

## **In Different Spaces: The Cultural Turn in Urban and Regional Political Economy**

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**ABSTRACT** *For many years, those involved in the fields of urban and regional political economy have called for increasing attention to cultural studies, both to add richness to contemporary interpretations of geographically uneven development and as a means of expanding class analysis to encompass more openly questions of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and everyday life. What has happened recently, however, has not been simply the addition of cultural analysis to political economy but the beginning of a radical restructuring of the very foundations of urban and regional political economy to contend with the emergence of what is now being called a New Cultural Politics.*

*I will explore three ways in which the New Cultural Politics differs significantly from what might be called the Old Economic Politics. The first difference arises from the epistemological restructuring that has marked the shift from modernist to post-modernist critical theory. The second difference, growing out of the first, is a rethinking of the nexus of relations defined by race, class, gender, and other axes of power inequalities and uneven development. Thirdly, I will argue that the most insightful current attempts to make practical and political sense of the New Cultural Politics are arising from a significantly different conceptualization and understanding of the spatiality of social life, from geographical imaginations that work 'in different spaces' from those focused on by most radical urban and regional political economists.*

*I will conclude by arguing that the cultural turn should not be seen as an abandonment of 'radical' formulations, as implied in the title of the International Seminar, but as an invitation and challenge to radical scholars and activists to rethink and restructure the epistemological and spatial foundations of their theories and practices.*

### **Introduction**

For many years, those involved in the fields of urban and regional political economy have recognized the need to give more attention to culture and cultural studies, both to add richness to contemporary interpretations of geographically uneven development and as a means of expanding class analysis to encompass more openly and effectively questions of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, locality, and everyday life. What has been happening in the 1990s, however, has involved much more than the mere addition of cultural sensibilities to the traditional analytical and interpretive frameworks of urban and regional political economy. The growing 'cultural turn' and the rise of what some have called a New Cultural Politics

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have initiated what may turn out to be a radical rethinking of the very foundations of urban and regional analysis and its role in making practical and theoretical sense of the contemporary world. My intention in this essay is to put this cultural turn in perspective, both with respect to the long history of debates about what might somewhat clumsily be described as the 'culturalization' of political economy, and in particular reference to more current discussion of 'Space, Inequality and Difference', the theme of the fifth Seminar of the Aegean, held on the island of Milos in August 1996, at which an earlier version of this paper was presented.<sup>1</sup>

### **Adding Culture to Political Economy: A Brief Historical Overview**

The 'cultural question' has always been a thorny and complex issue in the development of a radical political economy. At the crux of the problem of drawing together critical perspectives on political economy and culture is that each perspective has tended to represent itself as an all-encompassing approach to understanding what can be described as the totality of social life in a given situation. This paradigmatic similarity between radical political economy and critical cultural studies makes them inherently competitive, in part because they share so much in common. For both, the 'totality of social life' is simultaneously real and imagined, materially grounded yet filled with metaphorical and symbolic representations, with the construction of human consciousness, aesthetics, and ideology. As modes of critical inquiry, both tend to see culture as neither entirely independent of the economic base of society nor simply a direct reflection of it, although each has a history of swinging to one or the other extremes of this presumed continuum, especially with regard to the interpretation of the representational, symbolic, and ideological qualities of culture. Indeed, it has been the relative ease with which critical cultural studies edges into a depoliticized idealism and radical political economy becomes encased in a rigid and mechanical historical materialism or economism that has, for the most part, kept these two modes of inquiry separate and persistently uncombinable, if not combative.

The history of this tense encounter between cultural studies and political economy begins with Marx's creative critique of Smith, Ricardo, and other traditional forms of British political economy. At a most basic level, Marx began the culturalization of radical political economy by opening up the stodgy determinations of the British political economists to the very different intellectual traditions and cultures of Germany and France, creating a political economy that was increasingly sensitive to questions of human consciousness, alienation, ideology, the development of radical subjectivity, the power of social will, the dynamics of social reproduction, the formation of distinctive class cultures, and, in perhaps his most spatial assertion, the opposition of political cultures growing out of the city countryside relation, an early form of a core-periphery model based, like the later concept of hegemony, as much on political and cultural domination as on economic exploitation.<sup>2</sup> With the writing of *Capital*, however, Marx not only developed his critique to its most formidable heights, he simultaneously wrapped political economy in several epistemological binds that would constrain and limit a more expansive culturalization (and, I would add, spatialization) of marxian political economy well into the twentieth century.

