remains unresolved" [Smith 1987a, 170]); and the way to do that was to assert geography's centrality to knowledge, its role as the great unifier of human and physical analyses. Neil was dismissive – vocally disdaining – of such arguments; they riled him no end. He pushed back. Some of us students were caught in the middle as the battle raged in the context of our comprehensive exam questions and in other venues. Neil could be dismissive of those he disagreed with and especially of those whose ideas he thought weak or foolish, and he rarely reserved such judgments when students were in earshot. His faith in the power of critical and contextual history – and at this point especially in his own ideas – was so strong he thought it the height of folly to think that intradepartmental fights could be detrimental to

either the field's institutional security or to the learning and working environment for students in the department. He never realized how uncomfortable it could make us graduate students in the department, especially since any successful grad student needs allies in the faculty across a department. He never thought about (or certainly never admitted to me) how the force of his own ideas and opinions could undermine the efforts and learning of students he deeply supported, and indeed loved.

And he supported and loved his students. One of the contradictions that defined Neil's life was how he could be so fierce and uncompromising in intellectual and political debate, so scathing of people and ideas that he did not approve of or thought foolish, and at the very same time so generous to friends and students even when he did not entirely agree with them or their projects – even thought they might be fool's errands. The support came in many forms: critical and thorough commentary on papers and chapters (the blow of which was often softened by a beer or a meal), promotion of student work around campus and in the discipline (including introductions to our academic heroes), raucous all-night dinner parties (first at his apartment in Harlem, and then in Briavel Holcomb's expropriated house in Highland Park, NJ – Bria usually retiring to her room in the attic hours before Neil was ready to pack it in), and mostly through an appropriate mix of encouragement and benign neglect when we were struggling with our dissertations and trying to find our own voices. The love came in many forms too. For me, it was brotherly in the best sense of that term. But for some women in the department it was often decidedly uncomfortable, tinged all-too-often with an unmistakable sexual desire, the inappropriateness of which he understood (or so he once told me while I was still a student) but which he seemed incapable of adequately controlling. It tinged his relationship with students and colleagues, especially since (it later became clear to some of us) reciprocated desire was central to his understanding of his own *intellectual* self-worth. It was, remarkably, one way he proved to himself the potency of his *ideas*, especially in later years when he began to doubt whether he still had the intellectual chops that had so thoroughly defined his existence.

Revanchism

Those intellectual chops were very much in evidence at the end of the 1980s. Neil's study of Bowman and the mid-twentieth century history of geography led to a contribution to the AAG volume dedicated to reflecting on the lasting importance of Richard Hartshorne's *The Nature of Geography* on the 50th anniversary of its publication. In a philosophically and politically sophisticated argument, Neil used a close reading of *The Nature* to take aim at four intertwined and mutually supportive tendencies that in his view marked contemporary geography as much as the geography Hartshorne worked so hard to codify: the discipline's philosophical idealism; its political conservativism; its theoretical isolationism; and its blind ontological shakiness. It's easy to remember the sheer mischievous glee that accompanied Neil's discovery that the "geographical individual" upon which the whole edifice of *The Nature* was built was the "farm," and his almost malicious description – made in his History of Geography class if not explicitly in the pages of his chapter – of Hartshorne riding out Kristallnacht in Vienna, concerned about Nazi misappropriation of "true" geography, thereby illegitimately politicizing it, but oblivious of the real political geography crashing all around him. But what comes through the most in Neil's analysis is its sheer intellectual virtuosity, a technical mastery of ideas and of writing that comes together to form a critique of a work and a field that is at once wide-ranging and deep (Smith 1989b). Smith accuses Hartshorne as being a quintessential neo-Kantian in that Hartshorne's Kantianism "goes beyond" Kant himself in positing a philosophical idealism in which there is *no* "thing-in-itself" to which geographical concepts refer; "regions" in Hartshorne's system are entirely mental constructions. The *hiatus irrationalis* is total; "regions are 'not inherent in the world'" (Smith 1989b, 103, quoting Hartshorne 1961 ed. 362). The problem was that "Hartshorne's neo-Kantian idealism justified and indeed promoted the sterility of a regional concept and approach at precisely the time when the real-world landscapes were being dramatically restructured by the Depression, World War II, the Cold War and the Pax Americana,

postwar economic expansion, suburbanization and the professionalization of urban planning. … [O]ne could hardly tred [sic] further from contemporary events than a neo-Kantian discourse on ideal regions. The positivist revolt of the 1950s and 1960s, initiated in part by Schaefer's [1953] paper, reacted precisely to this internal sterility and external irrelevance" (pp. 103-104) – a reaction that came too late for landscape, which, Neil argued, was "assassinated" by Hartshorne, an assassination that instigated "a momentous wrong-turn which not only contributed to geography's arcane isolation but, in an ironic twist, abetted the mid-century decline of regional geography. Perhaps no other aspect of geography would have benefitted as much from a more sophisticated conception of landscape" (p. 109).

Part of Neil's animus towards Hartshornian idealism, especially in relation to the theorization of regions, is that he was at the same time involved in a two-sided reconsideration of regionalism and especially processes of regionalization which he understood to be an ineluctably materialist process. Neil agreed with Philip Cooke's (1985) assertion that regions were "class practices," with "each national piece in the world jigsaw puzzle … internally divided into coherent subnational 'production platforms' some more developed than others, some producing for export while others produced for local or national consumption. … The regionalization of the national economies of Western Europe and North America was, therefore, an integral part of the emergence of distinct national patches in the world system" (Smith and Dennis 1987, 160-161). Nation-states emerged not only out of "political struggles" – especially war – but also and crucially "as a geographical solution to their contradictory obligations to mutual cooperation and competition" of capitalist enterprises (Smith and Dennis 1987, 160), a theme first developed in *Uneven Development*, but here taken further by showing how subnational and supranational regionalization processes were dialectically entwined with the governance of the economy at the nation-state scale. Indeed, the wholesale economic restructuring in the global economy that followed the crises of the early 1970s "put the regional question back on the agenda" (Smith 1988c, 141-142; see also 1988b). Regions were not some mere ordering device made up by geographers, not

some methodological convenience, and certainly not merely a congeries of elements (like farms), but dynamic, structured, dialectical and especially *produced* extents or containers of economic, political, and social processes. The rise of competition among places, which many took to signal a new localism, did not thereby "preclude" (Smith 1988c, 144) the need to understand the regional integration of such places – competition always sits in dialectical tension with cooperation in capitalism, and this is as true geographically as it is economically – rather it made such understanding all the more imperative. What was at work, with the economic restructuring of the capitalist political economy in the 1980s, was a "*compound restructuring*" (Smith 1988c, 149, emphasis in original) and therefore had to be understood as a thoroughgoing restructuring of geographical scale, in which (against a new kind of "left localism" he deplored) "a global vision is vital" but only if it is developed in relation to the struggle to "understand the current international restructuring of regional organization and experience at a scale well beyond the local" (Smith 1988c, 151).

