1.4 Areal Differentiation and Post-Modern Human Geography

Derek Gregory
University of British Columbia

Derek Gregory is Professor of Geography at the University of British Columbia and was formerly Lecturer in Geography at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Sidney Sussex College. His teaching and research interests are in social theory and human geography and in the historical geography of Britain and North America. He is the author of Ideology, Science and Human Geography, Regional Transformations and Industrial Revolution and The Geographical Imagination, and co-editor of Social Relations and Spatial Structures (with John Urry) and The Dictionary of Human Geography (with F. J. Johnston and David M. Smith).

Searching for an epigraph to his Philosophical Investigations, Ludwig Wittgenstein considered using a quotation from King Lear: ‘I’ll teach you differences.’ ‘Rogers!’ he once told a friend, ‘always seems to me to be wanting to say that things which look different are really the same, whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different.’ — Terry Eagleton, Against the Grain.

POST-MODERNISM

If my title seems strange, so much the better. In this essay I want to explore some fragments of the contemporary intellectual landscape and to suggest some of the ways in which they bear upon modern human geography: and all of this will, I suspect, be unsettling. (Or, at any rate, if I can convey what is happening successfully then it ought to be unsettling.)

I use ‘post-modernism’ as a short-hand for a heterogeneous movement, which had its origins in architecture and literary theory. The relevance of the first of these for human geography must seem comparatively straight-
forward – especially if the interpretative arch is widened to span the produc-
tion of the built environment or, wider still, the production of space – but
the second is, as I will seek to show, every bit as important for the future
of geographical inquiry. The converse may also be true: Frederic Jameson,
one of the most exhilarating literary critics writing today, claims that ‘a model
of political culture appropriate to our own situation will necessarily have to raise
spatial issues as its fundamental organising concern’.

Post-modernism is, of course, much more than these two moments. It has
spiraled way beyond architecture and literary theory until it now confronts
the terrain of the humanities and social sciences rout court. But whatever its
location, I shall argue that post-modernism raises urgent questions about
place, space and landscape in the production of social life.

Post-modernism is, in its fundamentals, a critique of what is usually called
the ‘Enlightenment project’. The European Enlightenment of the eighteenth
century provided one of the essential frameworks for the development of
the modern humanities and social sciences. It was, above all, a celebration of
the power of reason and the universality of the ways in which these twin
ingines propell modernity into the concertina corners of the tra-
tional world. Both ‘reason’ and ‘rationality’ were given highly specific meanings, however, and have been disturbed by
the expansion of the particular vision of knowledge which those terms entail. The
more radical of them have sought to overthrow their closures and its supposed
certainties altogether. Their critique lies, for the most part, been conducted at
high levels of abstraction – the exchanges between Habermas and Lyotard
are of just such an order – but one of the most concrete illuminations of what
is at stake has been provided by David Ley in a remarkable essay on the
political-cultural landscapes of inner Vancouver.

Ley contrasts two redevelopment projects on either side of False Creek. To
the north, ‘an instrumental landscape of neo-conservativism’: high-density,
high-rise buildings whose minimalism geometric forms provide the
stereotypical image for the spectacular structures of a sports stadium, conference centre, elevated
freeway and rapid transit system and the towering pavilions of Expo ’86. To
the south, an ‘expressive landscape of liberal reform’: low-density
buildings, diverse in design and construction, incorporating local motifs
and local associations and allowing for a plurality of tenures, clutured around
a lake which opens up vistas across the waterfront to the downtown
and the mountain rim beyond. The north shore is a monument to modern
technology, to the internationalisation of ‘rational’ planning and corporate
engineering; one of Reich’s ‘placeless’ landscapes. The south shore, by
contrast, is a critical regionalism; a post-
modern landscape attentive to the needs of people rather than the demands
of machines and (above all) sensitive to the specifics of particular places.

This contrast is, of course, emblematic of others, not least between
different styles of human geography. But, as I must now show (and as the
term itself suggests), post-modernism is no traditionalist’s dream of recover-
ing a world we have lost. It is a movement beyond the modern and, simultaneoulsy, an invitation to construct our own human geographies. I will
build my argument on three of its basic features.

Firstly, post-modernism is, in a very real sense, ‘post-paradigm’: that is to
say, post-modern writers are immensely suspicious of any attempt to con-
struct a system of thought which claims to be complete and comprehensive. In
geography, of course, there have been no end of attempts of this kind, and
many of those who have – in my view, mistakenly – made use of Kahn’s
notion of a paradigm have done so prescriptively. They have claimed the
authority of ‘positivism’, ‘structuralism’, ‘humanism’ or whatever as a
means of legislating for the proper conduct of geographical inquiry and of excluding
work which lies beyond the competence of these various systems. Others have
preferred to transcend these, to them partial, perspectives and to offer some
more general (‘meta-theoretical’) framework in which all these competing
claims are supposed to be reconciled.

For over a decade this was usually assumed to be some kind of systems
approach and now, apparently, it is the philosophy of realism (perhaps
coupled with some version of Habermas’s critical theory) which holds out a
similar promise. But post-modernism rejects all of these manoeuvres. All of
these systems of thought are, in any case, incomplete, and if there is then
no alternative but to pluck different elements from different systems for
different purposes this is not a licence for an uncritical eclecticism: patching
them together must, rather, display a sensitivity towards the differences and
inseparability of them. And ‘sensitivity’ implies that those different
integrates must be respected and retained: not fused. The certainties which
were once offered by epistemology – by theories of knowledge which assumed that it was possible to ‘put a floor under’ or ‘ground’ intellectual
inquiry in some safe and secure way – are no longer credible in a post-modern
world.

