

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Introduction. Part 2: The place of politics

Book Section

How to cite:

Keith, Michael and Pile, Steve (1993). Introduction. Part 2: The place of politics. In: Keith, Michael and Pile, Steve eds. Place and the Politics of Identity. London: Routledge, pp. 22–40.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 1993 Routledge

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<https://www.routledge.com/Place-and-the-Politics-of-Identity/Keith-Pile/p/book/9780415090094>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Part 2: ...The Place of Politics

Michael Keith and Steve Pile

1. Mapping *The Satanic Verses*

Who is to play Pontius Pilate and pass judgement on Rushdie, however reluctantly? There are two routes we want to take out of our spatialized reading of *The Satanic Verses*. The first route tracks the evocations of the spatial, particularly the city as simultaneously real and imaginary, suggesting that Rushdie draws, perhaps unwittingly, on a notion that *the urban* invokes a multiplicity of spatialities simultaneously present. The second route is one that traces the notions of impurity and hybridity which are so central to the novel and suggests that this leads us into an understanding of identities defined as much by what they lack as by what they include.

The two routes draw respectively on the theoretical guidance of Henri Lefebvre and Ernesto Laclau to suggest that some of the central problems that are consistently flagged in identity politics can be resolved by mapping the spatialities on which both incomplete identities and situated knowledges rest. There is no suggestion here that Laclau and Lefebvre provide the only routes to the points we want to make, only that their work is exemplary in this context.

2. Route 1. The case For multiple spatialities

'The West'. A description of economic development but also an imagined locus of a particular form of rationality, sometimes reified by caricature in postcolonial inquiry. Symbolically at the heart of global power, 'the West' is a linguistic condensation of the globally powerful. It is in this context that, in both orientalist imagining and in the counter memories of resistance, Islam is placed in literal and symbolic opposition to this force. Such positioning by no means exhausts a description or analysis of contemporary Islam but it is constitutive of it. Such positioning also has literal and symbolic dimensions and it was into such configurations of power and powerlessness that *The Satanic Verses* was thrown; in Rushdie's own terms a political event that was used in the cultural politics of Indian sectarianism and then reimported, tragically signified in the homologous binaries of Islam against Anti-Islam, faith against faithlessness, powerless against powerful, Good against Evil.

And whilst the symbolism with which the book was endowed had little or nothing to do with the intentions of the author, the racist configuration of the social in which such a symbolism emerged was a landscape that he knew very well. Because Rushdie, more than most authors, knows that the power of naming and describing is so context specific.

A commonplace defence of the reactionary White is to question allegations of racism by false equivalence. 'Why', we are so often asked, 'is it alright for her to call me a Pom but racist for

me to call him a nigger'. And as anybody well versed in such encounters will immediately tell you, the false equivalence arises because a particular power relation is masked by an apparently universal right to abuse. The (spatial) context is a constitutive element of the individual speech act, the specific instance of everyday racism. And Rushdie's satire was not of the powerful by the powerless, he mocked Islam from the institutionally endorsed heights of the literary establishment. Constructed in British society as a lionized Booker prize winning novelist, he was gifted with a voice that alone drowned out the hurt protestations of the faithful, whose very faith had systematically been used historically as the medium of their degradation.

On one level this is why, whilst we would defend Rushdie's creation and his inventive genius, the novel can never be considered completely innocent; notwithstanding the grotesque asymmetry of his putative 'crime' and prescribed punishment. The iconic status of the Rushdie affair outgrew the apparent sincerity and the alleged (inevitable?) 'mauvaise foi' of the text.

On another level, both the affair and the text illustrate some of the themes that have pervaded all Rushdie's work and are shared by this volume; that the metaphoric and the real do not belong in separate worlds, that the symbolic and the literal are in part constitutive of one another. That meaning is never immanent, it is instead not just *marked* but also in part *constituted* by the spaces of representation in which it is articulated. These spaces of representation subvert the representation of spaces so that the ground we stand on becomes a mongrel hybrid of spatialities; at once a metaphor and a speaking position, a place of certainty and a burden of humility, sometimes all of these simultaneously, sometimes all of them incommensurably.

And so, as several chapters in this volume demonstrate, it is not possible to draw unproblematically on a spatialized vocabulary without reflecting on how this vocabulary operates. Different terms *connote* different meanings. They also mean different things at different times and different places to different people: for example, a term like 'place' triggers a chain of associations with parochialism, difference and ultimately reaction for some, and for others the term 'space' may set off a more approbatory chain tied to transcendence, universality and Enlightenment.

We are arguing neither that one set of associations is valid nor that it is possible or desirable to swap elements of the chain of signification around so the normative evaluations of space and place are reversed. It is instead suggested that we must look to the sites in which these associations are evoked (spaces of representation) in order to understand the cultural production of the representation of space.

The distinction between the representation of space ('the conceived') and the spaces of representation ('the lived') is one drawn from the work of Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre is most well known for his insightful analysis of how the twin myths of transparency and the illusion of realism represent space as a neutral and passive geometry. These myths mask the fact that space is produced and reproduced and thus represents the site and the outcome of social, political and economic struggle. It is this emphasis on the production

of space has been taken up in attempts to produce a political economy of space, most powerfully in the work of Marxist geographers such as David Harvey, Neil Smith and Ed Soja.