Neil's immediate target was the "new localism" that seemed to be taking British economic geography by storm, but his larger sights were set on the theorization of the production of geographic scale itself. Already a key theme in the first edition of *Uneven Development*, Neil took the opportunity of that book's republication in 1990 to write a significant "Afterword" that brought together a set of scattered and often speculative ideas on scale into a more rigorous theorization. After a set of ruminations on the discovery of "deep time" by geologists that structured all other geological time-scales, on the 20th century development of a concept of "deep space" by physicists, as well as on the "largely peaceful revolution of below" of 1989 Eastern Europe – which "gives additional richness to the notion of deep space" (Smith 1990b, 161) – Smith set out a crucial distinction between metaphorical and material space,[8] arguing that it has been through the latter that "the reassertion of space in critical social theory" (Soja 1989) has primarily been advanced. The danger, here, Smith argued (following

[8] A similar distinction about space itself would later reappear in an important article examining the "spatial turn" in social sciences and cultural studies co-authored with Cindi Katz (Smith and Katz 1993).

others – including some broad hints from Foucault) was that live metaphors of space tended to refer to an implicitly dead or inert material space: "space serves to animate time, to imbue time with a life that can be gauged, measured, appreciated against the deadness of space. Whatever the power of spatial metaphors to reveal the fragmented unity of the contemporary world, they work precisely by reinforcing the deadness of space and therefore by denying us the special concepts appropriate for *analysing* that world" (Smith 1990b, 169, original emphasis). This is a continuation of Neil's complaint against Hartshorne's idealism but now focused in a different direction: not the conservative idealism of old-school regional geography, but the leftist idealism of what we would now call the post-structuralism and its growing hold on critical theory. Drawing on, and critically analyzing Lefebvre's *Production of Space* (the English translation was still forthcoming as Neil wrote),[9] Neil argues that there is a crying need for a theorization of "the *production of scale*" as well as "the politics of scale" because "scale is as much the project of opposition as it is the project of capital" – that is *scale itself* is produced through ongoing struggle. "Scale, in fact, is the most elemental form of spatial differentiation, from the demarcation of the home to that of the globe" (Smith 1990b, 172-173).

To some degree Neil's recognition of the oppositional politics of scale was forced on him – from three directions. In 1988, Andrew Herod had come to Rutgers as a PhD student. Against what he saw as the capital-centrism of Smith (and Harvey's) work on the geography of capitalism, Herod sought to develop what he later termed "labor geography" (cf. Herod 2001). As part of this project he set out to show how workers themselves produced scale. Focusing on strikes and other actions by longshore workers on the east coast of the US, Herod showed how workers, through their struggles, made not just the spaces, but the spatial extents of their work and home lives – if not under conditions of their own choosing, to use the Marxian cliché – reworking the scalar geography of capitalism at the same time. The production of scale was not a one way street running from capital to everyday life, but a two-way

[9] Lefebvre, Neil (Smith 1990b, 172) asserted, "never escapes the terrain of philosophical critique" and thus his project remained hobbled by a certain Hegelian idealism.

struggle over the conditions of production and reproduction (Herod 1991, 1992). Neil sometimes thought Herod bent the stick too far in the direction of worker power but he himself bent his own arguments about the production of scale to meet Herod's challenge, creating in the process a richer sense of the dialectics at work in scale production. At the same time Neil's growing intellectual and personal entwinement with Cindi Katz led him to take much more seriously than he had hitherto the theorization of social reproduction: "Although I originally conceived of an urban scale at the lower end of this spectrum of geographical space, I would now want to revise this. First I would prefer to discuss 'the local' rather than 'the urban' for the obvious reason that it includes the rural production of space. Second I would add the scale of the home in which the relations of social reproduction and gender construction determine the boundaries of internal differences" (Smith 1990b, 198, fn 15). The site of the household was a space that capital no doubt penetrated and at least partially colonized, but it was also a space of far broader and vitally important struggles and social relations that actively shaped the scales at which social life was lived. Finally, ongoing struggles over gentrification in New York, and especially the Tompkins Square (Police) Riots of 1988, proved to Neil the importance of scale "in the struggle to control space." The struggle against gentrification and for the rights of homeless people:

> began as a struggle over the park but its scale expanded geographically until it defined the whole neighbourhood *as part of the political expansion of struggle* to include different groups and kinds of organizing as well as different locations. It suggests that a spatial politics not only puts into practice the metaphor that events "take place," but that the true contest concerns the locus of the power to determine the scale of the struggle: who defines the place to be taken … and its boundaries. It also suggests that successful struggles against abstract space proceed by "jumping scales." By organizing the fractal spaces at one scale into a coherent, connected place, struggles elevate themselves to the next scale up the hierarchy. Hence the importance of

> understanding the production of space as the production of a nested hierarchy of scales within the global scale, and how these hierarchies are constructed (Smith 1990b, 174-175).

These three influences led Neil to the development of a set of ideas – perhaps "jumping scale" foremost among them – that would be highly influential in human geography. But, as we will see, the idea of "jumping scales," at least as it was often deployed by geographers tended at the same time to obfuscate the central argument Neil wanted to advance: that geographical scale was an *on-going* social and material production. Scale was an ossification of social and economic relations, to be sure – that was its material force – but, like the "built environment" in capitalism (that Harvey was doing so much to theorize), it was also constantly being revolutionized: this was a central dialectic of the *geography* of capitalism.

Because geographical scale – and geographical space – was at once constantly being ossified and constantly being revolutionized, *places* often seemed to be highly precarious. Smith's arguments against the turn to locality in much human geography of the 1980s was not that understanding competition among localities was not important, but rather that it was not sufficient. The theory of the production of scale was meant to address this insufficiency. At the same time, however, the precariousness, and the new forced-competitiveness of places, meant that a simultaneous focus on the specificity of struggles in place was important. The Tompkins Square Park struggles made this abundantly clear to Neil: his general arguments about the logic of gentrification – and its ideological justification – hit home with special force in New York's Lower East Side. The piece of writing during this period of which he was most proud, therefore, was "Tompkins Square Park: Riots, Rents, and Redskins" (1989c) not because it was theoretically groundbreaking – it was derivative of much of his previous work on gentrification – but because it was published in *The Portable Lower East Side*, an arts/activism journal, fairly widely available across the city in progressive venues. He figured that his combined ideology critique – of the frontier ideology through which gentrification was made heroic to

its perpetrators – and restatement of the rent gap thesis appearing in this venue would not just help activists understand what they were fighting, but also catalyze new struggles against the wave of gentrification breaking over the neighborhood. The battle for ideas that Neil was so passionate about could here be sutured to ongoing battles for space itself. Several years after being booted out of the ISO, he saw the opportunity for a new kind of political involvement.

There is no doubt that Neil's analysis of the Lower East Side was influential outside the academy, among anti-gentrification activists, but it was also the case that the true impact of his analysis of the rent gap in activist circles was not felt until many years later, when by the 2000s his work had become required reading in many urban-activist circles influencing strategy.[10] But that influence was less the result of the *Portable Lower East Side* article than its reworking in the context of his 1996 book *The New Urban Frontier*. *The New Urban Frontier* brings together and reworks the ideas about gentrification Neil had been developing since his undergraduate thesis, but now couched them in a deeper *cultural* critique, a critique of a new urban order that he names "revanchist."