Secondly, this implies, in turn, that post-modern writers are hostile to the
‘totalizing’ ambitions of the conventional social sciences (and, for that matter,
those of the humanities). Their critique points in two directions. First, they
reject the notion that social life displays what could be called a ‘global
coherence’: that our day-to-day social practices are moments in the reproduc-
tion of a self-sustaining social system whose fundamental, so to speak
‘structural’ imperatives necessarily regulate our everyday lives in some
automatic, pre-set fashion. These writers do not, of course, deny the
importance of the interdependencies which have become such a common-
place of the late twentieth-century world, and neither do they minimise the
routine character of social reproduction nor the various powers which enclosed
our day-to-day routines. (These are, on the contrary, some of the most salient
foci of their work). But they do object to the concept of totality which informs
much of modern social theory, because it tacitly assumes that social life
somehow adds up to (or ‘makes sense in terms of’) a coherent system with its
own superordinate logie.
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Second, and closely connected to this, these writers reject the notion that social life can be explained in terms of some 'deeper' structure. This was one of the premises of structuralism, of course, and it still surfaces in some of the cruder versions of realism. It is largely through this opposition that modernism is sometimes identified with 'post-structuralism' and, put like this, I imagine that the post-modern critique will seem to echo the complaints of those who saw in structuralism a displacement of the human organism. In human geography as elsewhere, many commentators were dismayed by the way in which various versions of structuralism replaced the concrete complexities of human agency by the disembodied transformations of abstract unconsciousness. But post-modernism is not 'a return to humanism'. It objectifies to structuralism because its sharpened concept of structure points towards a 'centre' around which social life revolves, rather like a kaleidoscope or a child's mobile; but it objects to humanism for the very same reason. Most forms of humanism appeal to the human subject or to human agency as the self-evident centre of social life. And yet we are now beginning to discover just how problematic those terms are. Concepts of the 'person', for example, differ widely over space and through time and, paradoxically, it is their very importance which ensures that they cannot provide a constant foundation for the human sciences. They are the explanation not the explanation.

Thirdly, the accent on 'difference' which dominates the preceding paragraphs is a leitmotiv of post-modernism. One of the distinguishing features of post-modern culture is its sensitivity to heterogeneity, particularity and uniqueness. To some readers this insistence on 'difference' will raise the spectre of the ideologico, which is supposed to have been laid once and for all (in geography at any rate) by the Hartsorne-Schafer debate in the 1950s and by the consolidation of a generalising spatial science during the 1960s. To be sure, the caricature of Hartsorne as a crusty empiricist, indifferent to the search for spatial order, blind to location-scholar and ignorant of quantitative methods could never survive any serious reading of The Nature of Geography. There were, as several commentators have emphasised, deep-seated continuities between the Hartshornian orthodoxy and the prospectus of the so-called 'New Geography'. But Schafer's clarion call for geography as a non-schematic science, compelled to produce morphological laws and to disclose the fundamental geometries of spatial patterns, undoubtedly sounded a retreat from areal differentiation which was heard (and welcomed) in many quarters. Specificity became eccentricity, and the new conceptual apparatus made no secret of its confinement: it was, variously, a 'residual'; background 'noise' to be 'filtered out'; a 'deviation' from the 'normal'. And yet in the 1980s other writers in other fields have given specificity a wider resonance. In philosophy, Lyotard claims that 'post-modern knowledge... refines our sensitivity to differences'; in social theory de Certeau wants to fashion 'a science of singularity... that links everyday pursuits to particular circumstances': in anthropoloogy Geertz parades 'the diversity of things' and seeks illumination from 'the light of local knowledge'.

In geography too there has been a remarkable return to areal differentiation. But it is a return with a difference. When Harvey speaks of the 'uneven development' of capitalism, for example, or when (in a radically different vocabulary) Hagerstrand talks about 'pockets of local order' (I shall have more to say about both of these in due course) they - and now countless others like them - are attempting much more than the recovery of geography's traditional project. For they herald not so much the reconstruction of modern geography as its deconstruction. I mean this to be understood in an entirely positive and specifically technical sense: not as a new nihilism, still less as the enthronement of some new orthodoxy, but as the transformation of the modern intellectual landscape as a whole. I should admit at once that it is still barely possible to map that new landscape - not least because it is radically untalterable - but in what follows I will try to put some preliminary markers around what Soja calls the 'post-modernization' of geography. Two discarnators are immediately necessary. First, to work within disciplin boundaries is obviously open to objection - and I am as uneasy about doing so as anyone else - but I have retained the conventional enclosures because I want to show that 'geography' has as much to contribute to post-modernism as it has to learn from it. In so far as social life cannot be theorised on the point of a pin, then, so it seems to me, the introduction of concepts of place, space and landscape must radically transform the nature of modern social theory. Second, to say that geography has re-opened the question of areal differentiation is to invite the response that, for many, it was never closed. I accept that it would be wrong to minimise the continuing power of traditional regional geographies which, at their very best, have always provided remarkably sensitive evocations of the particular relations between people and the places in which they live. And I insist on this not as a politeness to be pushed to one side as soon as possible. On the contrary, the 'problem of geographical description' with which so many of these writers struggle is, as I will show, part of a more general 'crisis of representation' throughout the contemporary human sciences. This realisation, pregnant with consequences at once theoretical and practical, has also played its part in changing the modern intellectual landscape: so much so that we need new, theoretically-informed ways of conveying the complexities of areal differentiation if we are to make sense of the post-modern world. I realise that many readers will be uncomfortable at my emphasis on theory, and some of them will object to yet more intellectual baggage being strapped to the backs of the credulous. But hostility to theory, as Eagleton remarks in another context, 'usually means an opposition to other people's theories and an obligation to one's own'. Even so, I can understand how anyone, assaulted by the abstract technologies of spatial science and then bloodstream the philosophical critique of positivism, can yearn for an end to geography's alienation from - well, geography. Let me make it plain, therefore, that I have no interest in theory for its own sake. To be sure, one can derive genuine pleasure from theoretical work: and why not? But exercises of this sort cannot be justified by intellectual hedonism alone, and the theories
that I propose to discuss demand, by their very nature, an engagement with the world rather than an estrangement from it: they are, in other words, profoundly critical, political constructions.

