
My dinner with Derrida, *or* spatial analysis and poststructuralism do lunch

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Abstract. Menu. This paper extends our previous efforts to (de)lineate contemporary divisions between poststructuralist and spatial analytic, or scientific, approaches in geography. We adopt the format of a dialogue between a hypothetical spatial analyst (SA) and a poststructuralist (PS). Their exchange covers, among other items, the differing stances of these approaches to epistemology, ontology, research questions and methods, and the concept of 'context'. We also further develop the concept of the 'epistemology of the grid', which we define as the spatialization of categorical thought. We link this epistemology to two others, Cartesian perspectivalism and ocularcentrism, arguing that their realization in social practice is generative of social order.

Entrée

In a previous paper, we offered an allegorical account of poststructuralism and scientific geography.⁽¹⁾ Building upon an antiessentialist theorization of epistemological categories and social power, we conjectured what a 'progressive' scientific geography might be and do. In this paper, spatial analysis (SA) and poststructuralism (PS) are present as interlocutors, charting one of the more trenchant divides within geography and the processes of disciplinary boundary-making that reproduce it. This hypothetical dialogue is not our attempt at arbitration, nor is it an attempt to map a new, postparadigmatic, disciplinary landscape in which we all might 'get along'. Rather than posit bridges over the conceptual divide, we understand these approaches in terms of their systematic categorizations of thought, a process in which concepts are developed, compared, and contrasted in a relational manner. In offering this analysis, we hope that spatial analysts and poststructuralists will further reflect upon some of their contingently situated engagements within both schools of thought.

Plat principal

SA So, did you simply tire of the label 'postmodernist?'

PS For many, yes, postmodernism has gotten tiresome; for me, it's all too redundant.⁽²⁾ Postmodernism is a vessel that contains too much, or, as Rosalyn Deutsche might put it, has been (mis)taken far too often to retain its usefulness.⁽³⁾ Incorporated into diverse and often conflicting theoretical positions, postmodernism has been taken to be a critique of the rationalism and universalism of the Enlightenment; an emphasis on discourse and representation in the study of social life; a rejection of economic reductionism thought to lurk in some quarters of Marxist thought; the exuberant expression of a youth-oriented pop culture; an avant-garde architectural movement;

⁽¹⁾ Dixon and Jones (1996).

⁽²⁾ See Hannah and Strohmayer (1995).

⁽³⁾ See Deutsche (1991).

a break in the experience of time and space wrought by the hypermobility of capitalism; and, for some writers, a deep-seated nihilism regarding the possibility of progressive social change.⁽⁴⁾ Finally, the label 'postmodernism' is also deployed as an insult—pomo as fad, as esoteric discourse, as voyeuristic and exhibitionist politics.

SA What makes poststructuralism any different?

PS Poststructuralism is a form of analysis that relies upon the critical scrutiny of foundational moments in social thought. In particular, poststructuralism rejects the essentialism and fixity assumed to inhere in the knowing subject, both as an object of inquiry and as a producer of meanings. As such, it refuses the stability of all social relations that are productive of the 'individual' on the one hand, while problematizing the presumption of the bounded concept, and the certainty of knowledge, on the other.

SA So, poststructuralists scrutinize, reject, refuse, and problematize. That only tells me what kind of 'knowing subject' you are not: do you conceive of yourself in any positive terms?

PS Categorically speaking, a spatial analyst I am not.

SA Does your negation imply an unbridgeable gap between poststructuralism and spatial analysis?

PS Accepting the spirit of the question, let me first ask you: what is the intellectual terrain⁵ that spatial analysis lays claim to?

SA 'Spatial analysis' refers to those movements initiated during the 1950s and 1960s that transformed Anglo-American geography from a primarily descriptive endeavor to a science concerned to analyze spatial patterns and uncover the presence and operational specificities of the processes that produce those patterns. As a result, geographic research has become more rigorous and more precise in the specification and testing of theories. Though there were some general concepts in the field prior to the growth of spatial analysis, it was only after its arrival that researchers paid serious attention to *methodology*, or what Schaefer called "an active field [in which] concepts are continuously either refined or entirely discarded [and] laws and hypotheses are ... confirmed or disconfirmed."⁽⁵⁾ In consequence, spatial analysis ushered in a wholesale shift toward abstract conceptualization within the discipline, the benefits of which, I would add, carry forward into contemporary 'critical' geography. For example, it's hard to conceive of the emergence of Marxism in geography, with all its analytical categories, without there first having been a theoretical revolution initiated by spatial analysis. Witness the fact that so many Marxist geographers were once spatial analysts. And, finally, spatial analysis not only revolutionized geography by giving it a firm scientific purpose, it also paved the way for interdisciplinary scholarship between geography and the sciences, both natural and social.⁽⁶⁾ Geography has benefited from and contributed to disciplines as diverse as statistics, the computational sciences, economics, psychology, and regional science.