Lefebvre is also keen to distinguish the productions of different kinds of space, not just a distinction between the metric of space (physical space), mental space and the social space that contains appropriate place for the social relations of reproduction (gender relations) and relations of production (the division of labour) (Lefebvre, 1974, 32). More interestingly Lefebvre develops the notion of different forms of produced space, not just the deconstruction of the illusions of naturalness and transparency but instead a typology of spatialities that covers a range from sensory, sensual representational spaces through to the space of the Greek city that is assumed in classical philosophy and inscribed in ostensibly universal concepts such as citizenship

However, in Lefebvre's work the analytical shift from 'things in space' to 'the production of space' is historical as well as logical. The insights to be gained from the focus on the production of space can be lost by a concentration on the product as artefact, ossified by either the inertia of the socio-spatial dialectic or the vagaries of rent. Conceptually squashed into the frame of reference as an artefact, space is always in danger of losing its plastic, multi-faceted character. In large part this can be traced from Lefebvre's take on space as evolutionary. For him, the globe is progressively dominated by distinct forms of spatiality.

Different forms of space succeed each other through time. There is a succession from natural to absolute to abstract space, progressively erasing *nature* from our sense of spatiality. The teleological high point of capitalism is a world structured by abstract space which has "homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its lens" (1974, 287). In turn the contradictions of capitalist space contain within it "the seeds of a new kind of space" (1974, 52). The spatial expression of contradictions can be understood as *differential space*, that hinders the workings of the system and becomes capitalism's Achilles heel.

Situated in the site-specific politics of his own relation to the events in Paris in 1968 Lefebvre is anxious to pre-empt charges of apostasy by sticking to a rigidly teleological evolution in which absolute space is gradually erased by abstract space which in turn gives way to differential space.

For our argument here we want to suggest that this teleological element of Lefebvre's analysis in fact detracts from the analytical power of the work. It is not that we undervalue the significance of matching stages of capitalism with corresponding spatialities, as Harvey's work demonstrates in great detail. It is instead the case that the emphasis on succession in Lefebvre's work tends towards historicism and detracts from the conceptual richness of the notions of the the spatial that Lefebvre outlines. As he himself makes clear with reference to *the urban* and the role of Paris as both crucible of conflict and container of dissent (1974, 385-388, also Soja, this volume) there are tensions and contradictions here but the overall thrust of Lefebvre's

historicism is to fall prey to the myth of immanence, the notion that at each historical moment space is dominated by one (produced) set of immanent meanings.

The rigidity of this conceptual schema understates the malleability of the symbolic role of landscape. Space is produced in the image of capital but can be reappropriated in the symbolic vocabulary of liberation. Just as nationalism is challenged when the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes are profaned. Just as 'queer' and 'nigger' are reinstated at the centre of site-specific progressive politics or the dominant representations of space satirised by the Nuclear Free Zone. All transform received meaning and reinvent space as the site of the frontier effects around which political mobilisation occurs.

Again it is important that what we are not drawing from Lefebvre is a suggestion of an infinite number of forms of spatiality, all of equal significance. Such a proliferation of new spaces would itself be counter-productive. Social analysis shorn of political economy begets a politics of the right because a specific economic order assumes the unspoken allure of the natural. In divorcing the manufacture of underdevelopment from the celebration of affluence the icon of America the affluent belies the reality of the Los Angeles of the oppressed. As David Harvey forcefully argues in his chapter here the social relations of capitalist production remain and in comprehending their injustice it is imperative that we figuratively connect the spaces through which they are realised.

Instead we stress caution in understanding the multiplicity of spatialities simultaneously present at any one time. None of these are necessarily signified. Although de Certeau understandably chooses to celebrate the poets of the streets, the subversive consumers of urbanism, such a celebration cannot be unqualified. It has its negative potential, particularly if it emerges in exoticized representations of the city flâneur. Likewise Deutsche (1990) is surely right to stress the potential will to power implicit in the view from on high that is coded into the critical distance of urban studies but equally wrong to imply that this is a necessary political stigmatization of such a view. As the allusion to the connotative power of the words 'place' and 'space' suggested, the processes of signification are far too complex to lend themselves to such easy good/bad classifications. It is rather that we can return to one of the protagonists in *The Satanic Verses* who tries to grasp London by knowing it but finds instead that

"the city in its corruption refused to submit to the dominion of the cartographers, changing shape at will and without warning, making it impossible for Gibreel to approach his quest in the systematic manner he would have preferred." (Rushdie, 1988, 327)

3. Route 2. 'Taking place': theorizing contingency and radical contextualization

There is a sense in which our sensibilities are spatialized. We have seen already the manner in which the postmodern turn has frequently drawn on a spatially rich vocabulary, and more specifically how Frederic Jameson turns to cognitive mapping almost as a search for security

in a world of hyperreality. Similarly, for authors like Ed Soja and Umberto Eco contemporary landscapes are, after Lefebvre, freed of material or real referents, structured by abstract rather than absolute space (Eco, 1986).

So we are told that in the postmodern city we live in spaces that, after Baudrillard, are simulacra of realities which quite possibly never existed. The space of hyperreality is the space of the true fake, a faithful imitation of something that never was. It is in such hyperreal space that the rich go lifestyle shopping, drawing on seemingly mutually exclusive benevolent significations of both town and country simultaneously, exemplified in the synthetic public spaces of spectacular regeneration and the vogue notion of the urban village. The spaces of the poor meanwhile are structured by the security-paranoid gaze which fixes bodies in carceral compounds, pre-empting insurrection.

There is both rhetorical force and intuitive appeal in such analyses of the contemporary condition. But a conflation of the spatial and the novel can mask continuities that link the notion of the true-fake with past spatialities. In one guise we have already seen how for Walter Benjamin identity and location were inseparable, knowing oneself was an exercise in mapping where one stands.