Revanchism – revenge – in Neil's early usage (1996a, 1996c, 1996g) signals the effort by the upper classes to "take back" or "reclaim" the city, but in its rendering in *New Urban Frontier* it takes on certain urgency:

> The revanchist city represents a reaction to urbanism defined by recurrent waves of unremitting danger and brutality fueled by venal and uncontrolled passion. It is a place, in fact, where the reproduction of social relations has gone stupefyingly wrong (Katz 1991), but where the response is a virulent reassertion of many of the same oppressions and prescriptions that created the problem in the first place (Smith 1996e, 212).

[10] Around this time, Neil's work started attracting a wider audience, outside the confines of geography and urban theory, particularly among artists. Both his theorizations of the production of nature and of gentrification began to make fairly broad inroads into the critical art literature (see Smith 1989a; 1990a; 1991a; 1996f; 1996g).

Reclamation is advanced through repression. The bellwether of the revanchist city were homeless people (Smith 1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1996f), but also targeted were people of color, youth, queers, and so many others who did not fit the model of a hyper-yuppified city. *Policing* became the primary function of city government (Smith 1998b; Smith and Katz 1992). Drawing on the work of his student (and mentor) Ruth Wilson Gilmore (1994), Smith (1996e, 213) argued that "crime in particular had become a central marker of the revanchist city, the more so as the fears and realities of crime are desynchronized." In particular, "two events on different coasts, equally coded by race and nationalism entwined with class and gender, crystallized the emerging revanchism of the American city at the dawn of the 1990s:" the 1991 Los Angeles uprisings and the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. Neil plays the argument out through a whole series of racially charged shootings and terrorist events in the 1990s to argue that it is a *global* imaginary of terror that comes to roost in the streets, and the result is a "revengeful reaction … to a failed urban optimism at the end of the 1980s" (Smith 1996e, 217) as well as the "bankruptcy of liberal homeless policy … [which was] obvious at the national level during the 1980s," but which "was being played out at the local level" by the end of that decade (Smith 1996e, 223). As conservative commentators were wont to claim, liberal compassion seemed only to exacerbate the problem. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's zero-tolerance, quality of life campaign was the result. "The rallying cry of the revanchist city," Neil concluded:

> might well be: "Who lost the city? And on whom is revenge to be exacted?" Expressed in the physical, legal and rhetorical campaigns against scapegoats, identified in terms of class, race, gender, nationality, sexual preference, this reaction scripts everyday life, political administration and media representations of the contemporary US city with increasing intensity. The revanchist city is, to be sure, a dual and divided city of wealth and poverty…. But it is more. It is a divided city where the victors are increasingly defensive of their privilege, such as it is, and increasingly vicious defending it. The revanchist city is more than the dual city, in race and class

> terms. The benign neglect of "the other half," so dominant in liberal rhetoric of the 1950s and 1960s, has been superseded by a more active viciousness that attempts to criminalize a whole range of "behavior," individually defined, and to blame the failure of post-1968 urban policy on the populations it was supposed to assist (Smith 1996e, 227).

Naming the city of the 1990s the "revanchist city" struck an immediate chord and for many revanchism became a touchstone of urban theorizing – as well as a target to be attacked by those who read the city rather differently (e.g. Cloke, May, and Johnsen 2010).

Satire, Satan, and Sausages

The revanchism that marked the 1990s was not confined to the city. Neil saw the 1991 Gulf War as a similar act of revenge. The war was also (as he later put it in retrospect) part of an "endgame" of American globalism, the empire of American lebensraum (Smith 2005d). Neil's interest in the construction of American lebensraum and its links to the production of geographical knowledge had not abated. The growing hegemony of GIS in geography, he thought, had to be understood in relation to the deployment of geographic technology in the Gulf War (Smith 1992c), and since "the implosion of the Soviet and related regimes at the end of the cold war [had] led to a dramatic reconfiguration of geoeconomic and geopolitical relations at the global" (Smith 1994, 491), the need to understand the "tight dialectic" between geographical thought and geographical practice – "the practical intertwining of the constructed historical geography of empire and the history of geography *as a practice of* empire" (Smith 1994, 493) – was more important than ever. Slowly and often on the back burner, then, Neil continued with his studies of Bowman and his geoarcheology of American Empire. He did not publish anything directly on Bowman during this time, though snippets of his research appeared here and there (e.g. Smith 1994).

He focused instead, at least in part, on institution building and through that helping to develop a broad interdisciplinary turn to a spatialized social theory. His first foray in this direction was his involvement with, and eventual co-directorship of, the Center for the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture at Rutgers University, which became his main intellectual home for much of the 1990s. Besides opening up fellowship opportunities at CCACC for geography PhD students, Neil helped shape an exciting and incisive interdisciplinary milieu, and through that to extend his own reach into main precincts of then regnant cultural studies, joining, for example, the *Social Text* editorial collective (based at CCACC), contributing to *Public Culture*, and, on campus, providing and insistent voice that cultural theory had to be grounded in material reality and could not long survive without a solid political-economic foundation. At the same time, he was asked by Gerry Pratt to become a co-editor of *Society and Space*, to which he had frequently contributed, but which he also feared represented social-theoretical tendencies in human geography that were, at base, problematic and often reactionary, a problem that faced gentrification theory too: "The theory itself is being gentrified, so to speak" as "cultural analyses" came to dominate (Smith 1995a, 126) and the conservative hegemony of postmodernism was only beginning to show its cracks. From his editor's chair at *Society and Space* Neil not only shaped the journal (and critical theoretical discourse in geography) through the submissions he encouraged and the papers he passed on for publication, but also in regular short interventions in the editorial pages. Understanding that Pratt's invitation was a crucial move in helping to bridge some of the important divides within critical, leftist geography, Neil often phrased his interventions in a language of rapprochement (Smith 1995b), or if not that, than in high satire (Smith 1996b). As Pratt (2004, 1) put it a number of years later in thanking Neil for his service as editor, she, like many, "especially valued Neil's unswerving commitment to anti-imperialist Marxism, most playfully articulated in his editorial on sleep, in which he took on what he saw as a debilitating cultural politics, one that views almost every – often individualized – activity as counterhegemonic and transgressive. That this provoked further

serious (and not so serious) discussions of sleep, death, Lacan, and Derrida is perhaps one curious instance of *Society and Space* as a contradictory space!" – a space that in part through Neil's interventions was recognized in one history of architectural and urban discourse as being one of the few places "where divergent interpretations of the relations between 'society and space' … appear in one place" Crysler (2003, 177 in Pratt 2004, 1).[11]