It will make things much clearer, I hope, if I sketch out the emerging relations between geography and three other disciplines: political economy, sociology and anthropology. This is, very roughly, the order in which post-Fordist has occurred in the post-war decades, but it also corresponds to a movement in the direction of post-modernism.

**GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY**

Post-war geography had a close but curious relationship with mainstream neo-classical economics. I say 'close' because so many of the early models of spatial science assumed a neo-classical world of perfect competition, in which producers and consumers freely entered into price-fixing markets as sovereign individuals. The exchange relationships were, moreover, assumed to be 'free from' or 'disregard of' any externalities or 'disintermediation' or 'exogenous externalities'. And in that curious way the world had no history or geography, and once 'empty space' were introduced, the assumptions of neo-classical economics became untenable. As late twentieth-century capitalism was plunged into a profound crisis whose restructurings reverberated through local, national and international space-economies, so the historical geography of capitalism became ever more visible and the credibility of the neo-classical calculus ever more precarious. It was then, in the early 1970s, that a new relationship started to be forged between geography and political economy.

Political economy could properly claim to deal with social relations rather than hypothetical individuals, with the sphere of production as well as the sphere of exchange and consumption, and to produce its own equilibrium. It was historically sensitive too. Both Ricardo and Marx recognised the dramatic transformations wrought by the Industrial Revolution at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and those who followed in their footsteps continued to insist on the importance of subsequent transformations in the capitalist structures of capital.

But neither Ricardo nor Marx had much to say about geography. A number of writers have sought to develop a broadly neo-Ricardian perspective on location theory, but the most thorough-going geographical reconstruc-
tion of political economy has undoubtedly been neo-Marxian. Marx certainly drew attention to the 'annihilation of space by time', but this had little impact on the main currents of Marxism. The phrase proved to be unusually prophetic: *historical* materialism had little room for the historical geography of capitalism. Although Marx offered some remarkably suggestive theses about the spatial structures of capital circulation, in David Harvey's view 'one of the extraordinary and outstanding failures of an otherwise powerful

Marxist tradition' has been the way in which it appeared 'to license the study of historical transformations while ignoring how capitalism produces its own geography'. His careful delineation of *The Limits to Capital* must thus be read in a double sense, marking both the bounding contours of capitalist development and an important silence in Marx's master work.

The limits to capital

It is impossible to do justice to the richness of Harvey's argument here; let me instead open just one window on his work. There are, so he claims, a number of fundamental tensions in the landscape of contemporary capitalism (see Figure 1.4.1).

One of the most basic is between processes working towards agglomeration in place and processes working towards dispersal over space. Harvey argues that the rationalisation of capitalist production pushes clusters of economic activities into a 'structured coherence' within particular regions. In so far as capitalism is inherently expansive, however, capital circulation is obviously not confined to those regions, and this means that capital accumulation must also depend upon time-space co-ordination between regions. The tension between the two can only be reconciled, so Harvey claims, through the 'urbanization of capital'. In fact, the circulation of capital through an urbanised space-economy brings different labour processes at different locations into a general social relation. Pat like this, of course, the old opposition between the particular and the general disappears; but, more than that, concrete labour processes acquire abstract qualities tied to value as socially necessary labour time. This is immense importance because the concept of 'socially necessary labour time' is absolutely essential to Marx's labour theory of value. Without it, the whole structure of class exploitation through the appropriation of surplus value collapses. What Harvey is able to show, therefore, is that the mainspring of political economy, in contradiction to the apaternal calculus of neo-classical economics, depends upon the production of a differentiated and integrated space-economy.

Even so, that framework is chronically unstable, because the constant drive to reduce the turnover time of capital produces exactly that 'annihilation of space by time' which Marx accentuated. Changes in transportation and communication systems, credit networks and the like have all contributed to a remarkable increase in the speed of the global economy, and its accelerating rotations have progressively transformed the relative locations of existing production configurations. The deflation of old locational values has impelled changes in the geography of multinational investment, shifts in the international division of labour and the emergence of new nodal and regional cities. These processes are far from straightforward, Harvey points out, because a knife-edge has to be negotiated 'between preserving the values of past commitments made at a particular place and time, or deviating them to open up fresh room for accumulation'. The tension between the immobility of
spatial structures and their capacity to stretch across ever wider spans of time and space is almost palpable. To Harvey: 'the produced geographical landscape constituted by fixed and immobile capital is both the crowning glory of past capitalist development and a prison that inhibits the further progress of accumulation precisely because it creates spatial barriers where there were none before.'

The transcendence of these barriers to continued accumulation depends not only on the production of space, Harvey insists, but also on power over space. It is, in other words, a matter of geopolitics. The production of clusters of economic activities within regions is paralleled by the formation of equally unstable and place-specific ‘class alliances’. These coalitions are territorially-based social movements which seek to intervene in the competitive struggle between different regions within what is an increasingly complex and constantly changing hierarchy of domination and subordination. Class alliances are obviously forged out of a mix of different interests, but their instability is heightened by their double function. On the one hand, they have to protect those immobile regional infrastructures which provide for continued production and reproduction; and on the other, they must secure their own upward spiral of accumulation by capturing new rounds of investment. Class alliances thus become caught between ‘the stagnant swamp of monopoly controls fashioned out of the geopolitics of domination’ and the ‘the fires of open and escalating competition with others’.