So, while we are not arguing against specific readings of the spatiality of the postmodern city, we are suggesting that spatialities have always produced landscapes that are loaded with ethical, epistemological and aestheticized meanings. Almost invariably these are contested. In contrast there is an implicit acceptance of a dichotomy between myth and reality in some depictions of hyperreal space that misreads Eco's notion of the real fake. The self-consciousness of synthetic landscapes draws, frequently ironically or playfully, on lifestyles archetypes that are parodies of reality. At times the implication, as we saw in Zukin's work, is that once this was not so; that once there were real urban landscapes (relatively) lacking such artifice.

Such a stress on the contemporary echoes the flawed teleology of Lefebvre. A stronger argument to suggest that the social, the political and the economic do not just take place in 'time' and 'space' they are in part constituted by temporality and spatiality. In this vein, Ernesto Laclau has long argued that the common sense notion of society passing through time is illusory. Both are constitutively linked with one another, *historicity* is consequently a necessary property of all social relations.

For our part we would argue for an equivalence here between historicity and spatiality, an assertion articulated more fully in Doreen Massey's chapter, because there is a sense in which Laclau's work is significant precisely because it rests on the rejection of the binary dualisms between the abstract and the empirical, the universal and the specific. Working within a post-Marxism that owes its lineage to the way in which hegemony works invariably as a process that escapes closure (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) and his *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* Laclau's arguments are very much with the failure of Marxist historicism to 'deliver

the political goods', more specifically the resort of certain strands of Marxist thinking to explain this failure in terms of the escape clauses tied to a notion of *conjuncture*.

For Laclau such thinking is based on a hermetic, irrefutable logic that all historical events reducible to the abstractions of the Marxian canon except those which are not which are the contingent effects of the vagaries of conjuncture. In both his work with Chantal Mouffe and his more recent collection of essays Laclau works within a Marxian frame of reference to take issue with precisely this escape clause. Simplifying massively, what Ernesto Laclau argues is that all objects of scrutiny in the social sciences are incompletely constituted because of their location within a field of difference one from another. They are defined by the *negativity* that separates them and marked with a particular *historicity*.

Historicity provides the forces of dislocation which always both block the formation of complete objects but also in blocking affirm their very existence. Any articulation of identity or object formation is only momentarily complete, it is always in part constituted by the forces that oppose it (*the constitutive outside*), always contingent upon surviving the contradictions that it subsumes (*forces of dislocation*). In such a fragile world of identity formation and object formation, political subjects are articulated through moments of closure that create subjects as surfaces of inscription, mythical and metaphoric, invariably incomplete.

In this sense identity emerges through difference, just as all object formation is always partial because always relational. This negativity is the source of what Laclau draws on extensively in a concept of the *constitutive outside*. This is the source of his well known diagnosis that society can never be wholly constituted as an object of scrutiny, in the case of the social; "the social never manages to fully constitute itself as an objective order" (Laclau, 1990, 18) because of the presence of the constitutive outside.

Most usefully here Laclau draws implicitly on Lacan to work through the concept of identity formation set within these fields of (negative) differences, being articulated through that which it is not (*negativity* in Laclau's terms) and through the historical moment of enunciation (referred to as *contingency*). Difference becomes *located* difference within a relational field:

"what one gets is a field of simply relational identities which never manage to constitute themselves fully, since relations do not form a closed system" (1990, 20-21).

Consequently, identities and their conditions of existence are inseparable. There is no identity outside of its context.

"Identity depends on conditions of existence which are contingent, its relationship with them is absolutely necessary" (1990, 21).

Importantly for us, identity is always an incomplete process. At times, in order to make sense of a particular moment or a particular place (synchronic analysis), this process is stopped to

reveal an identity that is akin to a freeze-frame photograph of a race-horse at full gallop. It may be a 'true' representation of a moment but by the very act of freezing it denies the presence of movement. The photograph represents a momentary stop in this gallop, simultaneously real and unreal, it is a moment at which *closure* occurs. Likewise, with identity the very act of representing the ceaseless process of identity formation is based on a moment of *arbitrary closure* which in the same fashion is both true and false simultaneously. More technically, synchronic analysis is necessarily a process of sometimes justifiable misrepresentation. This is why identity is always incomplete, always subsumes a lack, perhaps is more readily understood as a process rather than an outcome.

There are also epistemological consequences of this, for Laclau negativity reveals the contingent nature of all objectivity.

"It is not possible to threaten the existence of something without simultaneously affirming it. In this sense, it is the contingent which subverts the necessary: contingency is not the negative other side of necessity, but the element of impurity which deforms and hinders its full constitution" (1990, 27).

Hence objectivity for Laclau is always partially threatened and partially constituted

"As Saint-Just said: 'What constitutes the unity of the Republic is the total destruction of what is opposed to it.' This link between the blocking and simultaneous affirmation of an identity is what we call 'contingency', which introduces an element of radical undecidability into the structure of objectivity" (1990, 21).

This notion of antagonism links directly back to the mutually constitutive nature of Islam and the West that we have already described. Each is fixed in the imagination of the other but this does render the two identities thus produced equivalent precisely because power relations between the two identities determine the nature of articulation.

Equally significantly, in producing a frame of analysis opposed to essentialism Laclau talks of weakening the boundary of essence through the radical contextualization of any object (1990, 23). Both the objects which are discursively formed through our attempts to make sense of the world (epistemological products) and objects that are formed through our attempts to make sense of ourselves and each other (identities) are subject to this process of *radical contextualization*. In fact, it is the ability to articulate either set of objects that is the very expression of power and the moment when the political (for Laclau, that which is contested) and the social (for Laclau those practices that are sedimented in time and uncontested) define each other by their mutual opposition.