PS You've located spatial analysis within a very general context. What do you think is at the core of this methodological revolution?

SA Spatial analysis is concerned with the construction and assessment of formalized abstractions—models—of social and physical processes. It undertakes this work using

⁽⁴⁾ For examinations of the variety of ideas, attitudes, and practices designated as 'postmodern', see Best and Kellner (1991), Harvey (1989), Jones et al (1993), and Lyotard (1984).

⁽⁵⁾ Schaefer (1953, page 226).

⁽⁶⁾ See Gould (1979).

four interrelated lines of inquiry. The first involves the application of mathematics to the representation and theoretical analysis of spatial structures and their transformations, primarily through algebra and the calculus. Data analysis, a second line of inquiry, involves the empirical evaluation of models through descriptive and inferential statistical assessments of spatially referenced data. A predictive approach to models, through simulation, constitutes the third area; here, spatial analysts project future spatiotemporal states of affairs under different hypothetical conditions. Finally, there is the normative approach to models, which is concerned with questions of optimization, or the determination of optimal spatial arrangements of social and physical infrastructure and spatial flows, using, for example, linear and nonlinear mathematical programming. In spite of the differences between these approaches (that is, between the particular methods they use, the questions they seek to answer, and the extent to which they employ empirical data), each shares a common faith, namely, that the investigation and explanation of spatial structure and variation requires rigorous, orderly, and systematic analysis.

PS You failed to mention one of the most popular areas in spatial analysis—GIS. Where does it fit within your schematic?

SA GIS is an outgrowth of developments in computer technology, data collection and management, and visualization. But in terms of spatial analysis, it typically involves the same questions one finds within data analysis, simulation, and optimization. Hence, for me, it is a tool for, rather than a separate category of, spatial analysis.

PS So, you are identifying, as the distinguishing feature of spatial analysis, clusters of questions and associated techniques that share an analytic orientation. How, then, do you situate different theoretical and substantive areas? What do you make of Marxism, feminism, and realism, to give just three examples?

SA By my reading, much of the research undertaken within these rubrics is consistent with the goals, research questions, and methods of spatial analysis. I am thinking here of work that conforms to the larger methodological aims of the social sciences, namely, to identify patterns and to uncover the significant processes behind those patterns in a systematic and orderly fashion. In practice, however, and for reasons grounded partially in disciplinary politics, researchers within these areas tend not to use the most sophisticated methods available for the kinds of questions they pose of their objects of analysis. More often than not, critical geographers 'explore', 'tease out', 'trace', 'map', 'allegorize', and 'interrogate', rather than actually analyze. This is unfortunate, and it is one reason that so many spatial analysts look upon critical geography with some skepticism. I would maintain that the study of numerous substantive research questions in critical geography could be improved through spatial analysis. Concepts such as exploitation, for example, whether conceived of in terms of class or gender, can and should be analytically specified, empirically measured, mapped, and related to other sociospatial variations. Such is the type of contribution that spatial analysis can make to critical geography.

There are, in fact, instances in which constructive engagements along these lines have been made. One immediately thinks of the work of analytical Marxists, for example.⁽⁷⁾ And though feminists carry on debate over the usefulness of quantitative methods in answering some of their research questions,⁽⁸⁾ others working within this

⁽⁷⁾ See Sheppard and Barnes (1990) and Webber and Rigby (1996).

⁽⁸⁾ See, for example, the collection of essays in *The Professional Geographer* by Lawson (1995), McLafferty (1995), Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi (1995), and Moss (1995).

tradition have not been reluctant to apply sophisticated statistical procedures.⁽⁹⁾ Finally, realists, though highly critical of positivism, find areas in which there can be crossovers between intensive and extensive styles of research, and between qualitative and quantitative methods.⁽¹⁰⁾

So, although the connections are limited in actual practice, the more general point is that the methods of spatial analysis can be deployed to achieve the research aims of these theoretical approaches. Which leads me back to my original question: what is it about spatial analysis that you refuse? Must poststructuralism *preclude* the use of analytical methods to investigate and explain spatial structure and variation?