These theses are obviously pitched at a high level of abstraction, and although Harvey has provided a number of empirical vignettes it is in Doreen Massey’s work that one finds some of the most concrete studies of the historical geography of contemporary capitalism. ‘While an abstract model of capitalism, by providing the necessary concepts, is an aid to analysis,’ she writes, ‘it cannot substitute for the analysis itself.’ Her Spatial Divisions of Labour is thus intended to provide the basis for a much more specific project: a new regional geography of the United Kingdom.12

Spatial divisions of labour

Massey’s model is simpler than Harvey’s and, in a purely formal sense, bears some of the marks of much older notions like Derwent Whittlesey’s sequent occupancy or H. C. Darby’s juxtaposition of cross-sections and vertical themes. But it has a much sharper bite. Massey begins with the formation of spatial structures of production. Each phase of capital accumulation – each ‘round of investment’ – is supposed to involve the allocation of different functions within the social relations of production to different regions within the national and international space-economy. I have tried to make this clearer by translating it into a game of cards (Figure 1.4.2). In the first round a single suit is dealt (representing a phase of capital accumulation), and each player (representing a different region) receives a different card (representing a different function). In the
second and third rounds, other single suits are dealt. As one phase is succeeded by another, so the structure of local economies can be seen as a product of the combination of "layers", of the successive imposition over the years of new rounds of investment and new forms of activity. Similarly, at the end of three rounds of our game, each player has a different hand, but in each case this is connected 'horizontally' to the hands held by other players and 'vertically' to the cards dealt in the previous rounds.

In much the same way a local economy may, through the mix of its activities, be embedded in a multitude of 'horizontal' spatial structures, as of which entail different relations of domination and subordination within the space-economy, and in a multitude of 'vertical' spatial structures containing the traces of the relations of domination and subordination put into play during previous rounds of investment. If you think about this for a moment, you will see that this means that the same round of investment can produce 'very different effects in different areas as a result of its combination with a different pre-existing structure'..

But Massey is quick to point out that localities do not merely reflect processes determined at national and international scales. On the contrary, the vast variety of conditions at the local scale materially affects the operation and outcome of these very processes. The combination of layers signifies a form of mutual determination, therefore, with each side of the process affecting the other. 'The uniqueness of place and the constantly evolving and shifting systems of interdependence [that is, relations of domination and subordination] are two sides of the same coin.'

Massey then broadens the base. 'The layers of history which are sedimented over time are not just economic," she says, because there are also cultural, political and ideological strata which also have their local specificities and which must also be brought into the analysis. Their importance for Massey is, in part, that they affect the investment strategies selected during each round - in Harvey's terms, the way in which 'space is produced by capital' - and, in part, that they shape the political strategies pursued by the social groups involved (including Harvey's 'class alliances'). Different historical legacies have created the conditions for different social movements. Massey concludes, and if the last decade has seen 'a reassertion of defensive [working class] solidarity' in the declining manufacturing regions of the United Kingdom, the cities have become important 'foci for resistance' where 'new alliances are being constructed out of the wreckage'.

The contours of political economy

For all the differences, there are a number of parallels between Harvey and Massey. Both of them emphasise the primacy of production; both of them see the ceaseless formation and re-formation of geographical landscapes as vital moments in the reproduction and transformation of contemporary capitalism.
and both of them draw out the implications of their arguments for political action.

Where they approach post-modernism is in their recovery of areal differentiation: both of them recognise 'the unique qualities of human action in [particular] places' (Harvey), and still more simply, 'the uniqueness of place' (Massey), and yet neither of them loses sight of the moving matrix in which those fragments are set. Where they draw back from post-modernism, however, is in their recognition of a generalized logic of capitalism. Harvey remains much closer to the 'econometric' tradition of classical Marxism than does Massey, I think, and this has its strengths as well as its weaknesses. In particular, it allows Harvey to disclose the mechanisms which produce different phases of accumulation - different 'rounds of investment' - in ways which are seemingly denied to Massey. For all its heuristic elegance, Massey's model is more of a metaphor than a theorization of uneven development. She is more sensitive to the importance of culture and politics than is Harvey, but she still says remarkably little about the ways in which these 'other strata' articulate with the 'economic layer'. This has always been one of the key questions for historical materialism, of course, and a number of different answers have been proposed. All of them retain some notion of 'totality', however, and although Massey declares that 'the geography of a society makes a difference to the way it works' - that 'what lies behind the whole notion of uneven development is the fact of highly differentiated and unique outcomes' - what lies behind that is the totalising discourse of a thoroughly modern Marxism.11

GEOGRAPHY AND SOCIOLOGY

In the immediately post-war decades the relations between geography and sociology were, with one or two exceptions, far from close. In one sense this is not surprising. The sociological and spatial sciences made any engagement with the concerns of sociology unlikely. But in another sense it is strange, because before the Second World War sociology was not silent about questions of spatial structure. Georg Simmel was perhaps the first to propose a 'sociology of space', which (though its terms were different to Harvey's) also addressed the fleeting, fragmentary and contradictory social world of the modern metropolis and showed how this was embedded in the volatile circulation of money over space and through time. Across the Rhine, Emile Durkheim's early work on the division of labour in society prompted him to give a central place to concepts of spatial structure in his preliminary programme for sociology: but it was, of course, this occupation of part of the field of géographie humaine which prompted many champions of Vidal de la Blache to insist on the integrity of the pre-existing intellectual division of labour. The barricades went up. The two were on opposite sides of the Atlantic. The doyen of the Chicago School of urban sociology, Robert Park,

Drew a sharp distinction between a supposedly 'idiographic' human geography and his own avowedly 'nomothetic' human ecology.14

Towards the end of the 1970s, however, a new dialogue was opened between geography and sociology. Like the continuing conversation between geography and political economy, this was distinguished by its historical sensitivity. Indeed, one of the most obvious features of late twentieth-century sociology has been the revival of historical sociology. But, just as significant, this has in many cases been accompanied by the rediscovery of concepts of spatial structure. Although this too echoes the geographical reconstruction of political economy, some of the most exciting work has in fact been stimulated by the shortcomings of historico-geographical materialism. Much the most important has been its failure to overcome the tension between what is sometimes called the 'two Marxsists': one celebrating the power of consciousness and collective human agency, the other preoccupied with the structural logic of the mode of production. 'On this score,' Perry Anderson once concluded, 'classical Marxism, even at the height of its powers, provided no coherent answer.' And, as other commentators have noted, these two basic orientations have reappeared throughout the subsequent history of modern Marxism.15 Historico-geographical materialism has proved to be no exception: or at any rate not much of one.16