The most widely recognized of these epistemological constraints arose from Marx's fixation of his critical theory and praxis on material production, the labour process, and the workplace as the paradigmatic site of exploitative social relations and hence of class struggle. While his own writings are much more subtle and open to 'external' influences, his followers tended to codify this fixation around a base-superstructure model, relegating virtually all cultural variables to a relatively subordinate and dependent positioning. In a sense, what was happening here was also an intentional subordination of *difference* and collective *identity* (so evident in superstructural relations) to the tactical and consciousness-raising universality, the

all-inclusive unity, of the dichotomized social relations of production under capitalism. Geographical and cultural variations, localisms, regionalisms, and nationalisms, were reduced either to annoying 'complications' to the capital labour relation, or came to be seen as inherently counter-revolutionary sources of 'false' consciousness, ideological impediments to the global unity of the working class. To be sure, there were many who broke out of this strict orthodoxy, but nevertheless there remained a powerful 'invisible hand' working to set strict limits to such breaks from tradition, even in the work of such 'cultural Marxists' as Lukacs.

In part, this materialist, productionist, and ouvrierist fixation in Marxism arose from Marx's profound inversion of hegelian idealism, and led to a determined rooting of cultural consciousness and all that was associated with it in the social production of the material world. And here too, in Marx's response to Hegel, was a primary source for another epistemological bind that would severely constrain and blinker the culturalization and, especially, the spatialization of marxian political economy. Hegelian idealism was deeply shaped by questions of political culture, the powerful role of the territorial state, and the ontological pre-eminence of space over time.<sup>3</sup> For Hegel, the motive force of history was a profoundly encultured and spatialized (or territorialized) human spirit. In his second inversion of Hegel, much less often noted than the first, Marx packed culture, territoriality, the role of the state and nation, and nearly all of what would later be called the social production of space into an encompassing and forceful *historicism*. The 'making' of history and such accompanying processes as the 'annihilation' of space by time (which can also be seen as the annihilation of geographical and cultural differences by the 'all-inclusive unity' of working class consciousness) was the totalizing focus for Marx's assertively *historical* materialism.<sup>4</sup>

An important but limited spatialization (and to some extent a culturalization) of Marxism came from theories of imperialism and notions of combined and uneven development that arose from the work of Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, and others. But the most concerted and influential effort to assert the importance of space and culture took place in the inter-war years. The work of the Frankfurt School, the hegelian Marxists and surrealists of France (including the young Henri Lefebvre), and, in particular, Antonio Gramsci created a new critical tradition in what came to be called Western Marxism, in contrast to the ultra-dogmatic closures of post-revolutionary Soviet Marxism Leninism.<sup>5</sup> Among the many refreshing new ideas developing out of this work was a dramatic expansion of the *sites* of exploitation and hence of struggle and the mobilization of class consciousness. Radical political economy, it was urged, must move beyond an exclusive focus on the place of work, the point of production, to explore the sites and social relations of reproduction, not just of labour power itself (in households, families, and gender roles) but also within the institutional structures which, ideologically and culturally, served to maintain and regulate cohesive capitalist social formations. More than ever before, the 'specific geography' of capitalism and its institutional grounding was brought into focus as a socially and culturally (as well as economically) contested landscape, with new attention being given to localities, to urban and rural 'popular' cultures, to regional patterns of identity and production relations, to the role of both the local and national state, and to what would later be called 'everyday life'.

