

RACE, PROTEST, AND PUBLIC SPACE: CONTEXTUALIZING LEFEBVRE IN THE U.S. CITY

Eugene J. McCann*

Introduction

On the morning of October 25, 1994 four Lexington, Kentucky police officers, two White and two Black, were assigned to serve three warrants on Tony Sullivan, an eighteen-year-old Black man. The officers searched for Sullivan in Bluegrass-Aspendale, a predominantly African-American government housing neighborhood north of Lexington's downtown. Finding Sullivan hiding in the living room closet of his ex-girlfriend's house, the officers, with guns drawn, demanded that he surrender. As he emerged from the closet with his hands above his head, a White police officer's pistol discharged, shooting Sullivan in the head. Sullivan died shortly afterward in a local hospital and the officer, Sergeant Phil Vogel, was immediately relieved of duty pending an investigation. As news of the shooting spread, the police characterized it as an accident—a story greeted with scorn and suspicion by large numbers of Bluegrass-Aspendale's residents.

I feel very uncomfortable turning the death of a teenager into an academic exercise. I cannot hope to convey the outrage and grief felt by Tony Sullivan's family, friends, and acquaintances. Sullivan's shooting has, however, become a landmark in debates over what "community" means in Lexington and in negotiations over the continuing process of producing and bounding the spaces of the city. More specifically, the events following Sullivan's death—especially a period of street protest in and around Bluegrass-Aspendale and the adjacent downtown business district—shocked the city's White population and highlighted the frustrations of

*Department of Geography, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio; e-mail: mccanne@ohiou.edu

many of the city's African Americans over their quality of life and their exclusion from decision-making processes. It is the aftermath of Sullivan's death and the way it was used by individuals and groups in the city to highlight Lexington's racially segregated landscape that is worth interrogating, because it sheds light more generally on the production and representation of racialized geographies in U.S. cities.

My argument is in two related parts. First, I suggest that social theories, such as Henri Lefebvre's discussion of the social production of space, both inform and are informed by the material circumstances of everyday life. As such, they must be transported from one context to another with care and sensitivity. Therefore, I argue that Lefebvre's theory, outlined in his book *The Production of Space* (1991), must be contextualized in the racialized geographies of U.S. cities if it is to deepen our understanding of urban sociospatial processes. The glaring omission of any explicit discussion of the role of racial identities in Lefebvre's discussion cannot go uncorrected in analyses of U.S. urbanism.¹ Second, I do not want to throw the baby out with the proverbial bathwater by suggesting that Lefebvre's conceptual framework cannot be applied to the U.S. context. I contend, rather, that Lefebvre's work *does* lend itself to a thorough discussion of race and racial identities in U.S. urban settings through its attention to the central role imagination and representation play in producing space. I argue that Lefebvre's conceptual framework is especially instructive when used to understand how the production and maintenance of "safe" public spaces in U.S. cities is fundamentally related to representations of racial identities and to an ongoing process in which subjective identity and material urban spaces exist in a mutually constitutive relationship.² In this regard, Lefebvre's concept of "abstract space"—space represented by elite social groups as homogeneous, instrumental, and ahistorical in order to facilitate the exercise of state power and the free flow of capital—lends itself to a discussion of the manner in which downtown business spaces in U.S. cities are exclusionary territories dominated by White, middle-class males.

In order to flesh this argument out, this article proceeds from an account of the protests in Lexington's downtown after Tony Sullivan's death to a brief discussion of Lefebvre's influence on Anglo-American geography and contemporary thinking on the meanings of, and practices that surround, urban public space. I then argue in more detail how public space—especially downtown streets—in U.S. cities can be seen, in Lefebvrian terms, as the epitome of "abstract space" (although I do not intend to suggest that abstract space is limited merely to streets—they represent one part of a wider process that constructs both material landscapes and subjective identities). The relationship between abstract public space, political protest, and racial identity is then conceptualized using Lefebvre's triad of representations of space, representational space, and spatial practices. In the final section, I draw on the discussion of race, protest, and

public space in Lexington to show how a thoroughly contextualized application of Lefebvrian categories both resonates with and contributes to current discussions of identity and protest in U.S. cities.

Reaction to Tony Sullivan's Death

Tony Sullivan was shot by Phil Vogel just before 10:00 am. By noon, word of his death had spread through Bluegrass-Aspendale and angry onlookers had begun to gather at the site of the shooting. Within an hour groups of mostly young African-American men began damaging police cars, throwing rocks, and attacking police officers and journalists. At the same time, on neighboring streets, gunshots rang out. Police reaction to these first incidents of violence was swift, forceful, and clearly in line with a pre-established plan. By 1:00 pm, all roads into Bluegrass-Aspendale had been sealed (a task made easier by a recent replanning of the neighborhood's road network to make through-travel impossible), and a police command post had been established at a main entrance to the west of the neighborhood, complementing a permanent police post in the east. With this enclosure complete, twenty police officers in full riot gear formed a line across the main street leading from Bluegrass-Aspendale to downtown and waited for the demonstrators to approach (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, October 26, 27, 28, 1994).

