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**THE GUILFORD PRESS**

**New York London**

claims that feminists are seen as high on "affectivity" and therefore "historically effective" but nonetheless "politically [in]consistent" (Andrew Ross, ed., *Universal Abandon: The Politics of Postmodernism* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989], xiii). Feminists are also pigeonholed as essentialists and then the claim is made that essentialism is (subsumed as) one of the "subject positions" of postmodernism's "radical pluralism".

65. Patrice Petro, "Mass Culture and the Feminine: The 'Place' of Television in Film Studies," *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 3 (1986):5-21. For expansion on this point and further details on Table 1, see Lutz, "The Gender of Theory." The table demonstrates that the analytic categories of modernism and postmodernism are no different than other such categories insofar as they show their roots in the cultural and historical context of their users. This does not constitute an argument against the continued use or validity of the terms but suggests an important caution and some additional questions. For example, is the response to postmodernism entirely pregnant with attitudes toward women? Does this category system receive continual replenishment from a view of contemporary American history as involving the ascendancy of affirmative-action-category peoples and especially white women (about whom the version of the feminine catalogued in the table appears most applicable) and/or the demasculinization and decline of "the" culture?

66. Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*.

67. *Ibid.*, 42.

68. Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in *Studies in Entertainment*, ed. T. Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 189.

69. As discussed in J. Okely, "The Self and Scientism," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 6, no. 3 (1975):171-88.

70. Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman," 189.

## 8

# Signposts toward a Poststructuralist Geography

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We are writing as social theorists housed in two disciplines that, on the surface, would seem to share little apart from the first letter of their institutional designation, namely, German and geography. Ours would seem to be a model case of different disciplines lacking direct connections, or even knowledge of one another's methods, objects, and interests. The apparent impossibility of confluent understandings, which we take as our point of departure, is partly the product of an institutional setting that *disciplines* the organization of knowledge by creating oppositions not only between the humanities and science, but also between history and space, understanding and explanation, writing and mapping, and theory and practice. Yet one feature of the current discussion over postmodernism is the rethinking of any number of imposed oppositions that resound with and have been resolved by universalizing truth value. Of all the multiaccidental meanings attaching themselves to "the postmodern," one of the few that unites its usage among scholars who feel sufficient inclination to answer its uncertain call is the sense that the foundational ontology inscribing such oppositions has exhausted its currency, as well as its capacity to render meaningful the social world.

Postmodernism, as an umbrella term, is a way of thinking ourselves out of this impasse, and as such, is tied to efforts seeking to form alternative understandings which do not rely upon the oppositional thinking

that continues to organize the academy and its products. Such thinking, however, does make for an uneasy grounding of disciplinary identities, as not only their "natural" objects of inquiry, but also their methods for rendering them, become ever less self-evident. As Sam Weber notes:

The widespread "identity crisis" that is affecting a variety of different disciplines today is only the most obvious indication of a process of rethinking, the implications of which extend to the academic division of labor itself. As the binary, oppositional logic that has traditionally organized scientific inquiry ceases simply to be taken for granted, its institutional corollary, the procedures by which the disciplines and divisions of "scholarship" have demarcated their domains and consolidated their authority, is being subjected to renewed scrutiny.<sup>1</sup>

A critical question posed under the aegis of postmodernism is how we shall react to such a scrutiny that moves past conceptions both of disciplinary boundaries as hermetically sealed, and of the entities contained within as self-referential objects subject to independent laws, principles, or rules. As the argumentation that follows will hopefully elucidate, our answer to this question is not a nihilistic postmodernism content to unground the possibility of all understanding, but rather one that takes its impulses from poststructuralism in attempting to provide a direction for a critical dialogue between the humanities and social sciences.

In this vein, one boundary urgently requiring reassessment is the one separating the domains that consider representation and space as their principle objects of inquiry. Largely in isolation from each other, thinkers of space and thinkers of representation have developed profound critiques of extant social thought. Geographers have taught us that space "matters," that space is implicated not only in any concrete understanding of the conditions of social life, but also that without a perspective inclusive of the horizontality of social life, any theoretical pronouncement is imminently suspect.<sup>2</sup> Literary theorists, meanwhile, have generated an extensive critique of representation and language that fruitfully problematizes the questions of context, narration, and communication, and all that is thereby implicated.

Both literary theory and geography, meanwhile, find a commonality in the critique of positivist/empiricist/objectivist history, which not only relegated space to the periphery of social investigation, but which also viewed the imminence of the social world and its re-presentability in language and thought in an oversimplified manner.<sup>3</sup> Peter Novick's characterization of the "matter-of-fact, antitheoretical and antiphilosophical objectivist empiricism which had always been the dominant stance of

American historians,"<sup>4</sup> aptly summarizes the continued influence of Ranke's charge to historians to "give an account of the past as it actually was." Ultimately, "modernist" history (in contrast to modernist literature) assumes, if not an intelligibility of events in the world, at least a confidence in the sovereign subject's ability to find (rather than construct) the pertinent facts, to master these fragments of social life, and to present a coherent if not omniscient account of them.

This neglect of representation, problematized by intellectual historians such as Hayden White, Dominick LaCapra, and Mark Poster, is paralleled by history's relegation of space to an inert horizontality which, according to one of historicism's most persistent critics, Ed Soja, "actively submerges and peripheralizes the geographical or spatial imagination."<sup>5</sup> Historicism's method freezes space: with the possible exception of the *Annales* school, empiricist history deploys geography not as a dialectical part of the process by which history is made and places "become," but rather as a device that supplements the explanation of events in terms of climatic or topographical features. It is, as Soja suggests, as if "an already-made geography sets the stage, while the willful making of history dictates the action and defines the story line."<sup>6</sup>

The post-Enlightenment era has accorded the historical imagination a privileged place in critical social theory. Modernist history, or "historical thinking," suggests not just stories and histories; it implies an all-pervasive subjugation of human affairs to the signifying power of history. History *is* the horizon of signification in this sense. Yet, as Nägele, following Szondi, has commented, history "does not need much of the historical gaze, directed at itself, to recognize that historical thinking in an emphatic sense is a relatively modern phenomena, emerging specifically in eighteenth-century Europe."<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, to be charged with thinking "ahistorically" today means that one is missing the true significance of things. To "deny history" would seem to deny the emancipatory project itself. Thus, spatial thinking, when it has entered the domain of social theory at all, has been charged as manifesting a conservative ahistoricism, instead of being viewed, for example, "as an attempt to deal with history in a different way, as a spatio-temporal configuration, simultaneously and interactively synchronic and diachronic."<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the rigorous questioning of context that illuminates the indeterminacy, nonreferentiality, and instability of language has often been taken to imply a nihilistic denial of historical knowledge, rather than seen as an effort to overcome the ideological and epistemological limits of its Rankean version.

As our argument here will demonstrate, however, space and language make social investigation much more complicated than "modernist" his-

tory presumes. Societies, as Michael Mann has written, "are much *messier* than our theories of them."<sup>9</sup> This is, as Derek Gregory suggests, partly due to their inherent spatiality,<sup>10</sup> yet it is also because writing about societies and their histories is not as simple as the modernist historian's mirror paradigm assumed. To us, the messiness of social life which surfeits "our theory of it," challenges the capability of any theory to make universalizing pronouncements irrespective of differentiations of space and contexts of reception.

In what follows, a sketch of the disciplinary histories of literary theory and geography provides an initial framework for mutual understandings of space and representation. Our narrative registers the conceptual, methodological, and theoretical transformations characterizing each discipline's stances toward their object of inquiry. The commonalities displayed by our montage suggests a position from which one can write a prolegomena toward both a spatialized poststructuralist critique of representation and a poststructural geography. We hope to encourage and foster this mutual understanding by permeating the boundaries of these two disciplines. We do so from positions which themselves are spatially, temporally, and intellectually situated, namely, a literary theory critically embedded in the German cultural tradition, and North American human geography. Our narrative unfolds from these two positions.

### Submerged Affinities

Any mapping of intellectual affinities, especially when charted, as ours is, over time, runs the dual risks of creating the appearance of a universal *Geist* moving through space/time and informing all thought, or of creating an empty identity where, as Hegel wrote, all cows are black in the night. This is certainly not our intent. For while the disciplinary self-reflexivity that we associate with the "postmodern" enables our inquiry, we do not take the term to indicate a force whose emergence has annihilated its precursor. The tendencies associated with both modernity and postmodernity have been present as "political positions in the century-long struggle between art and technology" since the start of industrial culture.<sup>11</sup> Just as there is no single "postmodernity"—as any catalogue of its symptoms demonstrates—there are many more "modernist" projects, geographical or narrational, than any uniaxential fixing of this referent would suggest. We are thus compelled to begin our portrait with a caution: the internal dynamics of disciplinary development display their own logic and cannot be too easily collapsed one unto the other. Doing so would subsume the voices of authors and their positions under a total-

ized account of theoretical currents. Yet at the same time, it is quite clear that no person writes outside of the existent social world, and that knowledge, consequently, is socially constructed; herein lies one explanation for the affinities we shall mark.