"The constitution of a social identity is an act of power and that identity as such is power" (1990, 31, emphasis in original).

An objective identity is consequently not a homogeneous point but a set of articulated elements in different discursive settings. One way Laclau phrases this is through the assertion that all social relations have contingent conditions of existence understood in terms of a *radical historicity*.

Any single set of articulated elements which defines subjects (akin to Foucauldian subjectification) is thus simultaneously an expression of power. Paradoxically, this expression of power always contains within itself a constitutive outside opposed to the particular articulation. Consequently, the inability to articulate any objectivity which is complete or without such expressions of domination prompts Laclau to use the concept of dislocation in a way which makes it central to his argument because

"every identity is dislocated insofar as it depends on an outside which both denies that identity and provides its conditions of possibility at the same time. But this in itself means that the effects of dislocation must be contradictory. If on the one hand they threaten identities, they are the foundation on which new identities are constituted" (1990, 39).

Laclau describes dislocation exclusively in the vocabulary of historicity, a decision which (we think mistakenly because he takes a notion of 'space as routinized time' from Heidegger) relegates the status of spatiality in the process of dislocation, something that Doreen Massey discusses in detail in her chapter. What we are interested in is reconceptualizing spatialities using Laclau's notion of *surfaces of inscription*, which are themselves marked by necessarily incomplete object formations. Therefore what we want to draw from Laclau - both thematically in this volume and specifically in our reconsideration of the Rushdie affair - is the stress on the *necessary* incompleteness of identity formation. As he puts it, "the field of social identities is not one of full identities but of their ultimate failure to be constituted" (1990, 38).

This has major consequences for two forms of purity which we are keen to reject in this volume. The first is the notion of pure knowledges. Because all object formation is relational all knowledge is necessarily situated: "all objectivity necessarily presupposes the repression of that which is excluded by its establishment" (1990, 31). The fact that the social never manages to constitute itself fully as a social order presents particular problems for epistemology. In no way threatening notions of realist ontology, the radical step that Laclau takes is to reconnect the empirical and the abstract in such a way as to make them mutually constitutive. Consequently, any statement about what we know is itself subject to its own logic of radical contextualization. There are signs of a similar sort of project in David Harvey's call in this volume for a dialectic between the universal and the particular in the evaluation of claims made on the grounds of difference.

The second is that of pure difference. A politics of identity that stresses the irreconcilable nature of differences can, if at times only implicitly, promote a notion of a politics of location that privileges each and every location. The advantage of Laclau's theorization is that these

spaces can be unpacked, they become equivalent to surfaces of inscription, which can only work through an understanding of the subject of political action. Such subjects have four properties for Laclau:

i Any subject is a mythical subject

ii The subject is constitutively metaphoric

iii The subjects forms of identification function as surfaces of inscription

iv The incomplete character of the mythical surface of inscription is the condition of possibility for the constitution of social imaginaries.

And so in selectively combining the analysis of Laclau and Lefebvre our understanding of identities, epistemologies and spatialities are resolved effectively through a theorization of the nature of contingency, a foregrounding of the limits to abstraction through the practice of radical contextualization.

Identity should always be a process, never an artefact. The moment the former is transformed into the latter is the point at which a contestable closure is transformed into a reified boundary. In another context this is perhaps what Donna Haraway means when she talks of a distinction between affinities and identities where

"Feminist discourse and anti-colonial discourse are engaged in the very subtle and delicate effort to build connections and affinities and not to produce one's own or another's experience as a resource for closed narrative" (Haraway, 1991, 113).

Where representation necessarily misrepresents we find the political moment when the strategic nature of closure is revealed. Again we should not present this as something novel. Instead such closures are moments in a politics of articulation, an echo of something Fanon reflected on while listening to the radio in the midst of anti-colonial war:

"The Arabic channel was of course jammed. But the scraps of sound had an exaggerated effect. Like rumours, they were constructively heard, and listening to them became an act of participation in revolutionary victories which might never have occurred. To quote Fanon, 'the radio receiver guaranteed this true lie' " (Feuchtwang, 1990).

Which brings us full circle back to Rushdie's protagonists, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, colonial exiles exploring themselves as they explore London, and discovering the nature of the true-lie. Because

"most migrants learn and can become disguises. Our own false descriptions to counter the falsehoods invented about us, concealing for reasons of security our secret selves" (Rushdie, 1988, 49).

Though more poetic, this is surely close to Laclau's suggestion that it is the necessarily incomplete character of the mythical surface of inscription that is the condition of possibility for the constitution of social imaginaries.

4. Destination: multiple spatialities, radical contextualization, incomplete identities, ambivalent epistemologies

Rethinking the Rushdie affair helps us to understand the manner in which 'the place of politics' is always itself an invocation of spatiality. It also provides a way of rethinking identity politics, not as some sort of surface froth that floats around on top of more important social processes but as something that strikes deep into our ability to transform the social world into concrete knowledges.

To bring together the routes we have taken out of *The Satanic Verses*, we want to suggest that by combining notions of multiple spatialities simultaneously present with the practice of radical contextualization we can both understand the significance of spatiality in the incomplete process of identity formation and reject the relativism that often bedevils identity politics (Bondi, this volume).

For us a politics of identity is quite specifically not about an epistemology of relativism. We stand with Donna Haraway in suggesting that

"The alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology. Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally" (1991, 191).