PS That would depend upon how and to what end analysis proceeds. Let me return to your definition of spatial analysis. The commonality you associate with each of its traditions is an attentiveness to rigorous, orderly, and systematic analytical investigation, and it is on these grounds that you build a bridge to other theoretical perspectives which, you claim, can benefit from the application of spatial analytic methods. In doing so, however, you are not merely sharing a mode of inquiry; rather, the mode of inquiry you propose must presume a stable, stratified, and hierarchical social ontology. The methods you advocate are appropriate only to this ontology, one that is structured in terms of discrete objects and events, spaces and times, and the cause-effect relationships that govern variability in the characteristics of all four of these domains. Your assertion that the methods of spatial analysis can cross over into other theoretical areas, such as Marxism and feminism, is in fact a product of your acceptance of this ontology as the 'true' structure of the world. To the extent that some Marxists, feminists, and realists would agree with your assessment, moreover, they too are working within the same ontology.

From a poststructuralist perspective, however, ontological assumptions put the cart before the horse, for any ontology is itself grounded in an epistemology about how we *know* 'what the world is like'; in other words, the analysis of ontology invariably shows it to rest upon epistemological priors that enable claims about the structure of the real world. For example, the ontological divisions between physical and social phenomena, or between individual agency and sociospatial structure, to mention just two that are prevalent in geographic thinking, is the result of an epistemology that segments reality and experience in order to comprehend both. But how do we draw the boundaries of nature, or, for that matter, of the individual? And when and where did these categories emerge? So much of geography is predicated on analyzing variables structured upon such dualisms, and yet the categories and their derivatives are not 'natural', in any 'real' sense, but are the sociohistorical outcomes of representational processes. So, to answer your question, analysis must first begin at the epistemological level.

SA You can't expect me to be surprised that knowledge of the world is bound with cultural definitions and practices. One only has to look at the era of scriptural authority, wherein Bishop Ussher could declare that creation took place at noon on the 23rd of October 4004 BC. Over time, however, such knowledges have to give way under the force of both theory and evidence. And, as Kuhn has shown, this doesn't mean that new knowledges are immune from cultural influences, only that it should be our guiding principle to continually and systematically evaluate our theorizations and evidence about the world.

PS Yes, most would concur that knowledge is social, but here's the question: precisely how is this connection theorized? You would maintain that spatial analysts work toward

⁽⁹⁾ For example, see Hanson et al (1997).

⁽¹⁰⁾ See Sayer (1992, especially chapter 9); also see Cox (1996) and Jones and Hanham (1995).

the best approximation of reality given the current state of theoretical, substantive, and technical knowledge. But here again questions arise as to representation. In your view, models merely represent reality, such that science progresses through the construction of ever better representations—the construction of ever better mirrors, so to speak.⁽¹¹⁾ But to what extent do you problematize reality as always already a representation?

SA OK, why don't you jump through that window and I'll show you a representation operating with the full force of objective reality.⁽¹²⁾

PS I'll accept your invitation if you can first jump outside of representation. Look, I'm not saying that the material world, including the law of gravity, does not exist. The point is that nothing is *either* material *or* representational. As Deutsche puts it: "Reality and representation mutually imply each other. This does not mean, as it is frequently held, that no reality exists or that it is unknowable, but only that no founding presence, no objective source, or privileged ground of meaning *ensures* a truth lurking behind representations ... any claim to know directly a truth outside representation emerges as an authoritarian form of representation employed in the battles to name reality".⁽¹³⁾ In this view, the realm of framing, naming, and signification is not something that one can choose to deploy or not according to one's objects of analysis or the objectives of one's investigation. Any assertion of a reality *beyond* representation will indeed find what is expected: a stable ontology that can be constructed and defended as both a 'fact' and as a legitimate object of analysis.

SA So, no 'ground of meaning' lurks outside the window? Objects are not facts?

PS Again, these are questions based on the separation of representation and reality. I would suggest instead that the same epistemologies that posit these *as* objects within an ontology also fix the significations that produce them as 'facts'. What this means for spatial analysis is that your objects of analysis do not in fact preexist the epistemologies you bring to bear upon them. By my estimation, your ontology is grounded in a particular way of knowing, one that depends upon, and propounds, the 'epistemology of the grid'. The grid is at once a procedure for locating and segmenting a complex, relational, and dynamic social reality. It works to create a systematic horizontality that stabilizes both objects and the concepts associated with them—*i, j*—such that both can be rigorously investigated using linear cause-effect systems of logic. The grid segments social life so that it may be captured, measured, and interrogated.⁽¹⁴⁾ Spatial analysis depends upon the grid epistemology; without it, concepts such as 'spatial autocorrelation' would not exist, let alone be areas of research.