To be sure, the same oppositions surface throughout non-Marxist social theory as well, and it is perfectly possible to speak of 'two sociologies' or 'two geographies' in broadly similar terms. But it is undoubtedly the Marxist tradition which has been the single most important source for the development of a critique seeking to transcend the dualism between human agency and social structure. And, as I now want to show, the incorporation of space-time relations has proved to be a strategic moment in the development of this 'post-Marxist' theory of structure. For its principal author, Anthony Giddens, insists that '[t]he spatial configurations of social life are just as much a matter of basic importance to social theory as are the dimensions of temporality' and that there are no logical or methodological differences between human geography and sociology.17

The time-space constitution of social life

The compass of Giddens's writings is extraordinarily wide, but Figure 1.4.3 is a simple sketch of one of the basic frameworks of his theory of structuration.18 In Giddens's view, societal integration - however precarious and partial it might be - depends upon the 'binding' of time and space into the conduct of social life. To say more than this entails an analytical distinction between social integration and system integration.

Social integration The continuity of day-to-day life depends, in large measure, on routinized interactions between people who are co-present in time and space. This is what 'society' meant before the eighteenth century:


simply the company of others. Giddens suggests that Hägerstrand's time- 

geography provides a notation through which the distinctive shapes of 

time-space routinisation can be captured (Figure 1.4.4). Thus each day we 

meet other people and part from them at particular times and at particular 

places (stations) in order to fulfill particular purposes ('projects'). In 

going so, we necessarily trace out 'paths' in time and space. From this perspective, 

therefore, time and space are, in effect, resources which have to be 

drawn upon in the conduct of everyday life. It is for this reason that Hägerstrand 
sometimes describes his work as a time-space ecology. But this is much more 

than a metaphor: one of Hägerstrand's central concerns is the competitive 

struggle between people and projects for open paths. It is this 'jeopardising for 

position' which is implied by the very concept of space he uses — in Swedish 

rum — for which the closest English equivalent is perhaps 'room'. The pattern 

of paths can then be seen as a time-space template of power.

For a population, of course, those patterns would seem bewilderingly 

complicated: imagine what the paths for just ten people would like, let alone 
a hundred or a thousand! And then try to visualise them not just for a single 
day but for a whole year. Even so, Hägerstrand believes that if one looks 
closer (and thinks harder) then a fleeting and flickering time-space coherence 
can be discerned.

This arises partly because the social practices which are carried forward 

along those paths are, as I've said, typically routinised; their intersections 

repeatedly form knots of social activity in time and space ('bundles') which 

are tied and retied over and over again. But it also arises because those social 

practices are shaped by — and in turn themselves shape — wider structural 

features of the social systems in which they are implicated. Those structures 
can be glimpsed in concrete form in the various institutions which regulate 

access to constellations of stations and stipulate modes of conduct within 

them. Hägerstrand calls these constellations 'domains' — and there you can 
surely hear the distant echoes of the geographies of domination which so 

coursed Harvey. Although Giddens is critical of several of Hägerstrand's 

theoretical claims, and in my view rightly so, the time-space relations 
between power and domination constitute one of the main axes of structuration 

theory.19

System integration In so far as routinised social practices are recognisably 

the same over varying spans of time and space, Giddens argues they 

flow from and fold back into structural relations which reach beyond the 'here 

and now' to define interactions with others who are absent in time or space. 

This is what 'society' came to mean after the eighteenth century: the larger 

world stretching away from the human body and the human being. Giddens 
suggests that a basic task of structuration theory is therefore to show how 'the 

limitations of individual “presence” are transcended by the stretching of social 

relations across time and space'. This sounds mystical, even 

mythical, but it turns out to be much more ordinary. What Giddens is talking
up spheres of interaction far beyond the spoken circles of oral cultures and traditional tribal societies and the diffusion of printing and other communica-
tions technologies, which dramatically enhanced the surveillance capabilities of the state and allowed it to penetrate much more deeply into the day-to-day lives of its subject populations. These various changes correspond to the mobilisation of authoritative resources.

The second set includes the emergence of money—Simmel repeatedly drew attention to 'the power of money to bridge distances' and the subsequent universalisation of a convulsive money economy, which Giddens (like Marx) regards as the cutting edge of the so-called 'commodification' of everyday life in class-divided capitalist societies. These various changes correspond to the mobilisation of allocative resources. In the late twentieth century these two sets intersect in innumerable ways, perhaps most obviously in the way in which, as Harvey notes, credit transfers 'can move around the world as quickly as information and instructions concerning their use will allow'.

The dissolution of the social

Giddens's work advances beyond Hägerstrand's in a number of directions. Where Hägerstrand puts the accent on the consumption of space, in which time and space are conceived as resources drawn upon in the realisation of
individual and collective projects, structuration theory is equally concerned with what Harvey would call the production of space—the "amplification of space by time"—through changing modes of intersubjective distance and where Hägerstrand emphasizes the creation of 'pockets of local order', structuration theory is equally attentive to what Massey would call the changing systems of interdependence in which they are embedded. These couplets both find common ground in regionalization. Giddens regards this as a phenomenon of decisive importance for social theory. 'No single concept helps more to redescribe the misleading divisions between "micro-scale" and "macro-scale" research,' he argues, and 'no single concept helps more to counter the assumption that a "society" is always a clear-cut unity with precisely defined boundaries to it.  

The last point is put most sharply by Michael Mann. Against the grain of conventional sociology, he writes:

Societies are not unitary. They are not social systems (closed or open); they are not totalities . . . Because there is no whole, social relations cannot be reduced 'unanimously', in the last instance to some systemic property of it—like the (social production). . . . Because there is no bounded totality, it is not helpful to divide social change or conflict into 'endogenous' and 'exogenous' varieties . . . Societies are much messier than our theories of them.