The problem of spatiality is that when a gaze from nowhere becomes a gaze from somewhere, it is possible to forget at times quite how problematic that somewhere actually might be. As a modesty suit constraining epistemological boasting, this is a fine act of public humility but unless the sorts of spatiality that are being evoked are examined more closely we have to ask whether it is more than rhetorical gesture. A proliferation of sites of difference begets a Babel like world where truth claims, ethical claims and assertions of desire all offer no external criteria of refutation. There is an almost sensual challenge to 'the order of things', a danger that in articulating complexity we celebrate incoherence.

Instead, we are moving towards a sense in which vocabularies of (singular) space are unpacked in terms of the (plural) spatialities that they connote, and consequently our notion of a singular geography is displaced by (plural) geographies, avoiding relativism through the theoretical refusal to submit to the separation of the abstract and the empirical in the process of theorization.

Geographical analysis consequently rests on exactly the sort of key themes of liminality, enunciation and articulation that we have explored in this introduction.

"The epistemological distance between subject and object, inside and outside, that is part of the cultural binarism that emerges from relativism is now replaced by a social process of enunciation. If the former focuses on function and intention, the latter focuses on signification and institutionalization. If the epistemological tends towards a 'representation' of its referent, prior to performativity, the enunciative attempts repeatedly to 'reinscribe' and relocate that claim to cultural and anthropological priority (High/Low; Ours/Theirs) in the act of revising and hybridizing the settled, sententious hierarchies, the locale and the locutions of the cultural" (Bhabha, 1992, 57).

Again, the sort of geographical project we are arguing for can be illustrated by returning to *The Satanic Verses*. The novel's representation of space is in part inseparable from the representational space through which the text becomes 'The Rushdie Affair'. Significantly it is a book which has also been drawn on to inform writings about the 'new ethnicities' that are emerging in cosmopolitan societies where the link between ethnicity and nation is cut and culture retains an autonomy of sorts in the construction of hybrid new ethnicities among migrant groups.

Rushdie has argued that the novel is a "privileged arena" (1991, 429). On these terms *The Satanic Verses* is unimpeachable. But this arena is itself a product and to confine consideration within its privileged boundaries is to tell only half the story. It is worth returning to Lefebvre's distinction between the representation of space and spaces of representation.

In semiotic terms, there is a paradigmatic equivalence between the space of the academy in which the vogue for identity politics is articulated and the representational space of the novel. These spaces of representation are inscribed with ethical and epistemological, as well as aesthetic, traces and conventions. It would be obscenely absurd to blame Rushdie for the cynical manipulation of the symbolic power of the novel by politicians of this and other countries. But there is another absurdity, equally extreme, equally common. And that is to pretend that the scriptor/author is ignorant of the social context in which the work is produced, the potential for a novel that draws, *however sympathetically*, on the life of the prophet to become an Orientalist icon in a racist world. This is the representational space in which in which the text 'takes place'. *The Satanic Verses*, regardless of the author's inclinations, is marked by the stigmata of the literary world that defines it as a classic.

Likewise, in the recent work of bell hooks, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Homi Bhabha and others, descriptions of the hybridity of contemporary cultural politics invoke only a sympathetic *celebration* of the syncretism that is happening 'out there' in the real world. Yet in defining new ethnicities there is clearly potential for the texts to signify a rejection of 'old' ethnicities; not only the exoticizing classificatory gaze of the ivory tower's old ethnicities but also the meaning of these 'old' identities in other worlds. In the latter context there is clearly both a

potential (mis)reading of the new identity politics indicted for devaluing the cultural heritage that resources resistance just as there is a potential (mis)reading which suggests that the work on new ethnicities offends because it transgresses old unitary mobilisations of political Blackness/class identity (Sivanandan, 1990).

Political, ethical and aesthetic significations are found in the representational spaces that are outside the hermetic world of the literary or academic text. As Patricia Williams points out, openness and syncretism are not universally 'good', they themselves are structured by the context in which they take place, in a white hegemonic world there is also "openness as a profane relation. Not communion, but exposure, vulnerability, the collapse of boundary in the most assaultive way" (Williams, 1991, 199).

In one sense what we have here is a return to the myth of spatial immanence and a fallacy of spatial relativism referred to in Part 1. In an abstract literary world such concerns appear self-evident. Texts neither have immanent meanings, nor are their meanings entirely the creation of the audience. Yet it is the spatial articulation of these problems that is so confusing.

Benjamin again is useful here precisely because in his representation of space, his Berlin and Paris, were not only simultaneously real and metaphorical worlds, they were also acts of representation that were consciously, cognitively and politically marked rather than the evocations of a purely aesthetic spatiality. However, as feminist critics have long pointed out the flâneur was a mode of sensibility, a viewpoint on flux, a position sometimes disingenuously acknowledged (Pollock, 1988). Such a viewpoint may or may not have been open to women in the city (Wilson, 1991). But more programatically it is only if both the spaces of representation and the spatialized vocabulary (representations of space) of contemporary social theory are rendered explicit that we can move towards the project that Laclau describes as 'radical contextualization'.

In relational terms, we want to move away from a position of privileging positionality and towards one of acknowledging spatiality. Such a move takes us towards an understanding of identities as always contingent and incomplete processes rather than determined outcomes and epistemologies as situated and ambivalent rather than abstract and universal. It is an acknowledgement of difference that gives no concessions to relativism. The ethical and political agenda can remain structured by social justice but it is a justice that radically contextualizes the various forms of oppression to find the ground on which progressive action can be taken. This radical geography does not - like Pontius Pilate - wash its hands of judgement. It is precisely this ground that is just beginning to be explored by both a form of new jurisprudence that asks how to arbitrate between difference, exemplified by the work of Patricia Williams (1991), and moral philosophies that make explicit the representational spaces on which they are based, exemplified in the work of Iris Marion Young (1990).