Though the use of the term 'grid' implies procedures for organizing observations and variables and a methodological heuristic for their rigorous, orderly, and systematic investigation, it should also be regarded more generally as a way of knowing that imposes itself upon and eventually becomes inseparable from those processes it helps to understand. The grid epistemology's powers of segmentation fashion borders and supervise interrelations among objects and events in space and time. In this sense, the grid is a necessary third moment within a triad of epistemologies that are generative of

⁽¹¹⁾ Rorty (1979).

⁽¹²⁾ This is the invitation that Alan Sokal, author of the contrived essay on postmodern physics published in *Social Text*, extends to postmodernists in his exposé of the hoax (1996). Andrew Sayer offered the same invitation to Ulf Strohmayer during comments at a session of the 1992 national meeting of the Association of American Geographers in San Diego, California.

⁽¹³⁾ Deutsche (1991, page 21, emphasis added).

⁽¹⁴⁾ The archetypal operationalization of the grid epistemology in geography can be found in Berry (1964).

social order. The other two are Cartesian perspectivalism, which lineates the world with respect to a central point, and ocularcentrism, which privileges vision from an elevated vantage point from which the world may be surveilled in its totality. As Martin Jay describes these, “Cartesian perspectivalism was thus in league with a scientific worldview that no longer hermeneutically read the world as a divine text but saw it as situated in a mathematically regular spatiotemporal order filled with natural objects that could only be observed from without by the dispassionate eye of the neutral researcher”.⁽¹⁵⁾ For the world to be ‘there for all to see’—a precondition for science after the Enlightenment—the objectivist gaze was coupled with an abstract, isotropic, and rectilinear spatiality, one that relied upon both subject–object separation and the unambiguous location of objects of analysis. The grid completes the epistemic triad by enabling what has been lineated and seen to be segmented *ad infinitum*.

Finally, I would note that epistemologies do not ‘free float’, but are realized in and arise out of particular practices. For example, Renaissance painting both contributed to and embeds Cartesian perspectivalism, while the telescope and microscope can, in similar vein, be associated with a wholesale shift in visionary processes. Conducive to and complicit with the rise of the grid epistemology are systems of land division, spatialized data collections such as censuses, taxonomies developed for cartographic presentation and analysis, and the rules and regulations that individuate—via specification of characteristics, rights, and responsibilities—the places and mobilities of what are taken to be Cartesian subjects. Landownership, for example, depends upon the application of a legal apparatus that specifies individual landholding rights and their scope—a process that not only produces subjects known as ‘landowners’, but also spheres known as ‘public’ and ‘private’. In short, the grid epistemology is generative of your stable, stratified, and hierarchical ontology. The grid ultimately finds its way into the organization of production and consumption, the layout of the built environment, the patterning of movement and communication, and the meanings we attach to all of these. Since the grid epistemology becomes embedded in our ways of living—from our streets and homes to our bodies—it facilitates the surveillance and policing of social practices.

SA Surely you exaggerate the role of spatial analysis in social control. After all, your ‘grid’ sounds a lot like other dire warnings emanating from social theory, such as Weber’s ‘iron cage’, Foucault’s ‘governmentality’, Habermas’s ‘instrumental reason’, Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘stabilization’, and Lefebvre’s ‘abstract space’. Clearly these are independent of spatial analysis. In some cases they predate it.

PS I don’t think spatial analysis is outside of these contexts. In fact, I think its arrival must be understood within them. More specifically, in contrast to your earlier historiography that dates the ‘arrival’ of spatial analysis, I consider the enterprise to be the *culmination* of the grid epistemology within the discipline of geography. What is more, I would go so far as to claim that the explanatory power of spatial analysis is due precisely to the deployment of the grid in the study of the grid. Spatial analysis is, therefore, caught within a causal tautology—that is, a particular thought and practice is employed to examine itself in the social world. Should we be surprised, given the grid’s implementation in social space, that the *R*-squares have been so high?

The continuing institutional success of spatial analysis is, moreover, virtually assured by the fact that spatial analysts reproduce the grid in modern society through, for example, applied geographic research on economies, transportation systems, and social groups. Such work not only relies on segmentations of space, it also contributes

⁽¹⁵⁾ Jay (1993, page 118). See also Cosgrove (1985) and Jones (1995).

to evermore sophisticated systems of data collection, management, and analysis. GIS and geodemographic systems are only the most recent technological and data management systems that embed the grid epistemology, and to the extent that they reproduce the epistemology in social space, we can be assured of their future growth.⁽¹⁶⁾

SA Even if I concede that what you call the grid epistemology is bound into sociospatial structures, there remains a set of prior questions: isn't such segmentation an ineradicable component of all social life?; isn't it simply the systematization of particularity?; and, how can you distinguish the grid from this larger process of categorization? Indeed, isn't categorization a necessary and natural component of all social research, and of social life more generally?