Like Giddens (though unlike him in other respects), Mann conceives the constitution of social life in terms of multiple sociospatial networks of power. This is not to say that social life can be fully accounted for in these terms, of course, but they are nevertheless of strategic importance to any post-modern social theory. 'A whole history remains to be written of spaces,'achel Foucault once wrote, 'from the great strategies of geopolitics to the tactics of the habit.' And he made it plain that a project of this sort would have to be, at the very same time, 'a history of powers', 'Space,' he declared, 'is fundamental to the exercise of power.' It is also critical for the construction of post-modern social theory.

The last paragraphs have drawn parallels between the geographical reconstruction of political economy and the geographical reconstruction of sociology. No doubt I have exaggerated their independent accounts and evidently have to say much more about the contrasts between them (and the silences within them). But it is at least plausible to suggest that the 'disorganization of capitalism'—the tense and turbulent landscapes of produc tion portrayed by Harvey and Massey—and the 'dissolution of the social'—the splitting of sociology's master concept prefigured by Giddens and Mann—are bound together in some way. In the most general terms, one might say that both of them seek to capture a wider nexus of overlapping, intersecting and contending relations through which actions in pockets of local order ricochet off one another in a constant play of difference. If that is indeed the case, then one of the most exacting problems in post-modern social theory turns on what a previous generation called 'the problem of geographical description'. For how can we convey all this in our writing? Some preliminary answers can be found in the developing relations between geography and anthropology.

**GEOGRAPHY AND ANTHROPOLOGY**

Post-war geography in Britain was strangely indifferent to the achievements of anthropology, and yet the two could claim a common lineage reaching back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Geography emerged, so Stoddart claims, 'as Europe encountered the rest of the world, and indeed itself, with the tools of the new objective science, and all other geographical traditions are necessarily derivative and indeed imitative of it'. What 'made our own subject possible,' he views, was 'the extension of scientific methods of observation, classification and comparison to peoples and societies'. Among these extensions Stoddart numbers 'a new concern for realism in illustration and description', through which 'places came to be seen as objects which could be recorded and related to each other in an objective manner, rather than simply as triggers to mood and to expression'. Anthropology can claim much the same history (though one usually written in less triumphant terms). Yet — with the exception of Darryl Forde, H. J. Fleure and a handful of other geographers — the relations between anthropology and geography have, for most of the twentieth century, been much closer on the other side of the Atlantic. Cultural geography is still a much more prominent feature of the North American intellectual landscape, where it has even been suggested that one of Carl Sauer's most far-reaching achievements was the 'amalgamation' of the two.

**Ethnography and writing cultures**

I mention Sauer not only because of his central role in the development of cultural geography. His writings are especially illuminating because they were animated by two traditions. The first derived from the work of Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie. These two Berkeley anthropologists saw culture as a coherent totality: as what Kroeber called a 'superorganic' collective which transcended the actions of individual human beings. This was a powerful and, as it turned out, an influential thesis: hence, presumably, Sauer's belief that human geography is a science that has nothing to do with individuals but only with . . . cultures. It continued to be an article of faith in cultural geography (and elsewhere) for many decades. At the beginning of the 1980s, however, this totalling vision was subjected to a critique which, though it was severely confined to Sauer's particular formulations, nevertheless did much to re-direct some of the most interesting work in cultural
geography towards a more 'interpretative' (which is not to say an individualistic) anthropology. The writings of Clifford Geertz have been of particular importance in this movement (and, in my judgment, are likely to gain even more so). 'The problem of our interpretations,' Geertz insisted in one of his most famous essays, 'cannot rest, as they are now so often made to do, on the tightness with which they hold together.' For 'nothing has done more to discredit cultural analysis than the impeccable depiction of footnotes which actually exist. no one can quite believe.' This could stand as an indictment of geography as easily as anthropology; but there is more.

If anthropological interpretation is constructing a reading of what happens, then to divorce it from what happens is to turn the discipline into a 'science'; but it is also to divorce the discipline from the whole vast business of the world – it is to divorce it from its implications and render it vacant.

It is largely for this reason that Geertz comments ethnography, a research process in which one seeks to describe the day-to-day lives of people in other, particular cultures through a sustained encounter with them and the multiplicity of contexts in which they live. Its purpose is 'thick description': rendering the layers of meaning in which their social actions are embedded less opaque, less refractory to our own (no less particular) sensibilities, yet without destroying altogether the 'strangeness' which drew us to them in the first place. This is the impulse which now informs many descriptions of the geography of everyday life and of the cultural landscape. These developments have done much to blunt the prescriptions which Stoddart derived from the natural sciences, and they have, I suggest, extended the boundaries of 'reality' far beyond the confines of objects and objectives. But they have not, in my view, undermined the cultural landscape.

And this matters more than you might think. For what do anthropologists do? They write, says Geertz. And ethnography is now not confined to anthropology, but is a cultural landscape. This brings me to the geographical theories through Saët's cultural geography. For this was suffused with the idealism of the Romantics who contested the unqualified naturalism of the Enlightenment. Foremost among them was Goethe. 'The foundation of Saët's metatheory [about the morphology of the cultural landscape] rests,' So Gottlieb argues, 'on Goethe's conception of morphological change.' Goethe sought to reconcile the scientific and the artistic imaginations through the study of morphology, the ceaseless transformation of living forms, and to convey, in the same moment, both the form produced and the process of formation. Saët's morphology was perfectly consistent with this, of course; so too, for that matter, were elements of locational analysis. But what is of special interest is that, according to two commentators, Goethe's concept of form 'pervades all his writings, verse as well as prose, not only in the sense that conceptual statements of it are incorporated into his philosophical poems, it is implicit in the structural relations of the language itself.' There was thus in Goethe (but not, I think, in Saët) a self-conscious attention to linguistic forms and textual conventions. One finds there, in part in consequence, a tension between order and chaos. Hence Goethe's anguished presentation of 'a world bereft of forms, when time and place shattered to atoms and the normal congruence between self and surroundings snapped, found its precipitate... in his poetry.'