The embeddedness of thought provides the basis for a second caution, namely, that one should not be too surprised that both literary theory and geography have been profoundly affected by events such as the two world wars of this century, and the rise of class, race, and gender as central moments in social investigation. Yet to be content with such commonalities would impose on our account an all-too-ready affinity of empty identities, however significant may be their subject matter. Instead, the selective (but how could it be otherwise?) signposts we shall identify are located in confluent, but not necessarily identical nor even simultaneous, methodological and theoretical developments in these disciplines.

Inasmuch as literary theory has thought little about space (at least in forms recognizable to geographers), and geography has thought little about representation (beyond that of the mirror paradigm), the metonymic relationship each has demarcated between its objects of inquiry and the social world has of necessity been differently construed. Nevertheless, each of their objects, being as they are, "in the world," necessarily provides a perspectival account of that world, and thus at the same time offers at least partial traces of the other.

We proceed with the understanding that the text exists materially. A text must be written, printed, or electronically displayed for it to enter social life. Books, for example, have a substance and materiality without which their message cannot enter circulation. Writers and their intentions form only one part of this social process. It is essential to remember that no text exists outside of the support that enables it to be read; any comprehension of a writing, no matter what it is, depends upon the forms in which it reaches its reader.<sup>12</sup> Implicated in this understanding of literature as a social process are publishing houses, booksellers, the academy, and the state, all of which promote and inhibit the parameters of the iterable in any given space and time.

While it might seem self-evident to assert that "space" is likewise a material product, it is worth bearing in mind that some geographers have gone so far in reifying their object of inquiry as to reduce the understanding of social life in space to little more than geometry. Space, we now know, is, like the text, both produced by and constitutive of society and embedded in a system of social practices. The materiality of texts and space provides the basis for an examination of the historical affinities to be discussed below.

We should also note that as observers who would have suspected no disciplinary commonalities, we were surprised to discover affinities after all; not so much in their objects of inquiry *per se*, but rather in the way in which these have been constituted and approached both methodologically and theoretically. On a fundamental level, the transposition of "texts" for "space" reveals analogies in the efforts of disciplinary practitioners to imbue meaning onto their objects by theorizing them in terms that have at various times privileged authorship, the object itself, or its interpreter.

These affinities may be conceived via literary criticism's traditional point of departure:

Author → Text → Literary Critic

As hierarchically conceived by this traditional rendering of the relationship, the author, as addresser, communicates a message, the text, to the literary critic, the addressee. In contrast, a simple version relying on a "space" for "text" transposition would appear in geography as:

Agent → Space → Geographer

In elaborating this metaphor between literary theory and geography, we must develop a parallelism between "text" and "space." The multiplicity of meanings the latter term evokes in geography—for example, objective space, relative space, landscape, the built environment, place, locality—corresponds to the contemporary literary theorist's understanding of "text," which designates not only the printed word, both fiction and nonfiction, but also pictorial images, political discourse, electronic systems of information, and indeed any form of communication that can be read as a product of historically variable discourse formations.<sup>13</sup> Such broad views of textuality have recently been applied to traditional objects of geographic analysis such as maps, landscapes, and architecture.<sup>14</sup> Space, following Soja and the theorists whose work his position amplifies, is here taken to be a material product of a wide range of social relations which themselves are reproduced and mediated by it. Place, or its variant "locality," are the terms we attach to specific spaces. Places result from a spatial "framing" of a particular scale, from the nation-state, to regions, communities, and neighborhoods, and even to the microsettings within a house. (Here we distance ourselves from the oppositional use of "space" and "place" that align, respectively, with the scientific and humanistic traditions in geography.) Thus, just as the term "text" explicitly challenges the boundaries delineating the roles for the author, reader, and "work" in a particular economy of reading, thereby opening reading

to a variety of phenomena such as advertising and film (as well as epistemological stances toward these objects), so also does space carry with it a great number of possible objects of analysis and positions toward them.

Continuing with the above triad, "agent" marks those who create and modify spaces. In literary criticism, authors have traditionally been designated as the agents who produce the "work." Importantly, just as the term "author" for more recent theorists not only refers to the individual who writes the book, but also and more pertinently to the social, political, and linguistic processes and institutions that produce texts to be read and categorized, so too can "agent" implicate both the individual who builds the fence and the collective, institutionally embedded actions of those who create massive suburban developments. Thus both contemporary literary theory and geography have come to view each of their objects in terms of a matrix of social powers that give rise to them. Finally, the right-hand side of the triadic model positions the geographer as the professional analogue to the text's critic. Like literary theory's critic, the geographer's *raison d'être* is the study (reading) of spaces (texts).

We begin our historical account of both literary theory and geography with modes of interpretation whose referent is the left-hand side of each of the above diagrams. We note first that traditional authorial explanations of literary works stress the intentionality of the individual who crafts an imaginative world based upon his or her life experience. In its classical, Enlightenment, and romantic versions, genius authorizes the poetic mission of the author. Language is the medium, the poetic work the result. The author is variously a vehicle through which *Geist* or a culture expresses itself or a Promethean forger of the unknown or new, through whom the cultural life of a nation is rejuvenated. In either case, what stands out in this mode of understanding is the central role of the author and the univocal relationship between his or her words and the intentions they express. For the reader as professional critic, the work's identity as an object to be read and understood has depended upon this constitutive understanding of the Author as the source and defining principle of the Work.

For example, literary critics who ground meaning through authorial intentionality might say the following: If you want to know what *The Magic Mountain* means or is about, ask Thomas Mann, its author, who meant what he said. Even after the empirical death of the author, what grounds the work's meaning is authorial intentionality; the task of the literary critic is to ferret out those significant aspects of the author's life and ancillary writings that can account for the particular form his writings assumed. Problems arise, however, as proponents of other modes of explanation have since argued, when, to begin with, overlapping inten-

tions on the part of the author reveal themselves. Thomas Mann, to stay with the above example, saw his own novel, first published in 1924, very differently depending upon the period or context in which he was questioned. His text was made different, even for himself, by the events of 1933, by World War II, and so forth. In short, authorial intention is itself embedded in a temporal matrix, which foreshadow a later discussion, has everything to do with difference. In addition, seeing all writings as embedded in the social world—the starting point of our discussion of the materiality of the text—likewise undermines the type of analysis that thinks of the author as an autonomous subject.

Questions of autonomy, moreover, may be raised when we examine how geographers have considered the “authorship” of space. Intentionality arises inasmuch as space is viewed as being the result of actions of sovereign individuals through whose agency landscapes are composed and transformed. The effort to locate the causal underpinnings of human landscapes in human agency arose in the early twentieth century with the discipline’s rejection of environmental determinism. Authors such as Semple and Davis had interpreted variations in ways of living as a one-to-one mapping of an ever-present physical environment onto social life.<sup>15</sup> When this mode of thinking lost credibility in the 1920s, geographers either eschewed the search for human intentionality, focusing, as it were, on the places themselves, or they turned to a transcendental view of culture, regarding it as an already given template, but one through which intentional agents shaped the landscape. In the latter case, humans stood at the precipice of various choices, though what choices were conceived and how they reacted to them ultimately depended upon their culture. According to Sauer, whose works defined cultural geography, “Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result.”<sup>16</sup> The concurrent literary critic’s concept of authorial intentionality likewise recognized the importance of the author’s lived experience and culture in shaping the text, making him or her the conveyor or medium of *Geist* (or *Zeitgeist*) whose reflection could be found in the Work.

Concerns over the intentionality of the place-makers were by no means resolved during the 1920s. Questions of autonomy arose again in the 1960s under the heading “behavioral” geography, a paradigm which argued that to understand space one had to research those whose activities shaped it. Indeed, few behavioral geographers would fail to recognize the impulse prompting the literary critic’s interrogation of Thomas Mann.

An early turn away from understanding the meaning of texts in terms of author-centered realist accounts was undertaken by the Russian for-

malists, whose efforts to overturn previous interpretive strategies were tied to parallel efforts to restructure the public sphere following the Russian Revolution. Above all, the formalists were keenly aware of the literary work as foremost a particular organization of language. Rather than privileging authorial intentions, the formalists focused on the complex nature of language and poetic utterance itself, which in turn were viewed as intimately connected to the social and economic sphere. Formalists concentrated on the mechanistic structures, devices, and laws governing the operation of the literary work. The text was seen not as the incarnation of some transcendental truth or as the expression of an author’s mind, nor, finally, as an organic unity or a symbolic whole, but rather as a collection of effects, to be dissected by the critic.<sup>17</sup>

If language was to be seen as a socially constructed sign system, it needed itself to be metonymically understood as both a social product and constitutive of the larger social world. Moreover, these signs were no longer to be viewed as the expression of a univocal relationship between signifier and signified, word and object. Language is many things, but it was certainly not natural. Language is a social construct, the result of a highly contentious process. Russian formalism marks a shift in emphasis, continued by structural criticism, away from authorial intentionality and toward an understanding of its object based upon a system of rules. All of this left the author and those critics who would derive meaning from authorial intentionality in a much more tenuous position *vis-à-vis* the interpretation of writing.