PS Yes, the grid works by categorization, and categories are indeed necessary moments in all aspects of social life.⁽¹⁷⁾ The point to be made here, though, is that one must not further presume that necessity is equivalent to naturalness. The category, as well as the boundary on which it depends, appears as a 'natural' part of social life precisely through its necessity; but these should not be conflated. There is nothing natural about how categories are constructed, deployed, and confronted. There is no better place to look for evidence of this than in the category of 'spatial analysis' itself. At the theoretical level, spatial analysis grounds its subjects—and its adherents!—in reason and rationality. Posited as the natural outcome of Enlightenment thinking, such qualities then become the standards by which other modes of inquiry can be evaluated, ranked, and dismissed according to their degree of explanatory power and rigor. At the methodological level, spatial analysis reproduces fixed categories in the very construction of its units of analysis, its variables, and its systems of measurement. And, at a disciplinary level, witness how spatial analysis has been constructed over and against alternative versions of geography. The power operative in the designation 'spatial analysis' is of a disciplinary form. It includes both the power to mark a shift in geography—"did it start with Schaefer or before?"⁽¹⁸⁾—and the power to designate which forms of research shall in the future qualify as spatial analysis. This sort of power is precisely what enabled spatial analysis to sanction regional geography as the Other to its categorical designations: objective, explanatory, quantitative, rigorous, analytical. And though different binaries are at work today, spatial analysis continues to enjoy the fruits of its association with the natural sciences and with 'hard' social sciences such as economics, as well as with technologies such as GIS and remote sensing.

SA And just what contemporary binaries do you have in mind?

PS For one, your invitation to jump out the window is based on the binary of reality and representation. In geography, this parallels spatial analysts' claims to study significant, real geographies over insignificant, discursive ones. The points being that these oppositions are available as a form of disciplinary power and that spatial analysts wield them to effect and advantage.

SA It's interesting how different the world looks when you are on the 'other' side of the category. I would argue that postmodernist, poststructuralist, and cultural theory approaches have been so successful—hegemonic, you might say—that they are now the dominant force in Anglo-American geography. You can see this at every national meeting in Britain, Canada, and the United States.

⁽¹⁶⁾ See Goss (1995) and also the essays in Pickles (1995).

⁽¹⁷⁾ The category is death, yet no less inevitable.

⁽¹⁸⁾ This is a rephrasing of the question that Foucault poses of space and Bergson (see Foucault, 1980, page 70).

PS Do let me know when this hegemony becomes manifest in job listings, OK?

SA Funny that *you* would resort to empirical evidence to make a point. But in any event, I am less interested in quibbling over who has the upper hand than to ask a more theoretical question: if categories are indeed necessary, aren't there always going to be hierarchies? Isn't that the nature of an opposition?

PS I think you're right, since only in *utopia*—that is, 'no place'—could the inside and outside of a category be equally valued. But in such hierarchies poststructuralism finds a purpose: to investigate the relations between processes of categorization and the operation of social power. A major component of poststructuralist research, therefore, involves posing questions to categories. For example, who has the power to designate difference, and, in the process, to draw the boundaries of the category? How do categories function in social life?⁽¹⁹⁾ Likewise, who has the power to draw the grid, that is, to implement categorization in social space? What we will invariably find is that the process of categorization is never neutral.

To complete the circle, I would note that the category is not only the result of power, it is also a condition for its deployment. Like the grid, the spatialized form of categorical thought, the category is enmeshed in and enabled by a social order that it *purportedly only describes*. So, in any research—spatial analytic or whatever—we should always ask prior to our analysis: what are the social stakes behind the systems of difference we are examining?

SA Wait a minute. It's not as if spatial analysts accept categories, or variables for that matter, as if they fall from on high; recall that Schaefer challenged geographers to continuously refine such concepts. In fact, I would suggest that, prior to asking questions about the 'social stakes' pertaining to a system of difference, we should first examine the validity and reliability of our understandings of that system of difference. In assessing construct validity, for example, the concern is the degree of alignment between a conceptual category and the variables developed to measure it. One can point here to the efforts of analytic geographers to operationalize the concept of 'distance'—whether measured in terms that are Euclidean, temporal, cognitive, or socioeconomic. Equally important is the reliability of categories, which involves assessments of the extent to which they adequately summarize the phenomena they describe. One only has to point here to the extensive work on regional classification systems and fuzzy set theory to understand the extent to which spatial analysts are concerned to accurately 'categorize' their objects of analysis.