Neil voiced his anti-imperialist Marxism in a widening sphere of disciplines and to a widening sphere of movements in the 1990s, often with gusto, even as he admitted to being "disheartened" at how quickly the revolts of Eastern Europe were coopted into a particularly raw neoliberal capitalism and to being "immobilized by Bush's villainous war for a new world order, and the ease with which millions in the advanced capitalist countries backed the Empire over the Third World – all this at the cost of perhaps a quarter million Iraqi lives" (Smith 1991b, 407). He seemed to have meant "immobilization" literally – not seeing much hope in the large march on Washington that preceded the invasion of Iraq, which he did not join – for he was certainly not deterred in his analysis, seeing the first Gulf War ("an unprecedented ecocide," [Smith 1997]) as a central part of the new kind of Imperialism the US was seeking to construct (if bumblingly). His co-edited *Geography and Empire* (Godlewska and Smith 1994) sought to put the critical analysis of empires and imperialism at the center of the history of geography, consolidating a range of research and developing a means of showing, as Neil put it in a review article, "the complicity of the discipline itself with empire" (Smith 1994, 491). Nor was contemporary empire building disconnected from globalization, even as the latter reworked the former: "Quite different from the colony-led imperialism that ushered in the twentieth century," Neil wrote (Smith 1997, 182),

> the globalization of culture and capital at the end of the century takes place not via the dictates of colonial administrations, colonial trade preferences, or even the imminent threat of military

[11] Neil's relations with the editors, and especially the publisher, of *Society and Space* were not always amicable, nor his writing necessarily sly, as the publisher's note in Smith (1987e, 380) makes abundantly clear. There are times when Neil simple would not bend his politics to fit the perceived norms of decorum in scholarly debate.

> retribution for noncooperation. The latter has not evaporated, of course, as Grenada, Panama, Haiti, Libya, and Iraq all found out in the last two decades of the century, but even in the case of Iraq, the military strategy was a quite temporary means of ensuring adherence to the "new world order." What was new was the unprecedented extent to which imperial exploitation no longer emanated first and foremost from political and military control but, rather, resulted from the unfettered operation of the global market itself.

Globalization, rooted in an inevitable uneven development, produced truly "satanic geographies" (Smith 1997). Neil pronounced himself wary of making too tight a conceptual link between capital and Satan. Part of his reason for making the connection at all was rhetorical: not only the fatwa against Salman Rushdie for having written *Satanic Verses* – and Rushdie's subsequent deification in the Western media – but Rushdie's scripting of Mahound (Muhammad) as a "businessman turned prophet" seemed deeply apposite of the post-Thatcher, post-Reagan neoliberal, global Zeitgeist-scripted-as-culture-war. But the crucial point was this: "The difference between Satan and capital, of course, is that however liquid the empire of global capital may be, accumulation cannot proceed without capital dropping from the sky, alighting on the land, and taking at least for a time some fixed form, a space to rest the sole of its foot upon." (By contrast, Satan was, in the words of Defoe, "confined to a vagabond, wondering, unsettled condition … without any certain abode.") "And in its fixity, capital is at its most vulnerable. Labor, by contrast, will be at its strongest when international organization can match the fluidity and global reach of capital" (Smith 1997, 189). Satanic geographies – which took many forms, including the revanchist city as well as the new empire of globalization – had to be confronted by expanding the scale of struggle, matching the global reach of capital.

Neil saw the development of the International Critical Geography Group as a very small, but important, step in expanding oppositional scale among critical and radical geographers. Hatched largely by students and faculty at Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia, the first ICG

(and Neil insisted on calling it, even as others preferred ICGG) conference brought together 300 activists and academics from 30 countries who committed themselves to developing an organization that would "encourage research and activism that supports, reports on, and contributes to political struggles seeking egalitarian social transformation and justice" (Smith and Desbiens 1999, 42; see Katz 1998). Since "existing national geographical societies are increasingly captured by a corporate notion of the discipline's future that aligns with rather than challenges a global neoliberalism" (Smith and Desbiens 1999, 42), the ICG sought to mobilize "critical geography" in order "to galvanize a common front where a broad range of radical critiques could not only respond to the backlash from within the discipline but thrive as a place where new ideas and political engagements could be discussed, debated and developed" (Smith 2005b, 890; see also Smith 2000c). Especially, he saw the ICG as a forum where the truism that "another world is possible," a slogan popularized by the World Social Forum movement, could be worked towards a reality.

Neil was not entirely comfortable with the term "critical." Within the AAG he argued against renaming the Socialist Geography Specialty Group the Critical Geography Specialty Group or even the Socialist and Critical Geography Specialty Group because he found, in that context, "critical" to be an evasion or evacuation of political content and orientation. But within an international context where specific national trajectories had to be considered, where, for example, "Socialist" had a very different political valence in post-state-socialist Hungary or "marching-to-the-market" China (to say nothing of newly handed-over Hong Kong), the moniker "critical" gestured towards "a broad group identity for scholars and activists committed to a radical restructuring of the societies we live in: capitalism, heteronormativity, patriarchy, imperialism, racism, and many other forms of oppression," each of which "represent[ed] the interlaced targets of this geographical critique" (Smith 2005b, 890). Neil's commitment to the ICG, as it grew and struggled to perpetuate itself in a new, non-hierarchical way, while also somehow finding the wherewithal to hold conferences in Taegu, Békéscsaba, Mexico city,

Mumbai, and Frankfurt, was precisely that it *tried* to "challenges the hierarchies of our own academic labour" (Smith 2005b, 890), especially international ones where Anglophonic hegemony obscures so much.

The formation of the ICG, and his own work in it, gave Neil a tremendous sense of political and intellectual optimism. That this was as much or more an optimism of the will than an optimism of the intellect gave it all the more power. Even when we knew this optimism was *performed*, it was a political act that persuaded.

The tight dialectic, this time between activist and academic work, became even tighter when Neil moved from Rutgers to the Graduate Center (GC) of the City University of New York in 2000. Named a Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Geography, Neil was given the space, money, and institutional support needed to create the interdisciplinary Center for Place, Culture, and Politics (CPCP) which quickly became not just a vibrant interdisciplinary space within the GC, but especially a vital link between urban activists in New York and their comrades in the academy. His years at CCACC had cemented an already strong predisposition towards an expansive notion of interdisciplinarity – one based especially in the confrontation of good ideas one against the other (rather than some top-down imposition of a *project* as it is often conceived by university administrators, a project that is often "corporatist" – or at least in the service of global capital and its imperial state apparatuses – in form). Neil saw the CPCP as a chance to contest from within pressures towards "education [that] is increasingly vocational in the narrowest sense" (Smith 2000c, 335). Even more, since "on a daily basis we all trek into the sausage factory" that is the modern university, as Neil famously put it drawing on an equally famous line of Marx's, and since "the local branch of the sausage factory serves as an excellent target for a little political agitation" (Smith 2000c, 338), he figured the CPCP could be a place where a bit of shop-floor organizing could be done. But this was not to be shop-floor organizing that focused only on the shop – which is what the university was increasingly becoming – itself. Rather "we also have to keep

our sights focused on the larger sausage factory of global capitalism. Taking over the factory and operating it democratically is a global project we can all get behind" (Smith 2000c, 338).

The "forbidden optimism" Neil felt with the birth of the ICG, and his excitement at the retightened dialectic between activist and academic work (which was also a reworking of the dialectic between the historical geography and the history of geography) that the CPCP represented (and quickly put into practice) were only reinforced by the sudden global explosion of anti-capitalist globalization protest first in Seattle (November/December, 1999) and then in a widening arc of loosely knit, but strikingly visible, protests stretching from Bangkok to Quebec City and Washington DC, Gothenburg and Genoa to Cancun – and on to Davos – focused on the depredations of the G8 (later G20), the WTO, IMF/World Bank, NAFTA, and the Free Trade Area of the Americas, as well as the World Economic Forum where the fate of our lives was decided behind our backs but out in the open (Smith 2000a).