For Bakhtin, perhaps the most unabashedly Marxist of the Russian formalists, the medium within which thought is presented—the verbal sign—is itself an arena of continuous struggle. Words, to say nothing of assemblages of words, such as poems or novels, are inherently multiaccidental, even though a perusal of literary histories demonstrates that the ruling class will always try to reduce their polymorphous nature to a uniaccentuality so as to support the dominant order. In sum, language is seen as a site of contestation, a battleground for control of the social world.<sup>18</sup>

While Russian formalism was decentering author-based readings of texts, spatial theory in the United States was being transformed by the human ecologists of the Chicago school of sociology, in particular Park, Burgess, and McKenzie, who became influential in shaping the subsequent rise of urban geography.<sup>19</sup> Their analyses of the communities of 1920s Chicago bear two parallels of note with the Russian formalists as described above. These include a rejection of the explanation of their objects of inquiry based upon intentionality in favor of a focus on internally constituted mechanisms governing the objects, and a view of

places, like texts, as sites of social contestation. As regards intentionality, these social scientists conceived of places not as expressions of symbolic wholes, "authored" by intentional agents, but instead as entities constructed through the interplay of systems of ecological relationships whose underlying mechanisms governed the spatial distribution of human activity.

In constructing their account, the human ecologists analyzed the city in much the same way that biologists treated living organisms. Burgess's model of urban form documented spatially "the way in which the city was the playground of competition between social groups and economic forces, believed by the early Chicago School to be propelled by biogenic drives."<sup>20</sup> Although the biological analogy and its deterministic underpinning distinguish it sharply from the theoretical and political orientation of Russian formalism, both shared a methodological stance focusing on effect-creating mechanisms that viewed the city (or alternatively, the text), not as given, but as a site of social contestation and struggle. In the Chicago school's language, "dominance," "invasion and succession," and "impersonal competition" were the governing mechanisms giving rise to spatial difference. Viewing the social outcomes of spatial competition as the product of contestation marked a shift from earlier studies which—if they carried any theoretical framework at all—located the causal forces within individuals, who, via intentionality or embodied culture, shaped places. In human ecology, places were no longer authored by intentional agents, but rather were written by the mechanisms that structure them. The human ecologists viewed the city as a social organism, with individual behavior and social organization governed by a struggle for existence.<sup>21</sup>

Russian formalism, meanwhile, silenced by Stalin's policies, was replaced by social realism, the Soviet Union's state-sanctioned aesthetic. The only other place where concerns similar to those espoused by the formalists occurred, the early work of the Frankfurt school and Brecht's creation of a theater of *Verfremdung* during the 1920s in Germany, was likewise repressed with Hitler's rise to power in 1933. National Socialism restored an aesthetic that gave prominence to authorial intentionality, along with such notions as genius, heroic creation, and eternal (and immutable) value, as Walter Benjamin was able to observe before he died while attempting to flee a Nazified Europe.<sup>22</sup>

While formalism was not to be rediscovered until the late 1960s, at which time it exercised considerable effect on Marxist criticism in the United States, another critical movement gained widespread currency at American and English universities between the 1930s and 1950s. Like formalism before it, the so-called New Criticism continued to mark a

shift away from authorial intentionality as the grounding concept in defining literary criticism's object of inquiry. Two leading proponents of the school boldly announced that "critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle."<sup>23</sup> Thus authorial intentionality, even if it could be recovered, was of no relevance for an interpretation of the work's meaning. A poem was a self-sufficient object, which meant what it meant. Yet as we shall see below, on a more subtle level, the "author-function" continued to provide the enabling limits determining its method. For New Critics, the literary work retained a measure of autonomy in New Criticism such that no social context, not even the possible intentions of its author, could be held accountable in a causal way for the meaning to be "found" in a poem by the critic. The poem was that "which could not be paraphrased, expressed in any language other than itself: each of its parts was folded in on the others in a complex organic unity which it would be a kind of blasphemy to violate."<sup>24</sup>

The New Critic's text was approached much like the geographer's region of the same period, wherein coherence and integration were the to-be-discovered characteristics of the poem/place. The task of the literary critic, to whom was now transferred the authority of interpretation, was to celebrate the uniqueness and particularity of each great literary work. The contemplative stance of the critic was one of reverence before the work's beauty. The method of analysis associated with this school was that of "close reading," through which the harmonious interactions of the elements comprising the poem's uniqueness could be discerned. Whereas the formalists saw language's multiaccentual character as the basis for reading in terms of conflict and contestation, the New Critics saw harmony and wholeness in the great works. Social conflict was, along with the author's intentions, irrelevant to "the work itself," which was simply given, not made. Needless to say, this understanding of the "text itself" found merely trivial assertions that the text needed to be understood as "itself" produced and embedded in the social world.

This celebration of the unique was not without a critical method. New Criticism inherited from the formalists a desire to understand the formal laws governing the structure of the poem. Through their close readings, however, what appeared on a manifest level to involve paradoxes and tensions could be resolved by a New Critic into a harmonious and beautiful identity that respected the autonomous integrity of the work. Any given poem could thus be understood by virtue of its own (to-be-discerned) inherent system, and not as bearing relationships to transcontextual laws. Indeed, a New Critic's insistence upon the uniqueness of the individual work, the belief that each work could be adequately studied and understood in isolation from others, must be seen as an effort to

prevent language's materialization as mere instances of general, or "scientific," laws. While scientific rationalism was stripping human experience of its sensuous particularity, poetry presented a possible aesthetic alternative. As Hayden White has summarized its impulse, the New Critics were engaged in a defense of autotelism for the artwork. Toward this end, "They progressively sheared away, as interpretatively trivial, the relations which the literary artifact bore to its historical context, its author, and its audience(s), leaving the ideal critical situation to be conceived as that in which a single sensitive reader, which usually turned out to be a New Critic, studied a single literary work in the effort to determine the inner dynamics of the work's intrinsic irony."<sup>25</sup>

New Criticism has been accused of ahistoricism, by White, Terry Eagleton, and many others, but the grounds for such a critique are themselves most illuminating. Eagleton, for example, is right in condemning the New Critics for converting the poem into a fetish, and in characterizing New Criticism's valorization of literature as being "a solution to social problems, not part of them; the poem must be plucked free of the wreckage of history and hoisted into a sublime space above it."<sup>26</sup> The category of space, which seems to have only metaphorical meaning here, is reiterated when Eagleton likewise remarks that for New Criticism, "The poem became a spatial figure rather than a temporal process."<sup>27</sup> What is remarkable in his otherwise admirable characterization is Eagleton's understanding of space here as an empty, nondialectical concept. For to be ahistorical (really he means acontextual, or divorced from any general laws governing social life) relegates thinking to a realm best expressed by the spatial. This observation pointedly amplifies Soja's claims regarding the subordination of spatial thinking in critical social theory.

From our perspective, New Criticism contains many parallels to its geographic contemporary, regional geography. As a paradigm dominating the North American scene from the 1930s to 1950s, regional geography was equally prone to celebrating the uniqueness of its objects, and to see in them not the operation of transcontextual laws but instances of distinctive interrelations. Like New Criticism's turn from authorial intentionality, regional geographers rejected analyses centered on agential forces, focusing instead on places as self-sufficient objects of inquiry. Moreover, the region (like the text) was seen to embody a complex unity that the geographer (like the critic) examined in terms of coherence/integration/harmony/wholeness. Regional geographers took as their core problematic the description and analysis of specific places, defining them in terms of surface homogeneity and directing attention to the varied interrelations they contained. As the leading spokesperson for regional geography, Richard Hartshorne, notes, geographers study phenomena:

[N]ot in themselves nor in their separate variations over the earth but in the areal variation of the phenomena as interrelated with each other, either in relatively simple integrations or in more complex but still partial integrations, in order to approach the total integration of interrelated phenomena which form the varying character of the earth as the home of man.<sup>28</sup>

Folding the parts into one another permits the geographer to achieve a gestalt-like unity, culminating in Hart's description of the discipline's highest art: "evocative descriptions that facilitate an understanding and an appreciation of places, areas, and regions."<sup>29</sup> Such sentimentalism was not without a critical method, however. Regional geography required equally a careful mapping and description of spatial variations, a classification of the phenomena under investigation, and a decoding of their interrelations. Thus at the same time literary critics were enjoined to emphasize the organic unity of the work through a "careful reading," geographers were encouraged to carefully map and analyze the varied features of regions such that an appreciation of their unique character and identity emerged.