PS My intent is not to operationalize categories, nor even to fine tune them. I want to deconstruct the category, not fill it with fellow [cell]mates.⁽²⁰⁾

SA It seems then that all categories are suspect. Which leads me to wonder how poststructuralism manages to avoid the critique of the category? Is it not a category also, one that both puts forward its own categorizations of social life and produces its own truths as a form of disciplinary power?

PS Poststructuralists are not innocent of either of these practices. But there is a difference in how poststructuralism conceptualizes and deploys categories. When one speaks in the plural of various poststructuralisms—for example, antiessentialist Marxism, poststructuralist feminisms, and some postcolonial and antiracist theories—one is attempting to signal not only the multiplicity of these projects but also their openness to the recategorization of social life. To illustrate, consider a poststructuralist

⁽¹⁹⁾ Natter and Jones (1997).

⁽²⁰⁾ See Horkheimer and Adorno (1995).

approach to subject identity. Each of these poststructuralisms resists the self-identical subject; that is, identities are viewed as contingently constructed through differentiated systems of power whose operation is never neatly contained within or outside the boundary of the category. The production of subjects is contingent in the sense that the processes that determine what constitutes an organizing moment for identity are sociohistorical, and therefore arbitrary.⁽²¹⁾ And identities are differentiated in the sense that they are always overlain with, and in opposition to, other systems of difference.⁽²²⁾ These contingent and differentiated systems—whether of gender, sexuality, class, race, or nationality—undermine the apparent self-evident social categorizations that so much spatial analysis depends upon. This is especially true for behavioral geography, which often assumes, and thereby reinforces, the operation of standard social categories. Finally, since power is a relational process not located within individuals, it is never confined to one or another side of the category: what appears as outside the category is instead implicated in the construction of the system of difference that the category putatively encloses. Thus, the outside is constitutive of the inside, always leaving its trace within the boundary of the category.⁽²³⁾ In this view, Otherness permeates subject positionality: it territorializes the inside, fashions the borders, and policies the hierarchies among categories.⁽²⁴⁾

This constitutive process is true not only of identities, but also of the epistemological categories upon which *both* spatial analysis and poststructuralism are constructed, such as objectivity, reason, materiality, etc. In this sense, poststructuralism and spatial analysis are embedded within the same sets of epistemological relations; these provide not only the context for mutual critique, but also, in the process, self-definition.⁽²⁵⁾ More specifically, it's the trace of an Other within the epistemological categories gathered up and deployed by spatial analysis that enables poststructuralism to open up and deconstruct this 'body' of thought.

SA Hmm ... so, everything is relational. But—and it's a big BUT⁽²⁶⁾—all this talk of interfiliating *X* and *Y* poses major problems. For one, you lose any ability to identify causal processes. You'll never know, will you, whether it was *X* that caused *Z*, or *X*'s haunting trace, *Y*? And, under this relational ontology, you not only lose the ability to sort out which variables one should include in a study from those that can be safely ignored, you can dispense entirely with concepts of experimental and statistical control. In a world where no boundary is ever really a boundary—where everything is always in flux—how can there be any certainty?

PS Certainty should be thought of as an effect of processes of stabilization, that is, as the product of a form of power.

SA But if you spend all your efforts destabilizing, then what is the purpose of deconstruction?

PS For me, the purpose is to *(de)lineate the social power that fixes meanings constructive of identities, spaces, and disciplines*. But there are no guarantees as to the outcome of deconstruction. This is because what it means to lineate and de-lineate, to fix and unfix, and to construct and deconstruct identities, spaces, and disciplines, is itself open to deconstruction. As Derrida put it, "One of the definitions of what is called

⁽²¹⁾ This is a point made by Morrison (1992, page 49).

⁽²²⁾ Jones and Moss (1995).

⁽²³⁾ Derrida (1988, pages 152–153).

⁽²⁴⁾ Natter and Jones (1997).

⁽²⁵⁾ Dixon and Jones (1996, page 768).

⁽²⁶⁾ Acknowledgments to Stan Openshaw for this formulation.

deconstruction would be the effort to take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recontextualization".⁽²⁷⁾ The exploration of this limitless context, one in which meanings are produced, but never fully present, in which identities, spaces, and disciplines are named, but always deferred, is part of the project of deconstruction.

SA 'Context', now there's a word. It seems to have as many meanings as 'postmodernism', especially within critical geographic circles, where everything that can't be explained, and even most things that can, are attributed to 'context'. How do you define 'context'?