5. Arenas of debate (in this collection)

It is the effort to explore and confront these all too frequently implicit forms of spatiality that is embarked upon in all the chapters in this volume. In this final section of our introduction, we would like to pick out three themes which we believe the contributors to this book develop. As you will find, the authors cut across similar kinds of issues, though in rather different ways; each issue relates to aspects of Place and the Politics of Identity. In many ways it is arbitrary to isolate these aspects as if they were in some way theoretically or politically unrelated. We would therefore like to describe them as 'surfaces of articulation' because we want to imply a dynamic sense of both difference and incommensurability and also of mutual constitution and interconnection. These surfaces are both separable and inseparable; we have labelled them 'locations of struggle', 'communities of resistance', and 'political spaces'.

Locations of Struggle

Perhaps fundamentally, there is a question about the constitution of the person, and how people enter as individuals into politics. The assumptions that are made about how people are constituted have profound effects not only on the kinds of radical politics people can be expected to make but also on the kind of effects that can ultimately be hoped for through political action. Harvey asks this question openly and confronts directly the problems relating to a politics of identity and difference. He is particularly worried by the lack of a political response to a major industrial accident. Here, indeed, is a location without struggle. The question, as was Lenin's, is: "what is to be done?".

The problem is that there are different and opposing answers, crudely, based on either a return to an singular identity around which radical politics is mobilised or deploying multiple identities strategically based on a reading of the most radical tactics in any given situation. The answers provided depend on the assessment of the current state of politics. For example, Soja and Hooper argue that there has been a fragmentation of modernist identity politics, and that this is "an endemic problem".

There appears to be broad agreement throughout the book on the undesirability of essentialist notions of the individual; this does not settle the issue, unfortunately. Questions then develop about how the individual is understood to be placed - located - in society (especially Bondi, Golding, Harvey, Revill, Smith and Katz). Are there social relations which people share? If people do share oppressions, are some more fundamental than others? Is it possible to ignore differences in order to form alliances against the powers that be? Which differences are to be articulated, and which are to be left for a later struggle? Around what points - moments, surfaces, events - are people to be mobilised?

This collection suggests that these questions are now being answered through appeals to the spatial - whether real spaces, imaginary spaces, or symbolic spaces. Yet notions of the spatial, and their political consequences, are not fully comprehended or fleshed out (Massey, Smith and Katz). Nevertheless, it is accepted that the individual has to be located within the struggle somehow (Bondi, Golding, Harvey). There are problems here though. Where identity is

assumed to be fixed and singular, then this provides a firm base on which to mobilise politics; the down-side is that this can all too easily exclude potential allies and may be unable to adapt to changing circumstances. On the other hand, where identity is assumed to be multiple, then this facilitates a kind of guerilla warfare against the powerful, and it authorises all kinds of alliances and tactics; unfortunately, this may be unable to distinguish between important and irrelevant struggles, and it may create counter-productive alliances between groups who should not be 'bedfellows'.

The deployment of spatial metaphors are used to resolve these questions, in part at least by refusing a simple 'us' versus 'them' binary ordering of resistance (Golding, Soja and Hooper). The consequence of this is an examination throughout the book of locations of struggle - deploying a sense that these are simultaneously real, imaginary and symbolic - in order to create and sustain communities of resistance (Radcliffe).

Communities of Resistance

This argument about the location of the individual in struggle and the common-sense deployment of spatial metaphors has led the authors to challenge what may be called hegemonic construction of space. It is argued that there is a danger implicit in drawing on received notions of space: any mobilisation grounded in reconstituting the spatial may have unintended, or even reactionary, elements (Radcliffe). Worse, a spatialized politics can be used for the vilest of ends and this can be seen all over the world, but perhaps especially in Serbia's policy of ethnic cleansing - so reminiscent of Nazi Germany's extermination of recidivists, criminals, Jews and other so called 'sub-humans', homosexuals, political opponents, and others who the Nazis labelled anti-social (see Theweleit, 1989, chapter 2).

It is argued here that thought needs to be given to the political deployment of (real, imagined, symbolic) space, and that the purpose of such questioning is to enable the formation and maintenance of progressive political alliances. This mean the consolidation of old communities of resistance or maybe the creation of alternative political possibilities (Harvey, Smith and Katz). The effort is to re-vision radical subjectivity and communities of resistance through "simultaneously real and imagined geographies" (Soja and Hooper). In order to empower alliances between marginalized people a different sense of space needs to be invoked - no longer static and passive, no longer devoid of politics (Massey).

For example, Massey's analysis shows how the common sense dichotomy between space and time actually permits one side of the dualism to be valued and the other side to be seen as lacking value. One aspect of the exercise of hegemonic power is that it facilitates and relies on the transcoding of value between dualisms. In this way time is valued because it is aligned with mind, reason, masculinity and - importantly - progressive politics. Whereas space is seen as lacking because it is associated with the body, emotion, femininity and - importantly - deadness (also Smith and Katz). Such a prescription denies the importance of space in the

construction of radical politics; it denies both its radical and its reactionary tendencies, it denies progressive alliances constructed through the spatial.