Regional geography suffered from a number of contradictions, not the least of which was its attempt to bound the limits of its object. Consider the following comment by Hartshorne: "The purpose in dividing up the area is to secure areal sections, or 'regions,' such that within each region the elements . . . under study will demonstrate nearly constant interrelations."<sup>30</sup> Paradoxically, regional geographers have to know the "what" and "how" of interrelations before they can identify the object of analysis, yet the "what" and "how" of these interrelations also constitute their goals. Yet even if we are to disregard this theoretical circularity, it is evident that the process of defining the spatial limits of interrelations would do no less than sever the region from its larger context. No wonder, then, that regional geographers were content to theorize their objects outside of their position in global systems of capitalism, colonialism, or militarism. Nor were they overly concerned with history, that is, with the processes whereby places become. As Hartshorne again writes: "Explanatory description of individual relationships may require analysis of process relationships considerably farther back in time, but the purpose of such dips into the past is not to trace developments or seek origins but to facilitate comprehension of the present."<sup>31</sup> Thus we see that, just as the poem hovered outside of the domain of history for the New Critics, so too did the geographer's region. Finally, regions were divorced from the agency that gave rise to them, lest geographers be accused of doing so much sociology. The region was not unreflective of the intentionality of those who lived in them, but the place itself, and not the place-makers, focused the paradigm.



Second, regional geographies adopted an unusually straightforward narrative form, typically beginning with a description of the physical environment (e.g., climate, landforms, soils, etc.), followed by a brief history of the sequence of man's (usually white European) occupancy and a lengthy discussion of the distribution of various social and economic features (population location and growth, agricultural production, industry, and cities). Such descriptions might conclude with instrumental commentary on the region's "political situation."<sup>32</sup> Once regional geography established its own paradigmatic narrative strategy, it disciplined what could be conceived and written, which elements counted in understanding a region and which did not. Thus, the confluence of regional geography's content and its narrative form is, to foreshadow a later discussion, an exemplary case of what Hayden White recognized in the context of narrative theory as the "content of the form."<sup>33</sup> As a consequence, regional geography failed to live up to its promise of understanding, in any theoretical sense, its objects of inquiry. The accusation, "mere" description, was a common critique leveled against the appearance of volume after volume of detailed, but theoretically unreflective, idiography.

Third, regional geography accepted as unproblematic a "mirror-of-reality" paradigm, in which the geographer could claim to have captured the essence of regions *via* cartographic representation and careful scientific description. Left uninterrogated was both the status of the observing subject, that is, the geographer as a "reader" of places, and the process of depiction, that is, the geographer as an author re-presenting places. Regional geography assumed that an objective observer with a thorough knowledge of the region being described could unproblematically render an understanding and explanation of the place in his or her writing. As Richard Hartshorne defined it, the discipline is "a science that interprets the realities of areal differentiation of the world *as they are found*."<sup>34</sup> This perspective assumes that the realities or facts of the world exist independent of the observer, that is, that there exists a realm of the Real in which "facts speak for themselves" prior to and independent of interpretation. Moreover, Hartshorne continues, understanding and explanation of this reality requires "accurate, orderly, and rational description and interpretation."<sup>35</sup> This additionally assumes that the representation of that which is given or present can be communicated without distortion and with its full presence. The problem of geographic description extends no further than the question of one's knowledge and honesty; in essence, geographic description posits an autonomous author who writes about, but as if outside, the social world.

In the 1960s regional geography and New Criticism began to lose

their power of persuasion to other schools, spatial science and literary structuralism, respectively, each of which promised more rigor in relating particular instances to universal laws. Literary structuralism, like spatial science, continued impulses from earlier schools (formalism and the Chicago school) by conceptualizing their objects not as self-contained entities but rather as the realization of transcontextual processes. In discarding the celebration of uniqueness practiced by the New Critics and regional geography, literary structuralism and spatial science interrogated their objects with the aim of establishing a system of universal laws operating throughout diverse texts and places. Both schools have been attacked (and praised) for being antihumanist, which in the case of literary structuralism marked its difference from any approach for which the human subject is the source and origin of literary meaning. Similarly, spatial science has been accused of erasing the "human" from human geography through its overly abstract emphasis on spatial laws, its use of models, and its reliance upon quantitative analysis.

The proper object of structuralist analysis is, following Saussurean linguistics, the system that underlies any particular signifying practice, not the individual utterance. The elements of any language or grammar—be it spoken or written—acquire meaning not as the result of some connection between words and things, but only as parts of a system of relations.<sup>36</sup> Whether applied to a literary work or to other cultural practices—fashion, architecture, myths—structuralism looks for the system of differences through which meaning is conveyed.<sup>37</sup>

Structuralism tacitly assumes a universal man and mind, a point which our later discussion of poststructuralism will consider further. While cultures may express themselves in different words or concepts, structuralism assumes a fundamental unity of laws governing these differences, once one has indeed discovered these central laws. Identifying and subsuming particulars under these universal laws became the task that structuralism, as a scientific enterprise, posed for itself. Phrased linguistically, structuralism sought to understand the nature of and the relationship between any given *parole* and the underlying structure of *langue*. It was attractive to literary critics, whose appetite had been whetted but not satisfied by New Criticism, because it promised to make the study of literature scientific by introducing rigor, objective universal laws, and hence, objectivity, into analysis. To do so, structuralists continued the formalist stress on form, and downplayed the actual content of any particular story. One can replace the particular nouns of any given plot—boy and man, daughter and woman—or its verbs, and still have the same story. Not the particular items, but the structure of the relations between the units is what is important.

The parallel to the rise of structuralism in literary theory is found in geography's turn toward spatial science, which employed geometric representations of space coupled with quantitative methodologies to identify laws governing the spatial organization of society. As Schaefer writes, "To explain the phenomena one has described means always to recognize them as instances of laws." Hence, he goes on, "geography has to be conceived as the science concerned with the formulation of the laws governing the spatial distribution of certain features on the surface of the earth."<sup>38</sup>

Within this paradigm, the most theoretically grounded approach is a deductive form of inquiry that homogenizes the diversity of places. The *tabula rasa* of location theory, upon which spatial laws are set into motion, reduces diversity to either an unnecessary complication or understands it as the outcome of manifestly complicated laws that we have only begun to identify. What is lost in this impulse toward the general is the heterogeneity posed by the unique, the specific, and the particular. Alternatively, variation over space can be analyzed inductively, by estimating functional relations between covarying spatial distributions. In either case, the goal is to establish general causal relationships between that which is under investigation and that to which it is presumed to be causally related.

Spatial science has been rightly accused of being profoundly antihumanist. It reduces all spatial organization of society to a set of discoverable principles outside of the control of the active agents who shape it. Moreover, its space is objective, physical, even Euclidean, rather than dialectically related to society or lived and meaningful to individuals. The antihumanist orientation of this paradigm is dramatically marked in the words of Stewart, an early spatial scientist who, with William Warntz, gave rise to a subparadigm known as social physics: "There is no longer any excuse for anyone to ignore the fact that human beings, on the average and at least in certain circumstances, obey mathematical rules resembling in a general way some of the primitive 'laws' of physics."<sup>39</sup> The reduction of agency to the neoclassical economist's world populated by persons with identical tastes, capacities, and incomes, enabled the universal application of models. One might just as easily apply Christaller's central place theory to southern Germany, as he did, or to China, Iowa, or Sweden, as was done by others.<sup>40</sup>

Importantly, representations of the spatial scientists' objects of inquiry (e.g., regions, cities, transportation networks, etc.) detached geography from the lived world. People, as well as the neighborhoods, cities, and regions in which they live, were analyzed, represented, and ultimately, universalized, as points, observational "units," or binary matrices.

The erasure of agency in both literary structuralism and spatial science prompted nearly simultaneous critiques in the early 1970s. In literary theory's version, agency was returned to textual interpretation by stressing the role that readers play in activating the meaning that resides in the individual work. Reader response theory, as it came to be known, can be understood as an effort to relocate agency, in the wake of the death of the humanist subject, not on the part of the author, but rather, on the part of the reader or communities of readers. Meaning, though not indifferent to authorial intentionality, could not be limited to it.

Roland Barthes, who profoundly influenced the turns toward reader response criticism and poststructuralism, discerned in the "death of the author" a reopening of the "text" against the closure of signification that the concept of the author had imposed upon the work. "The reader," he wrote, "is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination."<sup>41</sup> Thus, the author, like her or his contemporary audience, was only one of a potentially unlimited number of readers, each with their own horizon of expectations that prefigured the way the text would acquire meaning for them.

Strongly influenced by phenomenology and Gadamer's hermeneutics, reader response criticism rejects the conception of textual meaning that assumes the fixity of a work, whether by appeal to authorial intention or to linguistic structures. It furthermore marks a breakdown of the separation presumed to exist between knowing subjects, on the one hand, and their objects of inquiry, on the other. The separation of thought from its object and the priority of the latter over the former no longer are assumed. Moreover, as in Gadamer's hermeneutics, the historical (not necessarily social) embeddedness of interpretation is presupposed. Meaning depends upon the historical situation of the interpreter who will produce varying results depending upon his or her place in this ongoing historicity. As the work passes from one cultural or historical context to another, new meanings may be culled from it that were never anticipated by either its author or its original audience.<sup>42</sup>

Thus for Gadamer, reading is essentially a dialogue, the effort at fusion between the present and the past. Neither Plato nor Shakespeare should be read as if they were present in the classroom with us or given to us in an unmediated way. While the reader cannot expect simply to transcend what separates the present from the past, she or he can engage the tradition of reading through which any present reading also occurs. The work is not fixed forever, like a tombstone, nor is its meaning universal. In the thought of Jauss and Iser, close study of literature reveals gaps that actively solicit the reader's participation. Jauss refers to the cri-

teria readers use to judge literary texts in any given period as their "horizon of expectations."<sup>43</sup> As described by Iser, the competent reader recognizes literary conventions, genre laws, and so forth, which thus frame the manner in which the reader approaches the text.<sup>44</sup> In one sense, such approaches not only make understanding a matter of the observer's position, but in their more radical and literalist vein understand the printed word as being, after all, nothing more than the black marks on a page that await the interpreter's signifying desire to imbue them with meaning.