The optimism Neil felt politically was matched by a degree of personal fulfillment in the mid-to-late 1990s. He and Cindi Katz were married in the early part of the decade and together they bought a house in Highland Park, the backyard of which soon blossomed with buddleia and birdfeeders, tomatoes and tulips. Neil was known around the neighborhood for sneaking cuttings out of neighbors' gardens and coaxing them to life on his own small plot, as well as for his summer-long, usually losing battle against encroaching poison ivy (to which he was highly allergic). Inside the house – despite separate studies where Cindi and Neil could work – the dining room table was typically piled high with folded-over, impatiently scribbled on, half-read copies of *New Left Review*, *Society and Space*, *Antipode* and the *Annals*, stacks of back issues of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Lingua Franca*, and old *New York Times* in various states of dismemberment as Neil continued his life-long habit of clipping every article he found with any tangential relationship whatsoever to his myriad interests. The front porch, shaded by a giant Japanese maple (so big, it was later and rather spectacularly discovered, because it had

tapped its roots into the sewer outflow pipe) was for sitting with a beer and a book or sometimes meeting students.

American Empire (and the End Game of Globalization)

The optimism did not last, and neither did the sense of personal fulfillment. The move to CUNY was good professionally for Neil, but his marriage to Cindi hit a rocky stretch and dissolved in a couple of years. Neil's drinking, always prodigious, increased. After his move, Neil would joke that O'Reilly's on 35th St., a half-block from the GC was his "second office," but more and more it seemed to become his primary one. Still, his presence at the GC breathed a great deal of life into its already intellectually and politically vibrant body (Darling 2012). Then came September 11. As shocked as anyone by the awesome ferocity – and cunning – of the attack, "in the ensuing weeks Neil was superb," according to Eliza Jane Darling (2012, np), one of his students at the time. When students and colleagues began to make their way back to the GC and to the Center for Place, Culture and Politics a week after the attacks:

> Neil, and the Center's director Omar Dahbour, gave us the space to sort ourselves out – that first day especially, going one-by-one around the table, recounting our arrival stories on the coast of what seemed like a new historical epoch – but pushed us gently, eventually, to analyze, and organize. There was no smug triumphalism in Neil's take on that awful day – nor historical amnesia, nor callow bafflement, nor hopeless futility, nor cold analytical calculation. He was a solid and reassuring presence, who shared acutely in the sorrow of his beloved adopted city, but was aware from the outset of the brutal revanchism to come, and worked to prevent it (Darling 2012, np).[12]

In particular Neil sought to understand the mechanisms by which an event that was "profoundly local" as well as "obviously and quintessentially a global event" came so quickly to be "rendered a *national*

[12] For Neil's own anguished, but reflective, politically sharp, and quite humble, response to the attacks in the very first days after see the much republished "Ashes and Aftermath" (Smith 2001a, 2002a, 2002b).

'tragedy'," since "there was little that was automatically national in the scale of these two local attacks" (Smith 2001b, 631, see also 2002f). The national scale – and nationalism – quickly became hegemonic in the U.S. discourse (and government practices) following September 11, but it was contradictory. As Neil argued, the rapid erasure of the attack on the Pentagon from media, state, popular, and even military discussion of the attacks posed a quandary: "on the one hand, the Pentagon attack provides a vital piece of the puzzle for building a case about an 'attack on America,' since targeting the WTC alone could have many other meanings; yet, on the other hand, the deliberate, devastating crash of a commercial jet into the headquarters of a global military power demonstrates the stunning vulnerability of precisely that national power" (Smith 2001b, 632).

Media complicity in scripting 9/11 as a nationalist event, and then promoting the US war on Afghanistan (often prosecuted against innocent Afghanis) both galled Neil, but also proved one of his long-standing points: that American geographical ignorance was *produced* and that it was *productive* to particular geopolitical aims: "The net effect of US press coverage was not just to neuter widespread oppositional voices, but to starch a nationalist veil of popular ignorance around the United States. Willfully as much as instinctively, the press and government have combined to immunize the US populace against the facts and images of a war carried out in the name of US citizens…" (Smith 2001b, 634). Such "fabricated ignorance" (Smith 2001b, 634) was hardly new, as Neil's studies of Bowman and mid-twentieth century American geopolitics had shown and so, despite a growing pessimism about the ability of popular movements to shift the course of American empire in the wake of 9/11, Neil rededicated himself to finishing what he always called his "big book."

American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization (2003), which had been substantially drafted before 9/11, came out less than two years later (with, whatever the real status of their relationship, a lovely dedication to Cindi: Neil very much saw this a book that he could not have written without her, and without her own important scholarship on the global and local

geographies of social reproduction – what he called "an inverse topography, in its way, of the American Empire" [Smith 2003, xxvii]). *American Empire*, which won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award for Biography,[13] is a complex – though always lucid – double narrative. On the one hand it tells the story of Bowman, his rise to prominence, his work in shaping Wilson's and Roosevelt's foreign policy and thus US global ambition, and especially his central place in framing "the equivocal role of geography in this emerging American Empire" (Smith 2003, 2). On the other, it tells the story of precisely this Empire: how it came to be constructed, how it operates on related but different principles than empires that have come before it, and how it is the vital force in shaping contemporary capitalist globalization or what Neil accurately calls a particularly American "globalism." At the same time it provided a model of the kind deeply empirical, theoretically incisive, and contextually rich history of geography that Neil had long advocated. *American Empire* was anything but dull, descriptive, and defensive. In the words of Alex Checkovich (2005, 455), writing in this history of science journal *Isis*: "Here, finally, is a monograph that places the strategies and practices of a major American geographer into a rich social context." That social context, Neil argued, was determinative of three major thrusts of American globalism – attempts to secure American *Lebensraum* – first in the wake of World War I, where Bowman was instrumental in the machinations around the Treaty of Paris; second around World War II, where Bowman helped to theorize and implement what Luce so famously called "The American Century;" and finally after the collapse of state-socialism in 1989, in which Bowman of course had no role, but the contradictory geo-economics (not solely geopolitics) of empire he helped the American elite to grasp seemed finally on the cusp of realization, and of which the second Iraq War, sliding from triumphant march on Bagdad (with Bremer forcibly disintegrating the Baathist state economy and selling its assets to American-led capital

[13] It also won the Henry Adams Book Prize of the Society of Historians in Federal Government in 2004, and was a central plank in his being awarded the Globe Award for Public Understanding of Geography from the AAG the same year.

at fire-sale prices even as he laid the legal groundwork for a new kind of neoliberal legal hegemony) to a grinding guerrilla war where America's Imperial "endgame" seemed ready to unravel (cf. Smith 2005d).