This new cultural and spatial materialism had little effect on the mainstreams of Marxism during the inter-war years and well into the post-war period. The rigidities of historicism and the totalizing logic of the tightly binarized capital labour relation (the only relation that really 'mattered') continued to drive the development of radical political economy, at least until the 1960s, when two new breakthroughs began to take shape, both drawing heavily on the inter-war innovations of Western Marxism. The first was the expansion of critical cultural studies and a marxian cultural materialism, led by such figures as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. The second, building on the much more spatially-oriented French Marxist tradition and in particular on the influential work of Henri Lefebvre, was the

development of an explicitly spatialized political economy, first focused on the urban and international scales, and later on what came to be called regional political economy. In both developments, the rise of Althusserian structuralist Marxism, with its powerful critiques of empiricism, historicism, and economic reductionism, provided an important transitional stimulus for the emergence and expansion of a distinctly cultural and spatial (or geographical) materialism.

The relation between structuralism and the newly intensified spatial and cultural turns in radical political economy is a complex one that can only be briefly outlined here. The development of cultural materialism and critical cultural studies in British Marxism was, in part, a reaction against the perceived narrowness of Althusserian structuralism, with its seeming reduction of the 'subject of history' to the mere 'bearing' of structures by what were described disparagingly as 'cultural dopes'. But also carried forward in the most vicious critiques of structuralism, such as that of E.P. Thompson, was a stubborn defense of historicism, perhaps more entrenched in British Marxism than anywhere else in Western and Southern Europe. What developed in Britain (and perhaps also in most continuations of the Frankfurt School tradition, such as the work of Habermas) was a cultural turn that remained, for several decades, relatively immune to a comprehensive spatialization. Although more open to questions of race and somewhat less to gender, it also tended to remain relatively constrained by the traditionally dualized model of bourgeois versus proletarian culture, the former filled with hegemonic mystification and ideological control of the status quo, the latter with the almost exclusive potential for liberation and social transformation.

The formation of a distinctively urban political economy, in contrast, was more directly influenced and inspired by structuralism, either explicitly as in the work of Manuel Castells and the group of French Marxist sociologists who sought to understand the post-war development of the capitalist city and the fulminating urban crises of the 1960s; or implicitly as in the writings of David Harvey and other Anglo-American Marxist geographers, sociologists, and urban planners, similarly trying to make theoretical and practical sense of the urban condition under capitalism. Arguably the most directly influential figure shaping the emerging field of urban political economy was Henri Lefebvre, whose work on everyday life in the modern world, the emerging society of bureaucratically controlled consumerism, and the necessity for an 'urban revolution' had refocused the attention of Marxists to the 'urban question' and the contentious social production of urban space.<sup>6</sup>

Lefebvre, a key link back to Gramsci and other neo-Marxists of the inter-war years, had already established himself as the most forceful French critic of Althusserian structuralism, as well as Sartrean existentialism. But in many ways Lefebvre remained *both* a (critical) structuralist and existentialist, and more, maintaining to his death a rigorously open-minded Marxism that was determined to prevent any form of constraining closure to Marxist thought and practice. It is no surprise then that both Castells and Harvey paid homage to Lefebvre in their now classic books, *The Urban Question* (1977, original French version 1972) and *Social Justice and the City* (1973), while at the same time expressing their disagreement and confusion over his most forceful and eclectic attempts to urbanize, spatialize, and culturalize Marxism.

Unravelling the multi-sided impact of structuralism, however, is too complex a task to be treated so briefly. More important to the immediate argument being developed here is that the cultural and spatial turns that were initiated in the 1960s, whatever their ties to structuralism might have been, developed in relatively separate intellectual spheres until the late 1980s. Like the earlier 'Gramscian' round of culturalization and spatialization, the post-war developments remained, with some exceptions, rather peripheral even within the Western Marxist tradition.<sup>7</sup> This brings us to the most recent round of culturalization and spatialization of radical political economy, which I will suggest is currently having a much deeper and more unsettling effect on Marxism than any of the earlier rounds.