In its impulse, reader response theory can be extremely democratic: imagine a theory that assumes that actual readers, including but not limited to professional critics, *count* in the discerning of meaning. Works are not simply given, nor are the intentions of the author the measure of the work. The text is not a fixed entity, indifferent to those who choose to engage it. The irreducibly polymorphous nature of the work can never be contained by any single reader for all times. By activating not *the* reader in the process of interpretation (which unproblematically assumed the sameness of readers regardless of differentiations, for example, of place and time), but by instead seeing the work as something read by a plentitude of readers, questions of class, gender, and other social differentiations may also come into play. On the other hand, the notion of tradition that ultimately contains or limits the danger of a mere solipsism in the hermeneutics of Gadamer, is not without its problems. For Gadamer, the many transformations wrought over time unto the work are still unified by tradition, which as a continuing chain, has all the characteristics of "a club of the like-minded."<sup>45</sup> History, and the history of reading, is not for Gadamer a place of struggle, discontinuity, or exclusion.

Stanley Fish, meanwhile, is quite content to acknowledge that there is no "objective" work of literature to be interpreted. Specific readings occur based upon interpretive predilections, themselves the basis for the schooling of readers into communities. The work is what it does for "us" as Marxists, New Critics, feminists, and so on. The "danger" manifested by the acknowledged heterogeneity of the work is contained by reference to such interpretative communities, a redefinition of the concept of horizons of expectation such that distinct groups of competent readers are shown to share the same assumptions authorizing their interpretations.<sup>46</sup> The institutional framework in which interpretation proceeds is thus acknowledged by Fish, yet the institution is in no way thought of as interfering in the free choices of "disciplined" readers. The competent reader may, after all, choose which paradigm he or she will take to inform reading. Yet, as Marxist critics influenced by reception theory have shown, all of this leaves the reader in an oddly uncontextual frame. Readers too are constituted—by educational practices, class, race, and gender—and to

transfer interpretative authority to the reader is not to resolve the problem of autonomy, but merely to displace it upon the reader.<sup>47</sup>

Geography's turn from the "text"-centered analyses of the regional and spatial science schools began in the 1970s with the emergence of phenomenological perspectives. Early writers such as Buttimer, Tuan, and Relph launched an attack against the pervasive objectification of space practiced by spatial science. To the phenomenologists, space was nongeometric, "a space of human concern and involvement."<sup>48</sup> The impossibility of an objective reading of space independent of the reader resonates in the words of Relph, who wrote: "Man's relationship with the world is understood not merely as a cognitive relationship, but as something which permeates man's whole being. Similarly the world is permeated by man. Man and the world thus constitute a unity through their mutual implication."<sup>49</sup> Seamon likewise emphasized the inseparability of text and reader, space and geographer, when he noted that: "we are the world—we are subsumed in the world like a fish is joined with water . . . we do not experience the world as an object. . . Rather, we interpenetrate that world, are fused with it through an invisible, web-like presence woven of the threads of body and feeling."<sup>50</sup> Phenomenology thus complicates the subject-object distinction that had previously dominated human geography. Whereas regional geographers and spatial scientists were able to disconnect themselves from their objects of inquiry, phenomenologists rejected the notion that interpretation could be divorced from one's experiences, including one's actions, memories, fantasies, and perceptions.<sup>51</sup> If knowledge cannot exist independently of experience, then projects such as regional geography, which presumes to interpret places objectively, and spatial science, which aspires for transcontextual generality, become highly suspect.

Like reader response criticism in literary theory, phenomenology in geography challenged the knowing-subject/known-object dichotomy that heretofore had permitted geographers to view themselves and their works as independent of their interactions with the world. In practice, most phenomenologists were content to interpret their own spatial experiences, though some employed humanistic methods to understand the place readings of others.<sup>52</sup> Yet the approach threatened to undermine decades of research previously insulated from external criticism, and consequently phenomenologists witnessed a twofold reaction to what was seen as their overly perspectival form of social investigation. First, the *person* recovered in a phenomenological geography was most often the individual geographer, that is, the geographer as interpreter, rather than the agents who create and modify places, ostensibly the discipline's object of inquiry. While some humanistic geographers would allow for a

sensitive reading of other's intentions in creating places, under a strict Husserlian interpretation—the one providing the impulse to most early authors—the only recovery possible lies in the interiority of the individual writer, that is, as that space exists *for me*. Some geographers were sympathetic to the critique of positivism's conception of space, but few were willing to purchase a humanistic geography that focused attention on the geographer herself and which thereby seemed to eliminate the possibility of scientific verification.<sup>53</sup> A second critique of phenomenology, arising out of Marxism, claimed that phenomenology presupposes a causal structure in which individual meanings and intentions take precedence over social relations and culture. From a Marxist perspective, volunteerism and the rhetoric of choice mar phenomenology's humanistic turn. Such autonomistic interpretations belie the fact that one does not choose one's race, class, and gender nor the social structures that prefigure them. Marxist geographers, in response, echoed the critique of Marxist reader-response theorists, whose analyses stressed the social structures underpinning reading and interpretation.

The lacunas permeating humanistic geography's self-reflective accounts of the meaning of places were, in the 1970s and 1980s, countered by Marxist theorists who sought to relocate analyses on the processes creating and transforming space. In contrast to earlier culture-based accounts such as Sauer's, however, Marxists chose to examine the ways in which capitalism "scrawls its ugly hand across the landscape." In their analyses of capitalist space, Marxists focused attention on the processes of inter- and intra-class competition and the ensuing contradictions which structure spatial change. To Harvey, for example:

Capital thus comes to represent itself in the form of a physical landscape created in its own image, created as use values to enhance the progressive accumulation of capital on an expanding scale. The geographical landscape which fixed and immobile capital comprises is both a crowning glory of past capital development and a prison which inhibits the further progress of accumulation.<sup>54</sup>

Though Harvey was quick to emphasize capitalism as an ongoing social process, to many geographers writing in the 1980s what had emerged was an overly deterministic form of Marxism that not only bore the trappings of economism, but that also neglected the dialectical relationship between human agency and social structures.<sup>55</sup> In turning to writers such as Giddens, therefore, geographers attempted to "relocate human agency" in their explanations of spatiality. Agency, as theorized by Giddens, has little to do with the autonomous subjectivity of authorial

intentionality encountered earlier, but rather must be understood in terms of situated practices emergent from large-scale social structures which are seen to both constrain and enable human activity and which in turn may be reproduced or transformed by it. In this sense, structuration theory can be seen as bridging Marxist geography's structuralist account of the processes by which space is produced and humanistic geography's individualistic rendering of its meanings to intentional human actors.

### Toward a Poststructuralist Understanding

The above account has marked many of the major positions taken by geographers and literary critics *vis-à-vis* their objects of inquiry, alternatively privileging one or another moment of the triad, author (agent), text (space), or critic (geographer). Central to a poststructuralist epistemology are the problems that result once the object of inquiry is stabilized by reference to any one of these moments. The remainder of this chapter will, we hope, not only suggest what poststructuralism can contribute to social inquiry, but also provide an impulse toward a poststructuralist episteme for geography. Key features of this episteme include the implications that derive from the critique of representation; a stance toward objectivity that takes into account both its use-value and its production as a social process; and a perspective in which both the knowing subject and its object are no longer pre-given and bounded, nor separated according to disciplinary or institutional demarcations. Parallel to our introductory remarks, however, we wish to raise a note of caution. The poststructural impulse animating our analysis is not one that characterizes or justifies the theoretical fence-sitting permeating so much of what is taken to be the postmodern sensibility (Humpty Dumpty-ism, as Ed Soja refers to it).<sup>56</sup> Nor do we believe that poststructuralism leaves one incapable of writing with any possibility of assuredness, objectivity (properly conceived), or political commitment. It does, however, rigorously question the operating assumptions of those epistemes that have too easily rendered as unproblematic the relations among writing, truth, and politics. Poststructuralism should not be equated with an inability to speak, though it does alert us to the potential indignity of professing to speak for the other. That some would offer the former interpretation makes it all the more important to steer the debate at this time.