PS The problem is not whether and how to lineate context and not-context. This is because 'there's nothing outside context'; it refers to the 'real-history-of-the-world', a limitless condition in which there is *no* outside. As Derrida put it, "one cannot do anything, least of all speak, without determining (in a manner that is not only theoretical, but practical and performative) a context".⁽²⁸⁾ So, context stabilizes meanings, but never permanently; it locates, subject to recontextualization; it categorizes, but not without the trace of the excluded.

SA Then the 'de' in deconstruction is just that, a constant refusal. Analytically speaking, the argument goes nowhere, for after each fixing of context and subsequent deconstruction there is nothing left but another round of stabilization and deconstruction.

PS Yes, it sounds a bit like Schaefer's definition of methodology, "an active field [in which] concepts are continuously either refined or entirely discarded",⁽²⁹⁾ doesn't it?

SA With a difference. For, unlike in your definition, within spatial analysis context can be both analytically specified and investigated. I can illustrate this through the relationship between models and the geographic areas within and across which they are evaluated. Obviously, the choice of observational units in any study is an arbitrary one determined by the research problem, the available data, and the interest of the researcher. In considering those areas excluded from any particular study, however, there arises another research question, namely, to what extent can the research findings obtained be assumed to hold in those other, unincluded areas? In the general scientific sense, this problem is termed 'external validity'. Assessing external validity requires that one's research—in spatial analysis, one's construction and assessment of spatial models—be replicated in other regions. If the model holds in these regions, then, within the substantive scope of the study, there is no difference in 'context'. If, on the other hand, the model is inappropriate for these regions, then it needs either to be rethought or recalibrated to take into account the different causal structures operating in these places. In the latter case, we can say that the areas in question represent different 'contexts'. Similarly, one can evaluate, through assessments of 'internal validity', the generalizability or applicability of a model *within* a particular study area. In these instances, the researcher examines the stability of a model's functional form and parameters for the spatial units included in the study. If the model's parameters vary, then the researcher is faced with multiple contexts, or explanatory domains, and internal generalizability is limited.⁽³⁰⁾

Now in the past it might have been fair to assert, as some critical geographers have done, that spatial analysts assumed context away in their search for universal laws. Today, however, there is much greater attention paid to how models perform across

⁽²⁷⁾ Derrida (1988, page 136).

⁽²⁸⁾ Derrida (1988, page 136).

⁽²⁹⁾ Schaefer (1953, page 226).

⁽³⁰⁾ The above describes the expansion method paradigm. See Casetti (1993; 1995), Jones (1992), Jones and Hanham (1995).

space. Such assessments go directly to questions concerning the degree of order in causal interconnections, with high degrees of across-space order indicating similarity of 'context', and low degrees of across-space order indicating otherwise. On this basis, I would offer that 'context' can be *defined by* the extent of spatiotemporal stabilization of causal processes.

PS And how much order can one expect in explanation?

SA That depends (upon context). One cannot make a priori assumptions about the degree to which order might prevail in causal interconnections across space, for this is an empirical question that can only be decided within a specific research problem. In some instances, order may prevail, that is, processes may be fairly stable in their effects over space, whereas in others the relations under investigation may be so thoroughly bound in contingent effects that it becomes impossible to generalize them outside of local contexts. In fact, it is conceivable that at one end of the continuum we have a purely general process with no spatial variability in its operation, as is often the case in the study of physical systems, while at another end of the continuum there is nothing but pure contingency, that is, unrepeated and unsystematic causal interconnections.⁽³¹⁾

I've offered, therefore, a strong view—though a contextually defined one—of context. Indeed, I've presented a set of questions regarding context that can be pushed through all elements of the spatial analytic research program. You, on the other hand, have offered nothing but refusal, elision, dissemination, and deferral. Can you formulate a poststructuralist research program? And how would it link theory and empirics?

PS Poststructuralism requires a transformation of the ways we think about and deploy particular methods of research. The methods you associate with an 'analytic' approach to the representation and investigation of real-world processes and events, conceive of 'data' as discrete bits of information to be abstracted out of a relational context and slotted into an explanatory framework. A poststructuralist approach to methodology would first reject the presumption that there exists a 'field' of real-world processes and objects into which the researcher inserts her/himself and her/his instruments of measurement. Rather, the field can be theorized as an always in-process context that exists in a trialectical relationship with the 'subject' who views, and the 'objects' under view.⁽³²⁾ This relational understanding of context undermines the traditional dualisms between subject and object, active and passive, the definer and the defined. It explicitly addresses reflexivity by emphasizing the *productive* character of the 'field', or context, within which the researcher is embedded. Reflexivity, in *this* sense, is not defined as the gaze of the self upon the self—a definition which merely reiterates the notion of an essentialist subject—but rather is an intersubjective process within which the identities of the researcher and the researched are socially mediated. Exploring these relationalities is part of *doing* poststructuralism.