The sense here is that space is more than the outcome of social relations and more than one of the dimensions through which the social is constructed. It is an active, constitutive, irreducible, necessary component in the social's composition. The fabric of space now becomes more than a flat two-dimensional surface. Now, it may be that space-time is four or more dimensional (Massey), it may be that there is more to space than merely being in the centre or confined to the margin (Soja and Hooper). Indeed, space can be seen to be full of gaps, contradictions, folds and tears. Through these, marginalized communities may be able to inscribe themselves into new geographies (Hesse). The marginalized may be able to make new investments, for example, in the space of Britishness (Hesse) or in the places of Argentineness (Radcliffe). From this perspective radical politics may be seen as the effort to change the stories told about contested spaces (Hesse, Revill).

As described above, Lefebvre argues that there is a dialectic in the lived world between spaces of representation and representation of spaces. Both Hesse and Revill show that this leads to a fluidity and compositionality which escapes from the codification of the past and imagines a different future. Indeed, story telling may be seen as a particularly effective way of crossing boundaries and building alliances - though this also contains dangers of the systematic misrepresentation of the powerless by the powerful (Smith and Katz). From this perspective, it is necessary to declare problematic any stable sense of place, politics and identity and the communities of resistance which rely on them. This need not mean that "anything goes" as far as place, politics and identity is concerned, or that communities of resistance are impossible. It is a recognition that stability is a struggle to achieve, and different groups have different resources which give them different capacities to articulate their position, their politics, their identities and to mobilise communities of resistance (Revill). It is a recognition of the perpetual need to create, conserve and recreate political spaces.

Political Spaces

Space can now be recognised as an active constitutive component of hegemonic power: an element in the fragmentation, dislocation and weakening of class power (Harvey), both the medium and message of domination and subordination (Massey). It tells you where you are and it puts you there. The authors here agree that this is not where we want to be. The problem is this: where do we want to be, and how do we want to get there? What kind of political spaces are there to be occupied? And who is this 'we' anyway?

The authors, working through these problems, arrive at different answers. More properly, they are beginning to ask different questions. Should there be one basic organizing principle of struggle, which mirrors the fundamental structure of oppression in society (Bondi, Harvey)? Should there be multiple points of resistance, where one or more is prioritized on the grounds of their importance - or effectivity - in that situation (Massey, Smith and Katz)? Should the

powerful join the oppressed in the margins (Soja and Hooper)? Should the marginal present themselves to the centre (Hesse, Radcliffe, Reville)? How should those who exist in an impossible space - because they are excluded from both the centre and the margin - react (Golding)?

It is clear that the contributors believe that some sort of position has to be adopted. The answer to the question 'should there be multiple points of resistance, where none is prioritized?', cannot be "yes". Many of the authors agree with Jane Gallop when she argues that "identity must be continually assumed and immediately called into question" (1982, xii). And, if the surface of politics is not flat (i.e. if all positions are not the same), then what is to be the ground on which questions of politics and identity to be decided? And what kind of ground is this to be? An example is provided by Harvey. He argues that the Left needs to recover the language of social justice - which contains a universalizing notion of human rights - while at the same time recognizing that notions of social justice are embedded in material and hegemonic circumstances. Universal notions must be situated: "there can be no universal conception of justice to which we can appeal as a normative concept to evaluate some event". Concepts of social justice can only provide the terrain on which progressive politics can be grounded, if it is known where that terrain is and if it enables the identification of potential alliances on the basis of similarity rather than sameness.

Similarly, Hesse argues for the construction of new spaces which are not reducible to inside and outside. This also describes a movement not only from fixed to contingent surfaces of the articulation of politics, but also away from closure and totalities, partly because this enclosure is impossible as the history of diaspora demonstrates. While Soja and Hooper describe a politics that ranges from little tactics (in the lived world) to great strategies (geopolitics); in an attempt to create what hooks calls spaces of radical openness (see Part 1). Golding tries to open up "impossible spatiality" in the name of a radical geography, which is based in having to recognise that there an excluded middle between the same and the other, as Queer Politics demonstrates.

Radcliffe shows that the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (the mothers de Plaza de Mayo) had created an alternative geography through transgression; they had come from the margins to the centre and in doing so had created a new space of resistance to the military authorities. Understanding that this was a specific challenge to a specific authority means that the Madres should not be castigated for not being radical enough because they did not challenge hegemonic constructions of motherhood and domesticity. This example, we believe is not exceptional, such an analysis may be extended to a British context: for example, the Greenham Common women who occupied public land next to an U.S. air base to protest against nuclear weapons or the druids who wish to reclaim Stonehenge for their rituals.

We believe that this book demonstrates that all spatialities are political because they are the (covert) medium and (disguised) expression of asymmetrical relations of power. None of the

authors simply celebrate or condemn transgression - the movement from one (political) place to another (political) place. Instead, there is commitment to a continual questioning of location, movement and direction. And so, this volume challenges - each author from their own perspective - hegemonic constructions of place, of politics and of identity.