Second, we do not accept the view that poststructuralism can be reduced to a position that elevates language to the status of an independent variable, which is to say, makes a fetish of its object of analysis. Instead, the currents of poststructuralism that focus on the indeterminan-

cy of language may precisely be understood as efforts to grasp more fully the "messiness" of social life which earlier epistemes either submerged under universal modes of explanation or set aside as anomalous. Post-structuralism's reconsideration of representation holds as untenable the assumption of a correspondence, natural or otherwise, between the word and the thing it represents. Its critique of representation undermines the possibility of a fixed and stable relation between the object and that which signifies it. Various poststructuralisms have problematized the assumption that objects are given, extant, and that we then can find words to express, or represent, them in their full presence. This critique of representation, which discerns numerous antecedents in literary modernism, stands in contrast to the epistemologies of verisimilitude that continue to underwrite most social science. As we suggest below, a post-structuralist understanding of representation has important implications for the writing of geography and history, as well as for the yet-uncompleted project of reasserting space into critical social theory.

A poststructuralist conception of representation breaks with a presentation-representation model, and with all the safety and security that worldview provided. One casualty of this critique is the assumption that there exist acontextual things, objects, or facts already given or present that may merely be represented in our accounts of them. Another casualty is the scientific theology that is anchored by the promise of full, though necessarily deferred, presence, whose teleological guarantee at the same time warrants the positing of its claims as more than provisional. Neither knowing subject nor its objects are as plainly distinct or transparent as modernist social science writings have assumed. If one takes Derrida's questioning of identity seriously, then the givenness of the thing and of the knowing subject is all importantly a matter of context, whether linguistic, epistemic, social, or political.

In language, as scholars have known since Aristotle's definition of metaphor, one transports the presumed object from one context to another. This transport, for Derrida, cannot leave the object identical to itself. Rather, the object has been reproduced with a difference. Repetition necessarily entails alterity, transcontextual nonidentity. The stability and identity of intentional actions are thus unsettled when communication is understood as a vehicle of transport.<sup>57</sup> In short, both time and space "matter" in this understanding of representation. This characterization has force for all communication in written form. Not only this, but the implicit separation between oral and written speech upon which the degradation of the written as mere representation is based, cannot be sustained following Derrida's critique of phonocentrism.<sup>58</sup> The problem of difference, of a repetition of the message that is not a repetition of the

same, but rather one characterized by alterity, holds no less true for oral communication. Anchoring this privileging of the oral is at heart (so to speak) a postulation of a face-to-face presence guaranteed by the identity and intentionality of the utterer. Yet, if it can be demonstrated, as Derrida has undertaken to do in his critique of speech act theory,<sup>59</sup> that this notion of presence relies upon a complete transparency of context, then the presumed difference between written and oral communication collapses, and with it the linchpin of logocentrism. Also rendered problematic thereby are the presumed boundaries that ground the identities of intentions, events, and contexts.

We can view such analysis, far from being esoterically philosophical, as a sensitive characterization of the obstacles that are always the precondition for communication, whether face-to-face, or in the textual forms of poetry, philosophy, or electronic images. Difference is, moreover, particularly appropriate for understanding the consequences of the accelerated transport of communications made possible by the electronic age, which readily gives language the appearance of generating meaning self-referentially and of acquiring the force of a thing itself.<sup>60</sup>

All of this makes universalizing theoretical statements that act as if neither space nor time (context) matter more than suspect. As regards context, Derrida has recently characterized "what is called deconstruction" as 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."<sup>61</sup> Thus understood, "context" does not mean simply the recovery of topologically similar forms, but rather the generation of transformative meanings and effects. The "ceaseless recontextualization of context" does not imply the end of all meaning, as some would characterize deconstruction or poststructuralism. Deconstruction does, however, in its task of disarming the force that has rendered its critique "merely" aesthetic, require interrogation of the powers that render interpretations and their settings as static, universal, and beyond ideology. As Derrida notes, objectivity itself must be understood as thoroughly contextual:

What is called "objectivity," scientific for instance (in which I firmly believe in a given situation), imposes itself only within a context which is extremely vast, old, powerfully established, stabilized or rooted in a network of conventions (for instance, those of language) and yet which still remains a context. And the emergence of the value of objectivity (and hence of so many others) also belongs to a context.<sup>62</sup>

For Derrida, finally, the university itself is one such context: never neutral or independent, it is an indispensable but also inevitably prob-

lematic part of the articulation of meaning. Both moments, the university's problematic organization of knowledge production (as in what sanctions the divide between the social sciences and the humanities, for example) and its indispensability (political, social, economic, etc.), underscore the complexity of the issues faced by all academics who profess in the name of either "science" or the "people."

### Signposts for Space

In charting the signposts for a poststructuralist geography, it is useful to reiterate an understanding of the relationship between power and representation that has been a dominant concern in most contemporary literary theory. As the discussion above has suggested synoptically, poststructuralist literary theory should be taken as an orientation toward the social world that considers the ways in which power undergirds the origins, deployments, and effects of representations. Any attempt to stabilize or naturalize the text in terms of the object itself, its author, or its contexts of reception is thereby rendered suspect. The geographic corollary would be to equally recognize that irrespective of the naturalizing impulses brought to bear on spatial thinking through the Cartesian and Euclidean paradigms, space, like the text, is anything but static, universal, and beyond ideology. Space, to use Henri Lefebvre's favorite modifier, is always "social," and anything social can never be stable, transcontextual, or apolitical.

To break through to an understanding of the complexity imposed by space, it is necessary to overcome the "illusion of opaqueness"<sup>63</sup> which hides the social production of space behind an opacity of surface appearances that reduces it to a mere setting upon which the fecundity of social life unfolds. Opacity veils the interpenetration of social life and space, displacing space as a "natural thing" (object, fact), independent of politics, conflict, and agency. Lefebvre has devoted years and pages to arguing the impossibility of this view:

Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology and politics; it has always been political and strategic. If space has an air of neutrality and indifference with regard to its contents and thus seems to be "purely" formal, the epitome of rational abstraction, it is precisely because it has been occupied and used, and has already been the focus of past processes whose traces are not always evident on the landscape. Space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies.<sup>64</sup>

Not only is society constitutive of space—in the authorial sense of underlying its production—but space and society must also be conceived dialectically, in the sense that (social) space reproduces social relations, framing reception contexts for the activities of social life. As Lefebvre puts it, "Space and the political organization of space express social relationships but also react back upon them."<sup>65</sup> Thus spaces, no less than commodities or language (and by extension, our understandings of them), cannot exist independently of social relations. In the same way that commodities and language are not natural but are produced socially and in turn reconstitute the network of social powers that give rise to them, so too is space dialectically embedded.

This dialectic works at many scales, from the power/space that produces the panopticon and the power of surveillance that results from it, to the differentiated space of regions produced by capital through processes of development and underdevelopment, which in turn create new opportunities for reproducing capital by virtue of its uneven development.<sup>66</sup> At the microlevel, as in Bentham's prison, the panopticon operates as a spatially organized power relation "testing" an emerging social relation, while also establishing, at the macrolevel, surveillance as the basis of social relationships more generally, as in the control exercised over territory by the police state. Panopticism disciplines through the techniques it provides to assure the ordering of human multiplicities. Discipline "fixes; it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it establishes calculated distributions."<sup>67</sup> The spatial organization of society—the creation of calculated distributions in space—gives chaotic multiplicity an order that is the precondition for the exercise of power. Power sheers space of its illusion of opacity; poised between the natural, the social, and the political, space is thus revealed to be both product and producer of social organization. As de Certeau argues while amplifying Foucault's point, "'the often tiny ploys of discipline,' the 'minor but flawless' machinery that has colonized and made uniform the institutions of the state, derive their effectiveness from a relationship between *procedures* and the *space* they redistribute to create an 'operator.'"<sup>68</sup> The relationship suggested between user and space by Foucault and de Certeau is, of course, commensurate with her or his social positioning. De Certeau's point, whose theoretical goal parallels reader response criticism, is the empowerment of "operators." Nevertheless, like readers, operators are never simply "born," yet neither are they entirely reducible to the position of mere functional subjects.

A denaturalized understanding of the origins, form and content, and reception contexts of space is, therefore, one highly pertinent goal for a

poststructuralist understanding of geography. A further imperative arises from our discussion of representation/power, namely, how this juxtaposition can be complicated by an understanding of space/power. A metonymic interpretation of space and representation, one in which being "in the social world" entails seeing each object of interest as constituted by social relations and in turn constitutive of them, has implications for both the author→text→critic and the agent→space→geographer models. Our argumentation suggests two propositions, that the author→text→critic model must be problematized in terms of space, as one element of its contextualization, and that the agent→space→geographer model must be problematized in terms of representation.

To fully appreciate the geographic significance of this project, it is worth recalling that traditional analyses of regions, spatial structures, and landscapes have ignored the critique of representation, obfuscated the extent to which representational processes mediate objects of geographic analysis, and overlooked the very representational status of these objects. This is so because the discipline of geography has tended to focus its attention on the material conditions purported to constitute "real life," to the exclusion of issues that arise from the critique of representation. Overcoming the rigid distinction between that which is thought of as "representational" and that which is thought of as "material" requires a recognition of their mutual determination as well as the development of a theoretical frame that problematizes the setting that has naturalized this divide. It is not suggesting too much to insist that the representation of social life and social life as lived spatially would be better conceived dialectically.<sup>69</sup> For a start, this implies that the conditions of material life are shaped through their representation as objects of recognition, contestation, and indifference, just as representations are shaped by materially situated powers. Thus what is regarded as material has almost certainly been made possible by some previous form of representation. Representations, in turn, emerge out of the signifying chain to frame, discipline, and transform the thinking and action of individuals and ultimately to shape future sociospatial powers.