### **Adding Culture to Political Economy: The Contemporary Encounter**

That an important international conference of urban and regional political economists chose as its theme "Space, Inequality and Difference: From 'Radical' to 'Cultural' Formulations?" is evidence in itself that something significant has been happening to the fields of urban and regional political economy in the 1990s. And what became clear at the Milos conference in 1996 was that there remains great confusion and disagreement over the most recent intensification of the cultural turn. For some participants, there was a time-wearied sense of *déjà vu* —or, in the American idiom, 'been there, done that'— a belief that there is little that is new in the current cultural turn or, if there is anything new, it has strayed too far away from the radical roots of urban and regional political economy to be politically correct. More than one speaker openly answered the subtitle question by endorsing its specific phrasing, that the new cultural turn is a significant move away from 'radical' formulations, that it, like Lefebvre's earlier call for an 'urban revolution', has simply gone too far too fast. Although the words were not used, there was the implied notion that well-intentioned radical scholars were perhaps (again) edging toward a depoliticizing 'false consciousness' and divisive cultural idealism and/or relativism.

The most enthusiastic purveyors of the new cultural turn offered fascinating glimpses of critical cultural analysis but, for the most part, failed to trace the more explicit political implications of their research in sufficient detail to assure their radical bona fides. This fed the suspicions and skepticism of the 'neo-traditionalists', a few of whom proceeded to try to teach those who may have strayed too far what a radical analysis of 'culture' was all about. Appropriately enough, the majority positioned themselves in an ambivalent in-betweenness, but with markedly varying degrees of openness to the current cultural turn. The only consensus reached was that radical political economy must become more open to questions of gender, race, ethnicity, and other sources of potentially radical subjectivity (such as environmental degradation) in addition to class consciousness, a conclusion that has probably been reached at almost every gathering of urban and regional political economists for at least the past ten years. Left open for the most part was how this was to be done and, even more importantly, whether doing it successfully will necessarily involve a profound rethinking of the theoretical and analytical foundations of radical political economy itself.

In response to this apparent stalemate, I will try to build an argument that highlights what I think is significantly new about the current round of culturalization and spatialization and why I believe that the New Cultural Politics associated with this simultaneously cultural and spatial turn represents what may be the most formidable challenge to radical political economy in at least a hundred years. To begin, it is necessary to recognize that we are currently near the end of a more than thirty-year period of profound restructuring, not only of the material conditions of the contemporary capitalist world economy but also in the ways we make theoretical and practical sense of geographically uneven development in this rapidly changing material world. These restructuring processes, generated in majority from the urban, regional, national, and global crises of the 1960s and early 1970s, have increasingly become the focus of attention for a new urban and regional political economy that differs significantly from the earlier foundational work of Castells, Harvey, and others (although, like Castells and Harvey, many of the leading figures in the 1970s have agilely moved with the times to become prominent figures in the 1990s as well).

Within the developing framework of this new urban and regional political economy, there has been a shift of emphasis that has had the effect, often not consciously intended or desired, of opening up the field to an acceleration of the cultural turn. Using the language of the now widely familiar French Regulation School, the efforts to make practical and theoretical sense of the restructured political economy of contemporary capitalism concentrated first on an

understanding of the emergent new 'regimes of accumulation' and the various reconstitutions of Fordism, Keynesianism, mass production, consumerism, and the organization of the labour process that have played a major part in the restructuring of the world economy. The need to attend to cultural issues in these more abstract theoretical debates about the changing political economy of capitalism was relatively weak. But as confidence grew that at least the fundamental properties—the inner workings—of these new regimes were being effectively grasped, much more attention began to be given to the emerging 'modes of regulation' that were developing to maintain and sustain the restructured urban, regional, and global political economies. This more grounded and empirically detailed approach widened the scope of urban and regional political economy to more local and cultural issues—to changing patterns of governmentality, specific qualities of locality and regional 'milieux', the influence of social and cultural variables—some would call them 'untraded interdependencies' or local conventions—in shaping geographically uneven development: to reorganized gender, racial, and ethnic divisions of labour, popular culture, new information technologies, and the practices of everyday life in an era of global, flexible, post-fordist, and, some would add, post-modern capitalism.