References

- Ambrose P, 1986, Whatever Happened to Planning? (Methuen, London)
- Benjamin W, 1979, One Way Street (London, New Left Books)
- Berman M, 1988, All that is Solid Melts into Air: the experience of modernity (second edition, London, Verso)
- Bhabha H, 1992, 'Postcolonial authority and postmodern guilt' in L Grossberg, C Nelson and P Treichler, eds, Cultural Studies (London, Routledge) pp 56-66
- Brownill S, 1990, Developing London's Docklands: another great planning disaster? (London, Paul Chapman)
- Castells M, 1972, The Urban Question: a Marxist approach (1977, London, Edward Arnold)
- Castells M, 1983, The City and the Grassroots (Berkeley, University of California Press)
- Clifford J, 1989, 'Notes on travel and theory' in J Clifford and V Dhareshwar, eds, Inscriptions 5: Traveling Theories, Traveling Theorists (Santa Cruz Center for Critical Studies, Santa Cruz, University of California)
- Coupland A, 'Docklands: dream or disaster?' in A Thornley, ed., The Crisis of London (London, Routledge) pp 149-162
- Daniels S, 1989, 'Marxism, culture, and the duplicity of landscape', in R Peet and N Thrift, eds, New Models in Geography: Volume 2 (Unwin Hyman, London) pp 196-220
- de Certeau M, 1984, The Practice of Everyday Life (Berkeley, University of California Press)
- Deutsche R, 1990, 'Expertease' Artforum pp 21-23
- Eco U, 1986, Travels in Hyperreality: essays (London, Picador)
- Evans D and Gohl S, 1986, Photomontage: a political weapon (London, Gordon Fraser Gallery Limited)

- Feuchtwang S, 1985, 'Fanon's politics of culture: the colonial situation and its extension' Economy and Society **14(4)** pp 450-473
- Gallop J, 1982, Feminism and Psychoanalysis: the daughter's seduction (London, Macmillan)
- Gilroy P, 1987, There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack (London, Hutchinson)
- Gilroy P, 1991, ' "It ain't where you're from it's where you're at" The Dialectics of Diasporic Identification' Third Text **13** (Winter) pp 3-16
- Hall C, 1992, White, Male and Middle Class: explorations in feminism and history (Cambridge, Polity Press)
- Hall S, 1988, 'New Ethnicities' in Black Film, British Cinema (London, Institute of Contemporary Arts Documents, 7) pp 27-31
- Haraway D, 1991, Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (London, Free Association Books)
- Hardy D, 1983 Making Sense of London's Docklands: processes of change (Geography and Planning Paper No. 9, Middlesex Polytechnic)
- hooks b, 1991, Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics (London, Turnaround)
- Jacobs J, 1961, The Death and Life of Great American Cities (Harmondsworth, Peregrine)
- Jameson F, 1984, 'Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism' New Left Review **146** pp 53-92
- Jameson F, 1991, Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism (London, Verso)
- Keith M, 1988, 'Racial conflict and the 'No-Go Areas' of London', in J Eyles and D M Smith, eds, Qualitative Methods in Human Geography (Cambridge, Polity Press) pp 39-48
- Keith M, 1993, 'From punishment to discipline? Racism, racialization and the policing of social control' in M Cross. and M Keith, eds, Racism, The City and the State (London, Routledge) pp 193-209
- Laclau E, 1990, New Reflections on the Revolutions of our Time (London, Verso)
- Laclau E and Mouffe C, 1985, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: towards a radical democratic politics (London, Verso)
- Lash S and Friedman J, 1992, 'Introduction' in S Lash and J Friedman, eds, Modernity and Identity (Oxford, Blackwell) pp 1-30

- Lefebvre H, 1974, The Production of Space (1991, Oxford, Basil Blackwell)
- Massey D, 1991, 'A Global Sense of Place' Marxism Today, June, pp 24-29
- Massey D, 1992, 'Space, Place and Gender' LSE Magazine, Spring, pp 32-34
- Nairne S, in collaboration with Dunlop G and Wyver J, 1990, State of the Art: ideas and images in the 1980s (London, Chatto & Windus in collaboration with Channel Four Television Company Limited)
- Pile S and Rose G, 1992, 'All or Nothing? Politics and critique in modernism and postmodernism' Environment and Planning D: Society and Space **10(2)** pp 123-136
- Pile S, 1990, 'Depth hermeneutics and critical human geography' Environment and Planning D: Society and Space **8(2)** pp 211-232
- Pollock G, 1988, Vision and Difference: feminism, femininity and the histories of art (London, Routledge)
- Punter J, 1992, 'Classic carbuncles and mean streets: contemporary urban design and architecture in central London' in A Thornley, ed., The Crisis of London (London, Routledge) pp 69-89
- Rushdie S, 1983, Shame (Harmondsworth, Penguin)
- Rushdie S, 1988, The Satanic Verses (Harmondsworth, Penguin)
- Rushdie S, 1991, Imaginary Homelands: Essays and criticism 1981-1991 (London, Granta Books)
- Sivanandan A, 1990, 'All that melts into air is solid; the hokum of New Times' Race and Class **31(3)** pp 1-30
- Soja E, 1989, Postmodern Geographies (London, Verso)
- Sontag S, 1979, 'Introduction' in W Benjamin, One-Way Street (London, New Left Books) pp 7-28
- Theweleit K, 1989, Male Fantasies II. Male bodies: psychoanalyzing the white terror (1978, Cambridge, Polity Press)
- Wallis B, ed., 1991, If You Lived Here: The city in art, theory, and social activism, a project by Martha Rosler (Seattle, Bay Press)
- Widgery D, 1991, Some Lives: a GP's East End (London, Sinclair-Stevenson)

Williams P, 1991, The Alchemy of Race and Rights: diary of a law professor (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press)

Wilson E, 1992, 'The Invisible Flâneur' New Left Review **191** pp 90-110

Young I M, 1990, 'The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference' in L J Nicholson, ed., Feminism/Postmodernism (London and New York, Routledge) pp 300-323

Zukin S, 1991, Landscapes of Power: from Detroit to Disney world (Berkeley, University of California Press)

Zukin S, 1992, 'Postmodern urban landscapes: mapping culture and power' in S Lash and J Friedman, eds, Modernity and Identity (Oxford, Blackwell) pp 221-247