In analyzing these connections, users of both models, textual and spatial, would do well to integrate alterity in their efforts to account for the differences wrought by incessant recontextualization. The poststructuralist critique of representation and the sociospatial dialectic together enjoin us to reject any type of analysis, no matter how internally complex, that seeks to center itself on any one of the key elements of either model, irrespective of the others or of social relations. Understanding the social world requires a theoretically critical stance characterized by greater complexity, and thus truer to Mann's thesis regarding the "messi-

ness" of social life, than has heretofore been adopted by our disciplines. As a corollary to these considerations, a model of history that situates the historian as the renderer of the past (in the same way that the geographer renders places), cannot sweep aside fundamental consideration of the critique of representation and the inherent spatiality of social life.

### Narratology: Writing and Mapping

These comments have profound implications for how geographers and other social investigators narrate accounts of the social world. Since the early days of exploration—a startling, yet enabling limit of geographical thinking—geographic writing and mapping have adhered to a mirror model of reality. Geography, or *geo-graph*, means inscribing the world—"as it is found," Hartshorne would insist. Let us separate for a moment the world from the writing and mapping of it, analogous to the duality signaled by the German word for history, *Geschichte*, which entails in equal measure history and the writing of it (narration). In both instances, attention is directed to the principle role narration plays for its subject matter. Our consideration of geographic narration begins by asking what assumptions have traditionally guided the writing of geographical stories. We later turn to cartography as a special form of geographic narration.

The social sciences have come to adopt a natural science laboratory model in which the results of experiments are assumed to obtain equivalent outcomes across all contexts. The traditional form of narration used to describe the social world reflects this model of stability: we write as we believe, namely, that the results from my laboratory will, under the same conditions, give the same results in yours, regardless of temporal or spatial differentiation. However, inasmuch as the social world is *messier* than the theories we have to account for it, do we not do a disservice in utilizing a narrative form that presupposes the causality of a linear narration—that is, stories with beginnings, middles and ends—through which all the webs are brought together without significant contradiction, and hence are quotable as "transportable" facts or univocal truths regardless of contexts, temporal or spatial?

The recent work of Hayden White summarizes the evidence that narrative, far from being merely a form of discourse that can be filled with different contents, real or imaginary, "already possesses a content prior to any given actualization of it in speech or writing."<sup>70</sup> Narrative discourse, by providing the assurance that "social reality can be both lived and realistically comprehended as a story," tends to legitimate a

dominant social order regardless of the critical intent of the narrative's content. Narrative "strains for the effect of having filled in all the gaps, of having put an image of continuity, coherency, and meaning" onto the events it describes.<sup>71</sup> This legitimating function of narrative must be reckoned with by anyone who writes but who does not intend to affirm the values implied by a conservative ideology.

Moreover, the status of the authority that enables any author to profess an account of (to represent) the world is not irrelevant to the narrative stance of the author. All too often we encounter in social science writing the "disappearance of the I" in favor of a passive voice, the narrative corollary to the disappearance of the subject behind the object for which it speaks. In essence, no one speaks in this kind of scientific writing, for the events seem to tell themselves through the introduction, literature review, model, data, analysis, and conclusion. Such a narrative effaces the *I* behind the story: this was done not by the *I*, for the *I* is irrelevant, as any *I* would achieve the same results, where she or he follow the checklist of steps presented in the article. From such a model results a particular legitimating authority: no mere subjectivity has determined this outcome; rather a collective, presumably self-identical voice of all humanity (were all to follow this checklist) is invoked. Instead, critical social theory should experiment with forms of narration that rupture such invocations of their ideological, authoritarian force. Since we cannot in good faith speak in the voice of divine illumination in which meaning and truth are identical and fully present to themselves and to the reader (for this voice, after all, would have to be reserved for those who can claim to have witnessed the "end of history"), to write as if this were the case violates the very pursuit of truth that these authors hold so dear, or, alternatively, exposes them as voices writing in the mode of prophecy.

What the mutable, unstable contexts we have discussed above make impossible is the writing of any kind of history or geography that assumes identity as its operating principle. Objectivity as conceived in the natural science form is rendered impossible for the social world. But the recognition of the contingent nature of writing-reading (or cause-effect recognition in the scientific model) presents us with a new task, namely, the writing of a history of the mutations that take place, that is, a *contextual* understanding of the already shifting, mutable contexts, which, moreover, are not to be thought of as interfering with an understanding of the "thing itself" but rather are the very condition under which all dialogues occur. What Derrida refers to as "difference" points to this alterity in every repetition. This opens the rigorous questioning of "context" which is no longer to be thought of as the simple repetition of the same. It is for this reason, we offer, that normative history should be unsettled by both

Derrida's analysis of context and the critical reassertion of space.

Lest the project sketched above be seen in negative terms, it is important to reiterate that what we do not have to fear is the end of the writing of geography (or history). On the contrary, a great deal of writing needs be undertaken once we are informed by an understanding of the instabilities that intervene on all interpretation and narration. Such writing, whether in geography or history, will prove far more illuminating as regards these disciplines' purported objectives than a history or geography in which facts are presented as given "unto themselves." The facts *do not speak* for themselves: they are *spoken for* by the historian or geographer who fashions fragments into a coherent narrative. In the same way that the unity of the text discovered by the New Critics turns out to have been mostly a reflection of their own intentionality as interpreters, the unity of places discovered by regional geographers can be seen to reflect their own interpretation given coherence by their narrative form.

Geographic representation of a different sort, cartography, is not immune to the type of critique developed above. Like geographic analysis in general, today's cartography is wedded to a model of reality and representation that is reproducible on the one hand via natural scientific understanding, and on the other hand by the age of mechanical reproduction that has given us computer cartography and geographic information systems (GIS). The epistemological assumptions behind both is that the representation of the world is flawless, save for the inherent impossibility posed by scale. Both suggest an identity—mediated but nonetheless topologically equivalent—that collapses any distance between the narrator and the narrated world, between the *graph*-ing and the *geo*. As the reality paradigm has always assumed, the role of the observer is limited to her or him holding a mirror up to the extant world. Moreover, the objection of a mere subjectivity imposing itself upon that world is averted by the precision seemingly afforded by computer cartography and GIS. The thing and its representation have collapsed; computer cartography and GIS suggest presentation without representation, mediation, or displacement. It is through this process that both their social production and effects are utterly veiled.

The symptoms catalogued above have been productively examined with regard to cartography in a recent paper by Brian Harley.<sup>72</sup> In the paragraphs that follow we draw from our own commentary on his article.<sup>73</sup> Cartography, like any field of inquiry "disciplined" by a perceived necessity to claim scientific verisimilitude, faces a potential crisis when it stops to consider its own language of representation and the embeddedness of its products in the social world. Such questioning would seem to threaten the possibility of generalizable objective knowledge. It is an



issue that, in the era of the postmodern, has surfaced in many of the social sciences and humanities, and with the publication of Harley's paper, in cartography as well.

Harley's work brings a new perspective to the widely perceived crisis of realism and representation underlying the various "narratives of suspicion" to be found in deconstructive thinking. One such narrative questions the ability of language or any semiotic code to signify its object, as it were, translucently. Russian formalism, reader response theory, and Derridian deconstruction have all, as we have seen, explored the sometimes intersecting problems of representation, reading, and "context" that arise from this fundamental nonidentity of language. Various deconstructive strategies have therefore stressed the fundamental indeterminacy of language—its "messiness"—by stressing the rhetorical, political, and temporal nature of all discourse, and thus force a rethinking of the simple binary opposition between rhetoric (meant pejoratively), on the one hand, and disinterested, objective scientific language, on the other. The mere presence of this dualistic notion only serves to sustain the possibility of the latter. Its implication for cartography—ever-better maps, ever more accurately depicting the world as a result of technological innovation—currently fuels the widely accepted view of cartography as a disinterested science.

Another focus of suspicion, deriving from Foucault, rethinks institutions less as disinterested knowledge gatherers than as centers of power defining agendas and thereby redefining, through that which is produced, the realities of social life.<sup>74</sup> Disciplinary knowledge grows out of struggles of legitimation; when that knowledge, in turn, is imbued with the scientific stamp of "natural order," it imposes rather than mirrors reality. Revealing the implications of these twin processes is tantamount to rewriting the history of the cartographic enterprise and at the same time creating ground for a new praxis of cartography.

In it, cartographers would be urged to think further about the layers of meaning embedded in the "objective" symbols that constitute the discourse of the map as well as those elements that signify precisely by their absence. Any system of signification presupposes notions of what is thought to constitute the significant. Such choices of necessity implicate the map as a socially constructed vehicle of meaning. Likewise, omissions from maps convey that which has been deemed insignificant by its producers or that which has been consciously veiled in a strategy of mystification. Underlying both the present and the omitted iconographies are a complex of historically variable power relations that must be subjected to critical scrutiny. Such scrutiny might first consider the truth-power constructions of class in cartographic discourse, as in, for example, the

mapped depictions of central Kentucky as a series of bucolic bluegrass horse farms, or the messages of a single-gendered history transmitted by our maps of military victories, or the social construction of race and ethnicity both legitimated in and reproduced by maps labeling an area as "Chinatown" or "Little Havana," or the ethos of humans as the dominate partner in an exploitative dualism with nature in our maps of resources.