American Empire was widely reviewed, both inside and outside the academy. Outside, long reviews and essays appeared in venues ranging from the *New Left Review* and *The Nation* to the *American Conservative*, and from the *Los Angeles Times* and *In These Times* to the *Washington Times*. Inside it found equal billing, and was often the subject of essays and review forums in geography (the forum in *Political Geography* extends for nearly 30 pages), history, and even literary journals like *Raritan*.[14] (Remarkably, it does not seem to have been reviewed in the *Annals* or the *Transactions*.) The reviews record a deep as well as ranging engagement with the themes of the book, beyond what one typically finds in reviews of academic book. Appreciative, indeed admiring, of the empirical depth and for some of them of the theoretical and political ambition of *American Empire*, reviewers also do not know what to make of the book. Neil proclaimed it to not be a biography, and yet it was organized around the life and actions of Bowman, his multiple involvements and many intrigues, his central role in geography, politics, and the machinations of the Cambridge-New York-Washington elite. Reviewers faulted Neil for slighting the biographical details, especially the "inner life," of Bowman, or they were just confused by his decision not to highlight them; or they were troubled by his politics; or they imputed to him a one-sidedness that only saw evil in the American Empire and failed to see greater evils elsewhere (so much so that he was compelled to respond at one point: "I have to say that this was not a book about Stalin, actually, but a book about Isaiah Bowman and the American Empire" [Smith 2005a, 266]); or, some of them, mostly historians, were frustrated by what they saw as his overly theoretical and abstruse language (even as others, mostly geographers, were thrilled by the clarity and precision of

[14] Bowman seems to spark unacknowledged – and certainly by Smith untheorized – thoughts of basketball. Andrew Herod (2005) begins his *Area* review of *American Empire* with a discussion of (geographer) Michael Jordan's global fame; Richard White (2004) begins his *Raritan* review by suggesting that on any given day (non-geographer) Kobe Bryant is more likely to be discussed on the evening news than empire, even in the wake of the US invasion of Iraq. There seems to be no evidence that Bowman was particularly athletic, nor even tall.

his writing and his ability to work out difficult arguments and claims so compellingly). But all, enthusiasts and detractors alike, seemed to agree that, as Neil himself put it, "the colloid of geography, politics and history that I was striving for in this book … fell, somewhat awkwardly, across and between the different stools of biography, history of geography and political history of empire in the making." The main question for most of the reviewers seemed to be precisely how much it fell across and how much it fell between those stools, and for a few what other stools ii should have fallen onto (a deeper engagement with the pioneering anti-imperialist histories of Walter LeFeber and William Carlos Williams; a more thorough understanding of the contradictions of US's *territorial* imperialism of the nineteenth century; a better accounting of the continued existence of territorial colonialism in an American Empire that saw itself as "beyond geography;" a fuller acknowledgement of internal, often elite resistance to America's imperial ambitions; a fuller history of the role of military power in opening up the globe for American *Lebensraum*; a wider historical compass that took in the doings of French and not only American, British, and German geographers; and more besides). Even those most critical of *American Empire* recognized that it marked a significant reorientation of our understanding the nature of American imperialism and of the role in geography – as a material process and fact and as a discipline – within it.

The battle for ideas was engaged and Neil read many of his reviews with care, jotting responses in light pencil along their sides, rarely giving an inch.[15] His main rejoinder came less than two years later with the late 2004 publication of *The Endgame of Globalization* (Smith 2005d), a very different, but clearly closely related, book than *American Empire*. For one thing, it's short. I read the whole thing on the train back to Syracuse from New York in February 2005 – so, in less than six hours, with plenty of

[15] The evidence suggest, however, that he did learn from at least some of them, most particularly a long, critical review by the Puerto Rican sociologist and political economist José Anazagasty published in the on-line Bangladeshi activist forum *Meghbarta* (and upon which he commented in a public forum): while he contested some of Anazagasty's assertions, he also took to heart the main argument that American imperialism "beyond geography" looks and feels very different from within the US's actually-existing territorial colonies.

breaks for staring out the window at the Hudson. And it's as bracing and uncluttered – the typeface is large and the spacing generous – as *American Empire* is tightly argued and almost baroque in structure. And life had changed: now Deb Cowen occupied pride of place in the acknowledgments. In some ways *Endgame* is *American Empire* without Bowman (and without the history of geography) and written with a quite different sense of political urgency. It seeks to chart the shifting sands of American globalism as it transmogrified from the neoliberal "Washington Consensus" of the 1990s (in some ways the apogee of an American Empire "beyond geography" that was at the same time a reterritorialization of the world, since "imperialism … never relinquishes territorial definition" [Smith 2005d, 51]) to the neoconservativism of the 2000s, as well as to place that shift, which in the end is understood to be mostly epiphenomenal, within its historical context – that is precisely the context that *American Empire* so thoroughly exposed. There's one main stool here, and Neil seeks to pile it high with the contradictions of an empire that is at once globalist and nationalist, all in hopes that it won't be long before those contradictions become so great they go toppling into the abyss all around them.

September 11, 2001 had launched the US, under the administration of George W. Bush, into what Neil saw as its endgame, which Neil hoped, quoting Samuel Beckett, would quickly become "endgame lost" (Smith 2005d, 2), a hope for which the striking string of defeats to the US in global trade negotiations – from the agricultural demands at the WTO meeting in Cancun in 2003 and the demise of much of the FTAA in Miami and Monterrey around the same time, to a whole raft of WTO and IMF refusals of US initiatives – gave some substance. The rapid retreat into unilateralism, exemplified by the much heralded role of the Project for a New American Century in crafting post-9/11 foreign policy and military strategy and given fig-leaf cover through the construction of a "Coalition of the Willing" when most of the world refused the US demand to join its invasion of Iraq, suggested that, as Neil was writing, we might be at "the zenith of [the] third moment of global ambition" (Smith 2005d, 27). The argument Neil put forth blended a geo-economic with a geopolitical analysis – precisely because what the Bush

administration seemed intent on doing, as they played out the endgame of globalization, was to put geopolitics in the service of geo-economics. After September 11, "the world's major recalcitrant region, the crucible of opposition to a US-centered global capitalism, could now be brought to heel. The beheading of al Qaeda … was an obvious and vital first step but Iraq was to be ground zero for the broader conquest" (Smith 2005d, 191). But three "I's" conspired to undermine the coming triumph of American-global liberalism in its imperial form: after 9/11 the US very quickly become *isolated* on the global state, its warmongering and crude nationalism repugnant to much of the world; the US simultaneously proved its *incompetence* as a global administrator, whatever its sheer military presence, the world over; and finally the US's dreams were – and are – in fact *impossible*, since whatever the reach of the military it cannot be everywhere and it cannot always be there and even more it is impossible to win a war against a *concept*, especially one as slippery as "terror" (Smith 2005d, 195-200). Mostly, though, US global ambition is *economically* impossible: in 2005, Neil was already clearly diagnosing the financial crisis to come a couple of years later. Any other country, he argued, exhibiting the levels of debt, the trade imbalances, and the myriad other structural infirmities of America, would have long-since been broken by the IMF and the World Bank, forced into a course of severe austerity (which ought to start with the gargantuan military and related budgets but which instead would be rained down on the working and middle classes and the poor). Given the US position in the global economy a full-blown and unconstrained economic crisis would necessarily be a global one. As we are seeing, it is the working people of first Iceland, and then Ireland, and the Greece, and then Spain, and then Crete, and on and on, that are made to take the fall. Yet, as we are also seeing, "the end game of globalization as we know it … is unlikely to come as a military or economic whimper of empire, dissolving in its own impossibility" (Smith 2005d, 201).[16] It'll have to be forced.