I am not, of course, claiming that Goethe prefigures post-modernism: but the importance of linguistic forms and textual conventions is surely clear enough. It is this which Geertz accentuated; and it is this which is being explored, in a different register, by various experiments in post-modern ethnography.

Experiments in ethnography

I have already referred to the problem of geographical description. 'Elided to a central concern of theoretical reflection,' George Marcus and Michael Fischer propose, 'problems of description become problems of representation.' There is now, in their view, a crisis of representation throughout the human sciences. It is one which has demanded serious theoretical reflection about particular textual strategies (whose consequences, it so happens, reach far beyond the text), but it has also occasioned a series of practical experiments in writing ethnographies. Marcus and Fischer accentuate what is important in all this: it is not experimentation for its own sake, but the theoretical insight that the play with writing technique brings to consciousness. This needs emphasis: I think, because in geography there have been rather too many calls for 'plain writing' by commentators who signal fail to understand the consequences of conventional genres and modes of representation. Those who dismiss the work of Gunther Olsson, for example, need to see that the giving of description is never a purely empirical exercise. It is not only that all observations are inseparably 'theory-laden' (a leading theorem of virtually all post-positivist philosophies of science) but that the very act of stringing them together – of structuring the accounts in which they are placed – is itself an irredeemably theoretical practice. Olsson has in fact made this point in the most telling way possible: his theoretical reflections on discourse are themselves deliberate experiments in discourse. For all that, however, there have been pitifully few experiments in writing contemporary geography. There have been countless injunctions to exercise the geographical imagination, but these have usually been disciplined by the established conventions of (literary) realism. It may well be true that we are
not trained to be painters or poets but, like Pierce Lewis, I don’t think we should boast about it. For if we cannot evoke landscapes, if we cannot provide descriptions of the relations between people and places ‘so vivid that they move our emotions’, then—to adapt a phrase from Geertz—we radically ‘thin’ our geographies. Consider the following:

My love affair with those Michigan dunes... had everything to do with violence immediately preceding the wind sweeping from Lake Michigan, sun-hot sand that turned deliciously cool when your foot sank in, the sharp sting of sand blown hard against bare legs, the pale blur of sand piling off the crest against a porcelain-blue sky. Lake Michigan a muffled roar beyond the distant beach, a buoy froth of jade and white. As I try to shape words to evoke my feelings about that far-off place and time, I know why the impressionists painted landscapes as they did—no literally, but as fragments of colour, splashes of pigment, bits of shattered prismatic light.

Is that geography? Or is it an extract from a novel? If you can give a straightforward answer to the question, then I must suppose you can draw a clear distinction between the two. But on what basis? And why?

In fact, one of the most important elements in the movement towards a post-modern ethnography has been a serious consideration of the textual strategies of contemporary fiction. For ethnographies are fictions, in the literal sense of fictio—‘something made’. And there are no end of ways in which they can be ‘made’. What is more, some of the most interesting experiments in ethnographic writing derive from the Impressionism (and post-Impressionism) registered in the passage I have just cited; from the multiple voices and multiple perspectives which shutter the convention of a single author, outside the text and surveying, with a single gaze, all that happens inside its frame. For it is this blurring of inside and outside which is one of the most arresting developments in post-modern fiction (think of John Fowles’s The French Lieutenant’s Woman or Christopher Priest’s The Glamour): and it also distinguishes some of the most powerful ethnographic fictions. As James Clifford sees it, the ‘ground’ from which conventional representations of the world have issued has been transformed.

A conceptual shift, ‘tectonic’ in its implications, has taken place. We ‘ground’ things, now, on a moving earth. There is no longer any place of overview (mountaintop) from which to map human ways of being; there is only a Archimedean point from which to represent the world. Mountains are in constant motion. So are islands: for one cannot occupy, unambiguously, a bounded cultural world from which to journey out and analyze other cultures. Human ways of life increasingly influence, dominate, parcel out, translate and subvert one another. Cultural analysis is always entwined in global movements of difference and power.
These are, so it seems to me, substantially the same concerns which exercised Harvey and Giddens. But they are also the concerns which animate Freud and Priest.

And yet, when set alongside the variety of textual strategies encompassed by the contemporary shift in landscape, jump-cuts and enactments between scenes, dislocations of chronology and composition, comments on the construction of the text by author and reader, and so on—the characteristic writer of many of the most radical geographies is truly astonishing. Let me repeat: this is not an argument for experimentation for the sake of experimentation. It is instead a recognition that the form which we give to our texts materially affects what we say through them. Narrative, to take just one example, is not an innocent genre. It is, as a series of strategic assumptions, usually unremarked, about closure and coherence. Stories are supposed to ‘hang together’, to make sense in a particular way; loose ends here are to be tied up and a sense of finitude achieved. But what entire narratives are supposed to represent the world—to ‘make’ sense of it—in this particular way? And, make no mistake, it is a particular way; other textual strategies are possible and, to some critics, even preferable.

Frederic Jameson contends that narrative is a ‘socially symbolic act’ which belongs to everyday life ‘as lived on the social surface’. His thesis, as I understand it, is that the ‘comprehensible order’ of the conventional narrative conceals a much more tense and fundamentally contradictory social reality. Similarly, Hayden White suggests that the value we usually ascribe to narrative in the representation of ‘what happened’ arises ‘out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary’. For both writers, therefore, conventional narratives are structurally implicated in the construction of highly specific ideologies. Post-modernism, in part, is a challenge to those conventions and an exploration of other possibilities.