It is not only the cartographer, however, who stands to gain from these understandings, for both literary critics and historians need to overcome their own reliance on maps as disinterested instruments, and instead to see them in light of what Hayden White has called the "fictions of factual representation."<sup>75</sup> Maps are undeniably social products—even the most scientific among us must admit that. Yet to hide behind the guise of objectivity constrains cartographic theory to rigidly scientific boundaries of inquiry that deny both its historically artistic connections and limit that which can be attained from the critical reading of maps. Seen as vessels of social meaning, maps become ever-more revealing of embodied cultural constellations and historical moments. As we emphasized above, what is not at stake is the legitimacy of cartography itself. We can no longer imagine a world without maps, any more than we can imagine a world without language. Nor should we. Yet maps, like language, have been vehicles of domination and the pursuit of power. In recognizing this and developing a critical stance toward the map, we will need to grasp a sense of the ongoing historicity of cartographic discourse and to transcend, rather than hide behind, the time-bound language of objectivity.

## Conclusion

Of the many empiricist histories made questionable by poststructuralism, those that have charted the growth of the discipline of geography are of particular importance to us. It should now be clear that a poststructuralist spatiality, one that refuses to accept space as "natural" in either its origin or effects, might also critically reexamine those disciplinary histories whose accounts, in bearing the imprimatur of "progress," have likewise naturalized the discipline's "evolution." As we have shown through the twin mappings of the development of literary theory and geography, both disciplines have been marked by surprising parallels in the constitution of and approach toward their objects of inquiry. This, in spite of the incommensurability so readily acknowledged by those who would separate the domain of each as, for example, science versus aesthetics or explanation versus interpretation. Our collocation leads us to

situate both disciplines as themselves texts embedded in a wider sphere of social and academic contexts and power relationships.

Geography's histories, by contrast, have tended to be written from one of two perspectives: either as hagiographies in which the plot is written by monumental figures, or as a series of contradictions and resolutions illustrative of Kuhnian paradigm shifts.<sup>76</sup> In the former case geographic knowledge is not located within a field of power relationships that give it its form and content, but instead unfolds in the minds of the authors whose products provide the discipline's unique story. In the latter case, actors bearing particular paradigms struggle for legitimacy on a scientific battleground where victories are short-lived as new, better paradigms ascend. Both forms of history resound with a sense of "trajectory"—that is, a discipline *soaring above* context and *directed*, even if nonlinearly, *toward* its target, the full and final presence of true knowledge.

Our historiography contrasts the futurist myth of historical progress sustained by such narrations with a disciplinary path much more grounded in the everyday affairs of the academy and society at large. It is one in which, at the institutional level, geographical thinking can be read as being engaged in the attempt to distinguish itself from the practices of geology, anthropology, sociology, economics, and so on. An anxious tone frequently accompanies pronouncements regarding geography's field, and within it its proper objects of analysis. The fear of incorporation, of being dissolved by adjoining disciplines, or of losing its center, has often characterized reflections upon the enabling limits of geography.<sup>77</sup>

A social history of geography likewise remains to be written. Disciplines, geography no less than others, may create the knowledges necessary for continued capital accumulation; they may provide society with individuals inculcated with appropriate, nonrevolutionary ideology that legitimates the status quo; they may service the state by educating technically competent students to assist society in the making of war and in the identification of within-the-system solutions to social problems. Geography, as an historically applied discipline, has often been complicitous in these projects. The works of geographers can be read as having rationalized colonialism through the paradigm of environmental determinism, assisted in militarism through work on geopolitics and terrain analysis, contributed to an instrumentalized view of nature through environmental policy research, and legitimated state planning through the paradigm of efficiency dominating spatial science.

So, yes, geography is a "normal" science, though not in the way that Kuhn meant it. It is normal in the sense that in striving for legitimacy its practitioners have engaged in border wars, honing its tools of analysis so as to provide it with the sharpest edge *vis-à-vis* society and its discipli-

nary neighbors. As an exemplar of this tendency, consider the following definition of geography offered by Richard Hartshorne, who sought to reinforce distinctions between science and aesthetics, explanation and interpretation. Here we selectively interrupt his account with divergent epistemological signposts, borrowed from a recent commentator on the "postmodern":

Geography seeks (1) on the basis of empirical observation [*presence vs. absence*] as independent as possible of the person of the observer [*distance vs. participation*], to describe [*narrative vs. annarrative*] phenomena with the maximum degree of accuracy and certainty [*signified vs. signifier*]; (2) on this basis, to classify [*hierarchy vs. anarchy*] the phenomena, as far as reality permits, in terms of generic concepts or universals [*metaphysics vs. irony*]; (3) through rational consideration of the facts thus secured [*determinancy vs. indeterminancy*] and by logical processes of analysis [*design vs. chance*] and synthesis [*totalization vs. deconstruction*], including the construction [*form vs. anti-form*] and use wherever possible of general principles or laws of generic relationships [*master code vs. idiolect*], to attain the maximum comprehension [*depth vs. surface*] of the scientific [*interpretation vs. against interpretation*] interrelationships of phenomena [*metaphor vs. metonymy*]; and (4) to arrange these findings in orderly [*cause vs. trace*] systems so that what is known leads directly to the margin of the unknown [*paranoia vs. schizophrénia*].<sup>78</sup>

Our intent in these interruptions is not simply to expose the limits of Hartshorne's epistemology, but to reveal his model as an affirmation of an objective, orderly, and rational mode of social investigation whose merely provisional knowledge claims are legitimated by the ultimate promise of full presence. What is so remarkable about Hartshorne's definition is his wholesale appropriation of a model of scientific inquiry so shorn of particularity that virtually any "natural" science, whether physics, astronomy, or chemistry, could be readily substituted for "Geography" as its point of departure. In so doing, Hartshorne has legitimated geography's task by appeal to its character as a scientific enterprise.

It is undoubtedly easier to critique what is problematic in a paradigm than it is to predict what will replace it, since, as Sam Weber notes, "the new 'paradigm' can hardly be expected to [nor would we want it to] have the same unity as the old."<sup>79</sup> We thus end here not with a roadmap, for this would require a new language, indeed, a new form of writing that has yet to be *created*. This language, in the intent signaled here, will bespeak both the critique of representation and an understanding of space as a social product and process. Most importantly, our new explorations must reveal the interconnections between both so as to overcome

the divisions, institutionalized in the nineteenth century, that separated the domains of literary theory (art) and geography (technology).

A reconstructed literary theory stands to gain by contextualizing its objects of inquiry spatially. In its critique of representation, literary theory has come to understand power as central to the understanding of communication. Yet space in literary theory has been notable mostly for its absence, rather commensurate with its designation as mere metaphor. Space, however, is more than metaphorical, or put differently, "metaphor" is itself spatial. Never empty or nonideological, (social) space undergirds all practices of production and reception, beginning with the materiality of the book itself. A global economy and its forces and relations of production are materially assembled by the paper, ink, and cloth that make it a frame for the communication of ideas. More broadly, but no less materially, the fusion of space and power establishes the conditions under which represented thought may be produced and then transported from one context to another, one receiver to another, in all forms of communication.

Geography too can stand to gain from the poststructuralist critique of representation and the problematization of its objects of analysis which thereby ensues. In so doing, the discipline would benefit by adopting a stance toward (social) space that rejects the imperative to frame monolithic interpretations of society, a precondition for the disclosure of new human geographies. Thirty years ago the scientific consensus provided no discourse for, nor understanding of, spatiality that would enable the discipline to encircle a feminist geography, a working-class geography, a gay and lesbian geography, or a postcolonial geography. Today we can envision all of these and more. And as we continue to situate our accounts of the social world *in* the social world, our future disciplinary histories will doubtless bear the marks of it as well.

Finally, just as a reconstructed literary theory should consider space/power as a central moment in its analysis of representations, so too must its geographic counterpart more seriously engage and learn from the former's critique of representation. The powers that transform and are reproduced by space are *transported*, and hence activated, by and through representations. The conditions of space/power are thus equally material and representational. Indeed, the trifold nexus of space/power/representation brings into question the very distinction between the material and the representational, and with it, the stability of all disciplines demarcated via their separation.

## Acknowledgments

It is a pleasure to acknowledge those colleagues who read earlier versions of this chapter and offered many insightful suggestions: Anne Buttimer, Derek Gregory, John Pickles, Ted Schatzki, Ed Soja, and Peter Wissoker.

## Notes

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32. See, for example, Preston James, *Latin America* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975).

33. White, *Content of the Form*, xi.
34. Richard Hartshorne, *The Nature of Geography* (Lancaster, Penn.: Association of American Geographers, 1939), 462; our emphasis.
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