While urban and regional political economists seemed to agree that increased attention to these more culturally defined issues was a necessary step forward, there was little agreement on how far this cultural emphasis should go. It was this cautious acceptance that emerged again at the Milos conference. Left undiscussed, however, in these 'internal' debates about urban and political economy was what has been happening to the development of critical cultural studies and more radical versions of cultural materialism. Almost independent of developments within radical political economy, critical cultural studies has itself been experiencing a significant restructuring, building first on the post-modern critique of modernist epistemologies (including Marxism) and later, in the 1990s, on a remarkable spatial turn that would make critical cultural studies a key transdisciplinary nexus for innovative thinking about the specific geographies of the contemporary world, from the body (the geography closest in, as the poet Adrienne Rich called it) and what Foucault described as the little tactics of the habitat, to the more global geopolitics of urban, regional, national, and international development and the new spatial divisions of labour being produced by these changing geographies at every scale, from the local to the global. It is within this post-modern spatialization of critical cultural studies that we can find what is most new and different about the current engagement of political economy and cultural studies.

### **Post-Modernizations**

Post-modernism has become so controversial that it is impossible to cut through the morass of competing positions for and against (and in-between) to find a suitable definition that we all can agree on. At the very least, however, I want to suggest that you resist the easy acceptance of other people's definitions of post-modernism, especially those that impose closures on continuing debate. Reflecting this open-mindedness, I would also suggest that you consider the possibility that there can be a radical post-modernism, indeed a radical *and* post-modern urban and regional political economy. With such a possibility in mind, a possibility that is too often foreclosed whenever radical political economists discuss post-modernism, the question is raised as to where might one look to find the most insightful and politically useful examples of critical post-modern thought and practice?

If I were to respond to this question, I would begin with the critiques of modernist ontologies, epistemologies, and theory formation, including those that form the philosophical and political foundations of radical political economy. In particular, I would focus on the tendency to couch the accumulation of practical (and critical) knowledge around a binary

logic, a tendency that is as apparent in positivist science as it has been in Marxism. Breaking open such binary logics to other alternatives, or what some might call their deconstruction and tentative reconstitution, lies at the heart of the post-modern critiques of modernism in all its forms, including the guiding paradigms of radical political economy. It is also, I contend, the most useful starting point to understand the original subtitle of my presentation at Milos: "What's (Radically) New About the New Cultural Politics?"

Among the most restrictive binarisms that can be seen as constraining the contemporary development of (modern) radical political economy is that between capital and labour, along with such tightly related Big Dichotomies as bourgeoisie-proletariat, capitalism-socialism, and materialism-idealism. Contrary to the view of most anti-postmodernists, the critiques of modernist epistemologies do not argue for a complete dismissal of these binary relations as irrelevant or powerless. They continue to be seen as describing important features of social life, the making of history, and especially the practice of radical and progressive politics, where things often boil down necessarily to strict yes or no choices. But when such binaries rigidify as the only choices, they become too restrictive and reductionist, tending toward a narrowed and exclusive essentialism that affectively silences the power of other choices and voices, alternative interpretations that extend beyond the bounds of the strict either-or logic of binary thinking. Instead of the imposed closures of such an either-or logic, the post-modern critique calls for a more inclusive alternative of the 'both and also', for a political economy that is radically open to a multiplicity of approaches to understanding 'the totality of social life in a given situation'.

Let me give two illustrations that touch upon the continuing power of exclusionary binary thinking within radical political economy. The first comes from the board game of 'Class Struggle' developed by Bertell Ollman, a leading Marxist philosopher. In the game, players can choose several different roles (peasant, student, shopkeeper) but only two players can actually win or lose the game, those representing the determinative and exclusive dualism of class struggle: the capitalist and the worker. All else is mere byplay to the fully dichotomized field of action. The second illustration refers to the old shibboleth of historical materialism: "Is it consciousness that produces material life or material life that produces consciousness?" Given just an either-or choice, the orthodox materialist, avoiding the idealism of the first, opts for the second. The more sophisticated Marxist would make the either-or choice more dialectical, allowing for a (limited) synthesis or positioning in-between, but clearly leaning toward the materialist option. The post-modern alternative, however, is to say yes to both questions, and to look beyond them for more and different ways of conceptualizing the relation, for the initial posing of the question would be deemed too restrictive for an effective understanding of the complex interplay between consciousness and material life—in much the same way reducing everything to the capital-labour relation constrains alternative possibilities for effective class struggle.