[16] Simultaneous with the publication of *Endgame*, Neil presented the 2005 *Political Geography* lecture, also entitled "The Endgame of Globalization." The published version is accompanied by three commentaries and a response from Neil. The lively exchange – in which the commentaries tend to do all they can to shore up America's

The Revolutionary Imperative

And here Neil put ever increasing hope in the growing coalitions – as shifting and as best by setbacks as they were – of anticapitalist forces, of more local antigentrification and prohousing organizations, of the promise glimpsed in the World Social Forum movement (though Neil was a bit more skeptical about this than were many others), and in those organizations beginning to rally under the banner of the Right to the City (with David Harvey he instituted a reading group around this idea in the CPCP that brought together activists, artists, students, and faculty from around New York). All these movements promised that "another world was possible" – precisely the slogan Neil had helped make central to the work of the ICGG – and sought ways to bring it to fruition. Neil thickened his involvement with such organizations now not only in New York (where work with the Harlem Tenants Association was particularly important) but also Toronto where he and Deb set up a part of their transborder life together, and where they eventually bought a house where Neil could indulge his passion for gardening, a production of nature of which he thoroughly approved. In Canada, though connections of Deb's, Neil became especially involved with First Nation and suburban activists, even as he found time to walk graduate student picket lines in solidarity during student strikes.

Years of theorizing the production of nature meant that Neil was quick with an analysis, typically trenchant and political, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the Gulf Coast – "The Bush Hurricane," he called it (Smith 2005c) – an analysis that not only made it clear, right in the title that "There's No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster" (Smith 2005e, 2005f), but especially explained why. This was a piece that was picked up by activists everywhere, but it also indicated Neil's return to questions of nature and its role within capitalist political economy (Smith 2006a 2007, 2008c). There's no such thing

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dying liberalism against the charges Neil made against it, at least when they are not impugning his scholarship, his politics, or especially the way he combined both – was published in the first issue of volume 25 of the journal in 2006 (see Smith 2006b, 2006c).

as a natural disaster, because nature was now "an accumulation strategy," and disaster itself had been significantly financialized (Neil quoted a breathless *New York Times* article from 2006 noting how hedge fund managers were "piling" money into reinsurance; Smith 2007, 773) and weather futures were becoming hotter by the minute (Smith 2007, 778). Nature was more and more wrapped up in the circulation of capital, now not just the indispensible, if produced, basis for production and reproduction. In the process second nature was being further *abstracted*. Against this, Neil argued there indeed *was* an alternative, another world *was* possible: Cuba. That socialist Caribbean island had grown pretty good at weathering even the fiercest hurricanes, most notably 2004's Ivan, which had killed dozens around the Caribbean and in the US, but which killed no one in Cuba. Not only is nature differently produced there, but especially disaster preparedness is predicated on wholly different ways of understanding not only the threat that powerful storms pack, but especially a different sense of social solidarity combined with a less *technocratic* approach to disaster preparedness that focuses particularly on evacuation, including pets (Smith 2007).

Disaster response was, in other words, a "class project." "The financialization of disaster absorbs the politics of who lives, who dies, and whose life is utterly destroyed, displacing such raw power into the polite, privatized, anodyne multibillion-dollar calculations of boardroom denizens. There, Hannah Arendt's 'banality of evil' is alive and well" (Smith 2007, 783). For nearly a decade Neil had been asking "What Happened to Class" in geographical and other critical analyses (Smith 2000b) and as the disasters in Afghanistan, Iraq, and New Orleans made room for the global disaster of neoliberal, globalized, finance-driven capitalism that began to unfold across the landscape in 2006, the question became ever more urgent, though you might not know that from the preoccupations of "critical" geographers. Much as Neil liked gardening, and as much as he cared about the struggles over the community gardens that Giuliani was attempting to seize and resell in New York, he was appalled that the "critical geography forum" listserv seemed so obsessed by it, reducing all political struggle to the

"essentialist" politics of a certain kind of middle class gardening: what was political about critical geography, he asked, especially a critical geography in which class analysis had no place (Smith 2000b, 1013). He reprised this question in 2005 taking to task what he now termed "neo-critical geography," especially as personified by Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift and the class-blinders that so restricted their vision. They seemed only able to see a "flat pluralist world of business class" (Smith 2005b), and because of that they could not see how the production of the world around them was so terribly uneven: a class project shaped through unceasing struggle over the very constituents of social and economic life. "The question is not whether such a 'flatter world' is happening, for some people in some places, but what else is happening alongside and in blatant contradiction with it" (Smith 2005b, 895). Class struggle was all around us, and in the academy too: "geographical adherents of the flat earth seem to be collaborating in the obliteration of the very insights that put geography on the political and theoretical map after the 1970s – namely the core belief that socially divided societies reproduce their forms of social difference in geographical space and, by corollary, that hierarchically produced geographies reaffirm and reproduce social differences" (Smith 2005b, 895).

These hierarchically produced geographies could be produced otherwise (this is the lesson of Cuba during Hurricane Ivan). And so Neil turned his attention to revolution, and especially what he called the "revolutionary imperative" (2010). This was a time of turmoil across the globe. The first rumblings of the Arab Spring were not quite yet to be heard and the Occupy Movement had not yet been imagined (Neil thrilled to both of them when they finally came), but the refusal to accede to the dictates of the global financial institutions by Iceland, the rising street politics in Spain and Greece, the successes, partial as they may have been, of Bolivarian socialism in Latin America (spurred forward by the radical demands of street protesters from Quito to Caracas, Buenos Aries to El Alto), burgeoning student movements from Berkeley to Glasgow to Santiago (often training their sights not only *against* rising tuition and the like but *for* the audacious idea of a *public* education), the collapse of all the

sureties of the neoliberal order in the wake of the financial crisis, the resort to near-martial law to regain control of the streets in Toronto during the 2010 G20 meeting (Smith and Cowen 2010), all suggested to Neil that it was time to rekindle the revolutionary imagination (Smith 2010). In the flat pluralist world of the business class, in the whole ideological triumph of "there-is-no-alternative" post-1989 capitalism (itself made possible by revolution), "the very possibility of revolution was rendered ideologically absurd" (Smith 2010, 51). Picking up on a line from Habermas about modernism, Neil argued that neoliberalism was now "badly wounded … dominant but dead" (Smith 2009d, 54, 2008a, 2008b). It needed to be swept away. What was not needed was a return to some sort of New Deal; that was too "unambitious … [and] put the cart before the horse" (Smith 2010, 60). The horse was organizing and struggling towards change, towards making another world possible.