It is not my purpose to debate these claims here; but they ought to be debated if we are to be vigilant about our work. One of the reasons Harvey’s Limits to Capital is so different—is so much more scismatic, so much more systematised—than his later Consciousness and the Urban Experience, for example, is to do with the formal differences between the two texts: the one a sustained theoretical critique of a central object in a master-narrative directed towards the urbanisation of capital, the other a collection of essays with a looser structure and an epiphonic, almost fragmentary, evocation of the urbanisation of consciousness. This is to oversimplify. On the contrary, I know: Harvey has still not broken with the totalising vision of modern Marxism. But the change in textual strategy evident in his extraordinary essay on the historical geography of Paris is, I think, indicative of a growing tension in his work. Theory construction, he says, ‘does not proceed in isolation from reflection, speculation and historical-geographical experience. But it does proceed rather differently.’ And he admits that his thinking ‘has been as much influenced by Dickens, Balzac, Zola, Gissing, Dresier, Pynchon, and a host of others’ as it has been by ‘dry-as-dust science’. And that influence, I suggest, extends beyond their evocations of urban experience to the modes of representation which they deploy.

In sum, I believe we might profitably attend to the poetics of our descriptions as much as to their poetry: to the textual strategies which shape what we say as much as the words which we use. Put like that, then for those who worry about these things geography is an ‘art’ (is it a ‘science’ too?) but the ‘arts’ are every bit as ‘theoretical’ in their sensibilities as the ‘sciences’. Poetics is, of course, the theoretical scrutiny of textual strategies in whatever medium and in whatever field they are used, and the modes of representation which we deploy in our texts surely deserve our most careful theoretical reflection. There is a poetics of geography, for geography is a kind of writing—and writing, along with reading, is still the most difficult of all the skills we have to learn.

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POST-MODERNISM

There is an irony in all this. I said at the very start that post-modernism was suspicious of master-narratives, of systems with centres, of stories that claimed coherence and completeness. And yet my own account has been shaped by a conventional chronology, in which the successive cross-fertilisations of geography and political economy, sociology and anthropology have moved towards a post-modernism haunted by a central theme. There is probably comedy too: not only post-modernism but positivism, post-structuralism, post-Marxism, post-impressionism... Where will it all end?

But the tragedy would be to treat the developments I have described here as symptomatic of yet another ‘revolution’, one more sea-change to roll with or roll back. These are, instead, ideas to think about and to work with—critically, vigilantly, constructively. One way of measuring the distance between them and modern human geography is, perhaps, to reverse one of the catch-phrases of spatial science: that there is more disorder in the world than appears at first sight is not discovered until that disorder is looked for. That is more than mere word-play; it may be that one of the most ideological impasses of all—the ‘commonsense’ response to the complexity of the world—is to impose a coherence and a simplicity which is, at bottom, naive.

Eveyone, I would not wish this essay to be taken as an unqualified manifesto for post-modernism. I am well aware that post-modernism can be read in a number of different ways, some of them acutely conservative as well as insistently radical; that there are still all sorts of difficulties as well as its formulations which I have had no space to consider here; and that some of its own criticisms (of Habermas, for example) are wide of the mark. That said, the various themes which I have pulled together raise questions which, in my view, cannot be ignored. For, like Eagleton, I suspect that we are presently
strong out between notions of social totality which are plainly discreditable and a 'politics of the fragment or conjuncture' which is largely ineffectual. And to go beyond these limitations, I suspect, we need, in part, to go back to the question of areal differentiation but armed with a new theoretical sensitivity towards the world in which we live and the ways in which we represent it. Whether we focus on 'order' or 'disorder' or on the tension between the two—and no matter how we choose to define those terms—we still have to think about geography.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

5. It is to the disclosure of these differences and disquietures that 'deconstruction' is directed. I have found the following introductions particularly helpful: Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) pp.121-50; Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice (London: Methuen, 1982); Michael Ryan, Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982) Chapter 1.
12. Doreen Massey, Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production (London: Macmillan, 1984); the section which follows is derived largely from a reading of this text.
15. Perry Anderson, In the Tracks of Historical Materialism (London: Verso, 1983) p.34; Rick Rodger, Habermas and the Foundations of Critical Theory (London: Macmillan, 1986) pp.142-3. Habermas's writings are particularly instructive on these questions, though he is sharply critical of both post-structuralism and post-modernism; see Note 3.


22. Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings (edited by Colin Gordon) (Brighton: Harvester, 1980) p.149. I have provided a detailed discussion of Foucault’s analysis of space in Imagination, op. cit.


29. These days we don’t only write, of course, and the importance of film and video should be kept constantly in mind. Even so, the discussion which follows is confined to written texts, and although Geertz has noted the various ways in which the text can serve as a model for many other means of cultural expression, including images, I do not mean to suggest that graphic images do not present their own, distinctive potentials (and problems).


34. See Gunnar Olsson, Birds in Egg/Eggs in Bird (London: Pion, 1980) for an early example.

35. Geertz, Interpretation op. cit.


40. Marcus and Fischer, op. cit., 39, 43.

41. Exceptions are now beginning to appear, though few of them have the freshness or immediacy of the best contemporary travel writing: and in my view they ought to.


44. For a brilliant demonstration of what I have in mind, which shows just how constrained Darby’s conception of the problem of geographical description really was, see John Barrell, ‘Goethe follows is confined to written texts, and although Geertz has noted the various ways in which the text can serve as a model for many other means of cultural expression, including images, I do not mean to suggest that graphic images do not present their own, distinctive potentials (and problems).


FURTHER READING

The clearest summary of Harvey’s work will be found in his ‘The Geopolitics of Capitalism’, in Derek Gregory and John Urry (eds) Social Relations and
Areal Differentiation and Post-Modern Human Geography

Spatial Structures (London: Macmillan, 1985) pp.128-163. (Many of the essays in this book are directly relevant to the themes addressed in the present chapter). For more detail, sample the essays collected together in Harvey's Consciousness and the Urban Experience and The Urbanization of Capital (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985). For Doreen Massey, see her chapter with Richard Mabey in this volume and the references given there.


I have developed these ideas further in my The Geographical Imagination (London: Hutchinson, forthcoming).

PART II

PEOPLE AND PLACES, SOCIETIES AND SPACES