Other binarisms can be added that connect more explicitly with urban and regional political economy: city countryside, urban rural, core periphery, global local, fordism post-fordism, development underdevelopment, and, for that matter, modern post-modern. In each case, the critique involves neither a complete rejection of the opposing terms nor a search for an in-between position or even a creative dialectical synthesis; but rather a breaking open of the binarism to new possibilities of practical understanding. Seen in this way, the post-modern turn is not a demand for a complete break with modernism or with Marxism, although this view is often fostered by some overly exuberant post-modernist writers. What is called for instead is a deep questioning of established epistemologies, a full recognition of their weaknesses and limitations as well as their continuing strengths, and a shift of relative emphasis from a complete reliance on continuities with the past (a privileging of history) to a radical openness with regard to the present, to what is new and different about the

contemporary world, and especially to new ways of responding to the persistent political and theoretical question of "what is to be done, here and now?"

Taking the post-modern critique seriously has significantly changed what I have been calling the culturalization of radical political economy. Instead of a one-sided debate over how much 'culture' should be appropriately added, with political economists in control of admission, a new dialogue is being created on more equal terms. Political economy and cultural studies are becoming recombined in new modes of radical analysis that more successfully than at any other time in the past are able to deal with the interrelated politics of class, race, and gender without inherently privileging one over the other. It is this recombination that distinguishes the New Cultural Politics from the Old Economic Politics, and is also responsible for the refocusing of the study of geographically uneven development, the fundamental concern of all urban and regional political economists, around the combination of terms used to describe the theme of the Milos conference: Space, Inequality, and Difference.

Taking the lead in both theorizing and practicing this new post-modern and progressive cultural politics of space, race, gender, class, and other sources of difference, identity, and inequality have been two particularly active branches of critical cultural studies, one emanating from feminism and the other from what is now called the post-colonial critique. The post-modernism of both these groups of critical scholars has developed in large part from the same critique of binarism mentioned earlier. For post-modern feminism, this has involved a deconstruction and reconstitution of the dichotomy Man Woman, the opening up of many different conceptualizations of gender and sexuality, and the extension of this deconstructive critique to many other aspects of space, inequality, and difference. The post-colonial critics have engaged in a similar rethinking of the White versus Black opposition and such related binarisms as Colonizer Colonized, First World Third World, Occidentalism Orientalism.

Often these feminist and post-colonial critiques engender equally totalizing discourses that foster exclusionary politics and politically ineffective fragmentation. But in the work of such key figures as bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, the reconceptualization of space, inequality, and difference has opened more effective avenues for a radical and post-modern cultural politics that avoids such exclusionary totalization. In this new conception of 'otherness' and difference, of representation and identity, a more flexible understanding of the relations between space, knowledge, and power is developing and beginning to stimulate a 'recombinant' cultural politics of space, class, race, and gender, of strategic coalitions among all those who are marginalized or peripheralized by the unequal workings of power in contemporary societies, whatever its particular source.

Rather than mobilizing a politics that revolves primordially around a single channel of unequal power relations, such as the economic exploitation that underpins class struggle, there is a search for a more comprehensive and less exclusive terrain for political action and for the formation of strategic communities of resistance to all forms of oppression. For bell hooks, this involves 'choosing the margin as a space of radical openness'; for Homi Bhabha, it is a 'third space' of 'hybridities'; for Anzaldua, it requires 'border work' and a sense of *mestizaje*. Here is how the African-American philosopher and critic Cornel West summarizes what's radically new about the new cultural politics of space, inequality, and difference:

Distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize, and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting, and changing .... These gestures



are not new in the history of criticism ... yet what makes them novel – along with the cultural politics they produce—is how and what constitutes difference ... and the way in which highlighting issues like exterminism, empire, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nation, nature, and region at this historical moment acknowledge some discontinuity and disruption from previous forms of cultural critique. To put it bluntly, the new cultural politics of difference consists of creative responses to the precise circumstances of our present moment ... in order to empower and enable social action.<sup>8</sup>