SA I suppose we can't expect objectivity to survive this hyperrelativism.

PS You're right, but the same expectation for objectivity holds with your grid. Recall that the grid is embedded in *both* your epistemology and your objects of analysis. Thus, the grid is present in both subject and object, so much so, in fact, that you can't be objective, at least not when thought of as a procedure for creating a space of independence, impartiality, and autonomy between researcher and researched.

⁽³¹⁾ Jones and Hanham (1995).

⁽³²⁾ For example, see another collection of essays in *The Professional Geographer: England* (1994), Gilbert (1994), Katz (1994), Kobayashi (1994), Nast (1994), Staeheli and Lawson (1994); also Pile (1991).

'Objectivity', therefore, should not be thought of as a formalized procedure, but as a performance, one whose effect is produced by a particular and contingent form of scientific narration. In other words, objectivity results from an adherence to modes of representation that successfully implement the contingent standards of conventional scientific writing.⁽³³⁾ When spatial analysts adhere to canonical forms of writing, they implicitly guarantee to the reader the certainty of their accounts, for scientific writing "strains for the effect of having put an image of continuity, coherency, and meaning", onto the objects and events it describes.⁽³⁴⁾ In effacing the 'I' behind the writing, one asserts that no mere subjectivity has determined the outcome of the research; in weaving together taught stories with beginnings, middles, and ends, such narrative strategies imply a coherent author giving voice to a coherent world.⁽³⁵⁾ To disrupt these conventions by experimenting with alternative forms of representation of the world is to intervene in the ideological content of scientific narration.⁽³⁶⁾

SA So that's what Gunnar Olsson is about?⁽³⁷⁾

PS I think so. Maybe.⁽³⁸⁾

SA And how are we supposed to accumulate knowledge when moments of recognition are simply washed away with each new wave or re-cognition: "oh yes, *that too* has been socially constructed".

PS In the absence of universal laws and in recognition of the critique of the category, why continue to maintain a faith in knowledge accumulation, at least as traditionally conceived? Rather than bemoan the demise of the organizing principles (that is, metanarratives) of knowledge accumulation, why not recognize that these do nothing more than *permit* knowledge to be recognized as such? Why, then, not foster creative research strategies and forms of narration that open up new routes to knowledge? What's wrong with knowledge maps without destinations? Perhaps 'explore' isn't such a bad metaphor.

SA Whatever.

Dessert

SA A final question about politics. Where does it fit within your persistent deconstruction? If there is no aspect of the social world even remotely stable enough to refer to by a variable or to name as a process, then we seem to be left with no 'social order' to or against which action can be directed. How can deconstruction claim valuative criteria in the face of such groundlessness?⁽³⁹⁾

PS There can be judgment, which explores a different path than that implied by your question, which I take to be nihilism, or the end of politics. This process of judgment, which is itself a product of context, is to be distinguished, however, from certainty, which to me implies that there is only one legitimate vantage point from which to survey the social and political landscape.

⁽³³⁾ Jones (1995, pages 82–83).

⁽³⁴⁾ White (1987, page 11).

⁽³⁵⁾ Natter and Jones (1993, especially pages 191–195).

⁽³⁶⁾ Consider, for example, how much *more* unbelievable this account would be if both parties made the same points, but in rhyme.

⁽³⁷⁾ Olsson (1980).

⁽³⁸⁾ Olsson (1991; also 1995).

⁽³⁹⁾ For example, see Wolin (1992).

Within poststructuralism, one can no longer presume the stability of concepts upon which interpretations of 'progressive' politics have been constructed, including those such as 'public', 'citizen', and 'democracy'. And yet, in recognizing all of these as contextually defined categories, there emerge new opportunities for politics. For example, one might ask how the discursive resources that have come to rest in concepts such as 'freedom' and 'liberty' might be productively deployed in an attempt to expand rather than contract the range of meanings of these terms.⁽⁴⁰⁾

As a form of politics, moreover, I would argue that this is more 'progressive', if that term means anything, than the 'politics' of spatial analysis, which must be limited, at best, to the call to ameliorate recognized societal ills, or to the planning of what are considered to be optimum sociospatial conditions. Praxis, in your model, becomes a matter of working *within* given social categories and, de facto, *with* the social relations of power that produce those categories.

SA For an antiessentialist body of thought, poststructuralism seems to have an amazing degree of [internal] logic. Isn't that something of a contradiction?

PS Check please.

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⁽⁴⁰⁾ See Mouffe (1993) and Natter (1995).

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