> Revolution may, as [C.L.R.] James (1993) suggests, come in like a thief in the night, but if there's going to be a heist on capitalism, the thief needs to come with a few tools. Some tools are intellectual ideas; other are tools of the imagination about other worlds; still others are our human bodies, but most importantly they are social and political organization for a more humane future. Or as Goethe put it, "One earns one's freedom and life when one takes them every day by storm" (Smith 2010, 64).

One of Neil's contributions to the tool box was going to be a book on the geography of revolution, and much of his later writing – and his teaching at CUNY where he taught a seminar on revolution – was geared towards putting together the pieces for such a book, comprised of equal part reference to the long history and geography of revolutionary movements across the globe and theorizing revolutionary possibilities within the facts of a globally uneven, dominant but dead, capitalism.[17]

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[17] Another was a collaborative effort with his students from his Revolution seminar, *Revolting New York*, which would lay out the historical geography of revolt, rebellion, riot, and revolution in New York City. This was unfinished when Neil died; his students are currently working to finish it off and get it into print.

But if Neil, with Goethe, thought one's life and freedom was won by taking it by storm, the reality was his life itself was stormy. By outward appearances in the mid-2000s Neil was at the top of his game. His ideas were more and more being picked up by activist groups, especially antigentrification forces the world over; he was more and more in demand to speak and inspire these groups and his global travel increasingly became directed by opportunities to tie in with their struggles; he was being published in a wider and wider gamut of scholarly, and especially political-activist journals and websites; interviews with him were frequently requested; after several years of being out of print (but available on his website as a PDF) *Uneven Development* was republished with new prefaces and afterwords; *The New Urban Frontier* remained not just a steady seller, but a book that was actually engaged with – a book that continued to inspire countless students and activists as they sought to understand the changes in the cities they knew, struggled in, and studied. But outward appearances are rarely all there is. And the contradictions that so shaped Neil's life deepened. So often outwardly ebullient, the mid-2000s were a sad and difficult time for him. When his parents died in rapid succession, Neil grew depressed. He had a complicated relationship with them, especially his mother, which was not much resolved when she died, and it hit him hard. A fire in the apartment next to his Murray Hill flat, only put out when the firefighters accessed it by breaking a big hole in his wall, left him homeless and disoriented for several months as he moved from temporary lodging to temporary lodging while he waited to see if he would ever get back in. Unfaithfulness to Deb Cowen seemed to trouble him, but that seemed to too little deter him. His drinking got worse. He was often drunk when he showed up to teach. He often missed commitments to give talks or take part in conferences. He refused entreaties by friends and colleagues who had gone through similar struggles, refusing to admit the depth of his problems. He stopped sleeping at night and tended to fall asleep in his own seminars (even when he was not drunk). He broke out in rashes. He was deeply depressed. He could barely rouse himself to tend his and Deb's garden in Toronto. In 2009 he was diagnosed with advanced cirrhosis of the liver. He was told in no uncertain

terms that if he did not stop drinking he would die. Even with stopping, his liver was already seriously damaged and there likely had been some brain damage as well (diseased livers shoot various toxins to the brain undermining cognitive ability).

He stopped drinking. A certain zest for life – the "old Neil" some of us recognized and loved – rapidly returned. I found the turnaround to be remarkable the first time I saw him after he stopped drinking. The old impishness was back and he seemed quite content with the non-alcoholic beer in his hand (and we were out on a St. Patrick's night in over-the-top Manhattan). He was talking again about his revolution book. He was talking again about the battle for ideas. He had by then moved to a new apartment in the Gowanus section of Brooklyn and he and Deb were looking to buy, eventually finding a lovely apartment in a model garden city complex in Jackson Heights, Queens.

But the turnaround was not to last. The depression – if that is what it was – was undiagnosed and untreated. He complained of not being able to write; alcohol, he thought, had always been central to his creativity. Eventually, physically, this was probably true. Writing and drinking went together. He started drinking again. With addict's logic, he thought he could keep it in moderation and convinced himself he would do no further damage to his health. He was wrong, on both counts. By the time he and Deb moved to Jackson Heights he was drinking more-than-heavily. His health deteriorated. He began looking up old girlfriends and seeking out new ones. At the same time, though, Occupy Wall Street erupted all around him. He threw himself in, giving lectures, supporting student-activists, arguing strategy, pinning hopes on what seemed to be another mutation of the global, if sometimes too inchoate, movement for another world.

As the revolutionary year of 2011 slid into the not-so-revolutionary year of 2012, Neil slid deeper into his addiction, rallying some of the great fun of drinking at times, such as the big party of lefty geographers he helped host at Ace Bar during the NYC AAG, but also, surely, slowly killing himself. His liver was shutting down. He became jaundiced. When I saw him the week before he died, he was

bright yellow. He was also disoriented – he did not recognized me when we met up the first morning – always knackered, really sick. We had met up at one of the suburban university campuses in Paris for a conference organized by young French radical geographers hoping to jumpstart a more critical approach to a field they thought was too mired in techocratism. Neil was all in – or he wanted to be. He had been asked to give a keynote talk on the history and experiences of Anglo-American radical geography. It was a typical tour de force of historical detail, theoretical insight, and political analysis, dissecting the structural conditions that had allowed for a flourishing of radicalism in Anglo-American geography in the 1970s and 1980s and to the conditions that led to growing conservativism of the field especially in Britain. It examined the changing nature of the university, the role of assessment and accounting measures in regulating the labor process, and how a new generation of scholars, led not from the Anglo-American heartland had a chance to reinvigorate a truly political geography. It was a tour de force, but only on paper. His reading of it was bad, scary. He kept getting lost, tripped over his own words, repeated whole sections. It was sad. When I talked with him in person, it was clear he was totally perplexed. Of course he knew what was wrong; but of course, at the same time he refused to admit what was wrong. It was too late anyway, it turns out. He told me he had stopped drinking again, and said it with a bit of pride. But doctors say that when the liver shuts down so does the need for alcohol. Lots of dying drunks stop drinking. In his more lucid moments he talked, with great anticipation, of an interview he was going to do with Yves Lacoste when the conference ended.

I do not know if he did the interview. A day or two after the conference ended he somehow got himself back to New York and went to see his doctor. The doctor immediately checked him into the hospital and called Deb in Toronto to tell her he would not be coming out. Neil died on September 29, 2012, with Deb at his side and friends gathered round, the revolutionary imperative as strong as ever, but now without Neil to help us see how and why.

Acknowledgements

As with the much shorter *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* obituary that was extracted from this fuller attempt to reduce many of Neil's ideas and a little of his life to the two dimensions of paper (or one dimension of electronic impulses), I have had to have a lot of help. Deb Cowen, Cindi Katz, Susan Millar, Nik Heynen, Lynn Staeheli, Tom Slater, David Harvey, Ruthie Gilmore, and all those who have written obituaries or shared insights are to be thanked. For the misinterpretations of ideas and misunderstanding of who Neil *was*, I'll take all the blame. In the year since Neil's death – which has been a year spent writing this critical appreciation – he has never stopped standing over my shoulder (nor, for better and worse, standing me to a drink). He remains with me whenever I write (about anything), when I work with students, when I think and act politically, and when I weed in my garden. His flaws were completely a part of him. For me, he needs to be thanked most of all.

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