As with earlier rounds of the culturalization of political economy, there is an attempt here to expand the potential sites of struggle, but in the new cultural politics these sites and spaces have multiplied much more than ever before and have extended well beyond the traditionally defined capital-labour relation. They include not just the sites of (class) exploitation but also of (racial) domination and (patriarchal) subjection, all places and spaces where difference and otherness translates into inequalities of power and knowledge, privilege and wellbeing. This involves not just cities and regions, households and workplaces, but also many other sites: the human body and the visual representation of culture, written texts and the university classroom, maps and the profession of cartography, Disneyland and Leisure World, the Amazon rainforest and the Macdonalds hamburger, television and the Internet, asylums and prisons, shopping centres and car-boot sales. Even the abstract realms of ontological and epistemological debate become sites of contention and struggle. What unites all these sites is a shared consciousness of the power and control embedded in the spatiality of human life, how all forms of human oppression and degradation are at least partially sustained by and through the production of specific geographies or what Lefebvre called the production of fully lived space.<sup>9</sup>

### **Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination**

There was a striking absence in Milos (and, I might add, in much of the mainstream literature on radical urban and regional political economy) of any specific discussion about space or what Derek Gregory (1994) has called our 'Geographical Imaginations'. Some might say that this is because space is no longer a problematic issue for urban and regional political economy, that we are all imbued with a robust geographical imagination, indeed it is this that ties us most closely together. We may be divided over such issues as post-modernism and the degree to which we need to take a cultural turn, but surely we are unified about the central importance of a spatial perspective in the study of cities and regions and in our approach to questions of class, race, and gender. In concluding this essay, I will argue otherwise and suggest that much of the confusion and disagreement that characterizes the contemporary encounter between radical political economy and critical cultural studies arises from significant differences in the way we conceptualize and interpret space and spatiality. Recalling the title of this essay, we operate in (and on) 'different spaces', and these differences may be creating complex barriers that constrain our practical and theoretical understanding of the contemporary restructuring of global capitalism as well as of the growing culturalization of urban and regional political economy.

In *Thirdspace* (1996), I argued that spatial thinking and the geographical imagination have tended to be bound by a dualism as rigid and confining as any of the other modernist binarisms discussed earlier. On the one hand, the spatiality of human life is seen primarily in its material manifestations, as a mappable 'real' geography that can be explained either through covariations or correlations of its surface patternings (the foundations of spatial and regional science) or through deeper social and historical forces that shape and structure these

surface appearances (such as the social relations of production and class that are fundamental to radical urban and regional political economy, or the power of patriarchy and masculinism in feminist geographical analysis). Alternatively, spatiality is analyzed and understood as an 'imagined' geography, rooted in mental or ideational processes, in the symbolic, ideological, and epistemological representations of space and spatiality. In short, the first view objectively emphasizes 'things in space', the second more subjective 'thoughts about space'. Taken together, these two modes of spatial thinking have often been presumed to encompass all the spatial dimensions of the 'totality of social life in a given situation', the phrase I used earlier to define the scope of both radical political economy and critical cultural studies.

Using the work of Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, bell hooks and other spatial feminists, and post-colonial critics, I try to break open this dualism to alternative conceptualizations and ways of thinking through a process I call 'critical thirding-as-othering'. The main argument that emerges from this critique revolves around the identification of a less well travelled third way of thinking about spatiality that is more commensurate with the ways critical scholars have traditionally thought about the historicity and sociality of human life than was possible within the constraining dualism of spatial thinking. This 'thirdspace' or, as Lefebvre called it, *espace vécu* or fully lived space, encompasses both the 'perceived space' of material spatial practices and the 'conceived space' of symbolic representations and epistemology, not as a simple either-or dichotomy but rather as a radically open 'both-and also' expansion. Every lived space is simultaneously real and imagined, or as I describe it, real-and-imagined. Like every 'lived time', whether it be the biography of an individual or the collective history of any given social formation, lived spaces are never completely knowable. Their 'totality' can never be entirely explained, for too much remains hidden, beyond any explanatory discourse whether it be social science or scientific socialism. A thousand historians could never hope to produce a complete biography of your life. So too is it impossible for a thousand geographers to make total theoretical and practical sense of a lived space such as the port of Milos or South Central Los Angeles.

This radical openness of lived spaces puts limits on our ability to theoretically and practically understand (*savoir*) or, better, comprehend (*comprendre*) human spatiality (and, by association, human historicity and sociality, or the making of history and the construction of social relations in society). Hence the appeal of the post-modern critiques of essentialism, totalizing metanarratives, and overconfident epistemologies. Making theoretical and practical sense of lived spaces requires a multiplicity of approaches to knowledge formation, a kind of nomadic practice that builds few permanent structures or inviolable 'schools' of knowing. While accumulating the most useful products of past journeys, it must also discard what is less needed in order to move on to new explorations. Understanding lived space is much more difficult than understanding perceived space or conceived space, making it all the more important that it be guided not so much by a single formalized epistemology but by a political project, by the usefulness of spatial knowledge for practical application and praxis. It is in this sense that Thirdspace can become an appropriate milieu for an innovative restructuring of both radical political economy and critical cultural studies, and for creating the productive synergy that has been lacking in all previous encounters between these two modes of critical inquiry.

In *Thirdspace*, I also argue that the spatial disciplines (geography, architecture, urban and regional studies) may have more difficulty in comprehending the critical significance of this alternative approach to spatiality because they have been so deeply socialized into the traditional dualism. Today, it seems that the most interesting and innovatively radical thinking about space and spatiality is coming from outside the traditionally spatial disciplines and especially from the many different disciplinary streams that come together in contemporary critical cultural studies. Leading this development are radical women of colour, whose direct experience of the multiple and interactive oppressions of class, race, and gender provide an

exceptionally powerful and insightful positioning. It is precisely this group that has been most left out of the Marxist discourse and the evolution of radical urban and regional political economy over the past hundred and fifty years. It is from their perspective perhaps more than any other that we can learn most about what is radically new about the New Cultural Politics. This is why I argue that the culturalization of radical political economy must today be led more by the best cultural critics than by the best political economists.

There is much more to say about the current spatial turn and how it is making the social production of space an important strategic milieu for a new coalitional politics of class, race, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, locality, community, environment, region, and other sites and sources of cultural identity and the assertion of difference. But in deference to the importance of those 'other voices', I close with a resounding third-spatial invitation from bell hooks.

This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonizer/colonized. Marginality is the space of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators.<sup>16</sup>

In the end, we have nothing to lose but the constraints of our history.

## Notes

1. The original title of this paper was "In Different Spaces: What's (Radically) New About the New Cultural Politics". As it was one of the last papers presented at the Milos conference, it contained some specific comments on the conference proceedings. I have retained some of this commentary here.
2. The emphasis on 'domination' rather than 'exploitation' to describe prevailing forms of human oppression defines another rhetorical contrast between critical cultural studies and radical political economy.
3. I have discussed this second inversion of Hegel in more detail in *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso, 1989.
4. On this critique of historicism see *Postmodern Geographies*, op. cit. I have elaborated the critique further in chapter 6 of *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
5. It is interesting to note that these three sources of neo-Marxist cultural and spatial thinking, symbolized best perhaps by the trio of Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, and Antonio Gramsci, provided some of the most important precursors for the development of what has come to be called critical cultural studies, starting in the 1960s and continuing on to the present.
6. For more on Lefebvre's influential writings, see *Thirdspace*, op. cit.
7. The exceptions themselves may have been concentrated in the southern (Mediterranean) and northern (Scandinavian) peripheries of European Marxism, a point raised by Kirsten Simonsen and others at the Milos conference.
8. Cornel West, 'The New Cultural Politics of Difference', in R. Ferguson et al. (Eds) *Out There*, pp. 19-20. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990.
9. This key point requires much greater elaboration than can be given here. For a more extensive discussion, see Edward W. Soja and Barbara Hooper, 'The Spaces That Difference Makes', in M. Keith and S. Pile (Eds) *Place and the Politics of Identity*, pp. 183-205. London and New York: Routledge, 1993; and chapters 2-4 in *Thirdspace*, op. cit.
10. bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, p. 152. Boston: South End Press, 1990.