In the period from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm, the number of protesters grew to over one hundred and violent skirmishes and occasional shooting continued within the neighborhood. At around 3:00 pm, thirty protesters left the main group and headed downtown to the city's government center, where they had a brief meeting with Lexington's White police chief. At the meeting, the chief reiterated his view that Sullivan's death was an accident. This explanation failed to satisfy those protesters in city hall or the larger group of approximately one hundred demonstrators who had, in the meantime, left Bluegrass-Aspendale en route to downtown. A more expressive group than the first, the second group, shouting "we want justice" and "go kill someone else," was met by police on the north edge of downtown. When fights broke out, police sprayed the protesters with pepper spray. As the crowd scattered, most evaded the police line, cut through parking lots and headed for the government center on Main Street, in the heart of downtown. After a short period in the central business district, where more bystanders were attacked, a considerable amount of property damage was incurred, and police and demonstrators had running fights in the street (all in the glare of national television news cameras), the protesters were admitted into the local government council chamber to meet with Black politicians and community leaders.

At the meeting, the Black leaders appealed for calm and suggested that a peaceful protest be held in the following days. The demonstrators, on the other hand, used the forum to vent their frustrations at Lexington police's

treatment of African Americans and to tell stories of police harassment. These frustrations were related to wider issues of inequality and spatial entrapment that have been seen as major problems for poor African Americans in Lexington for decades. For instance, the quality of grocery stores in the areas north of downtown is significantly lower than in other parts of the city. Produce is less likely to be fresh or plentiful and prices are higher than in the suburban megamarts (*Lexington Herald-Leader* 1991a, 1991b; Miewald, 1997). At the same time, government support for public transportation is being steadily eroded, thus inhibiting poor people's access to affordable, quality food. Neighborhood activists cite this and other long-standing social and economic inequalities as contributing to the unrest that followed Sullivan's death (Lexington Citizen Summit, 1995).

As the meeting broke up, many of the protesters were still angry, but most began to make their way north toward Bluegrass-Aspendale and other neighborhoods. As the night wore on, however, there were continued instances of violence in the streets in and around Lexington's downtown. In all, fifteen people were injured in the unrest, mostly by flying bricks and bottles, four people were arrested on charges ranging from disorderly conduct to inciting a riot, and there were over one dozen reports of property damage. The wider impact of the protest was less tangible and only became apparent in the weeks after Sullivan's death. Making sense of both the protest itself and the longer-term attempts to come to terms with it is greatly facilitated by a Lefebvrian analysis that takes seriously the role of race in the production of space.

Lefebvre in Anglo-American Geography

Until the early 1990s, Anglo-American geographers' engagement with the work of Henri Lefebvre had been limited indeed. Prior to the translation of Lefebvre's milestone work, *The Production of Space* (1991), understanding of his corpus had been mediated by a handful of interpreters with the linguistic and theoretical wherewithal to work through the French originals. Early discussions of Lefebvre by Harvey (1973) and Castells (1977) were, according to Gottdiener (1993), undermined because they did not have the benefits of Lefebvre's "polished, completed arguments" on space, published in *The Production of Space*. Gottdiener's work in the 1980s on urban space (Gottdiener, 1985) and Soja's (1980) discussion of the sociospatial dialectic—the complex interrelationship between society and space—overcame the early difficulties and brought Lefebvre's notions of the social production of space to a wider anglophone audience (see also Martins, 1982).

It was not until the 1990s, however, that Lefebvre's work on space and urbanism became central to many discussions in Anglo-American geography. The increased accessibility of his work—the translation of *The*

Production of Space and the recent collection, *Writings on Cities* (1996), which includes a translation of *The Right to the City* (1968)—has been complemented by extended and thoughtful discussions of his theorization of space by geographers and others (Gregory, 1994, ch. 6; Harvey, 1989, ch. 13; Merrifield, 1993, 1995; Soja, 1989).

There has been a significant effort in recent geographical and related literature to work through Lefebvre's notions of space, especially his conceptual triad of conceived, perceived, and lived spaces (Allen and Pryke, 1994; Liggett, 1995). This engagement is still in its early stages, but due to Lefebvre's "tantalizing vague writing style," (Merrifield, 1995:295) the opportunities to expand on his spatial theory through examples are legion and can provide insight into a number of social (spatial) practices. For instance, the representations of the spaces of Glasgow found in the city's strategic plans have been contrasted with those found in the city's rich literary tradition to show how Lefebvre's conceptual triad facilitates understanding of the modern urban landscape (Fyfe, 1996). The conceptual triad has been used in a discussion of how GIS technologies are "ways of knowing, seeing ordering, and reproducing the material lived world and social relations" (Roberts and Schein, 1995:192). And Heidi Nast and Mabel Wilson (1994) have critiqued central assumptions in *The Production of Space* and produced an architectural design that problematizes the manner in which Lefebvre sees the house as an enclosed, "feminine," and "private" space.

Urban Public Spaces and Lefebvre

Lefebvre's constant attention to the everyday practices of life makes his work applicable to discussions of urban public spaces—the spaces of cities, such as streets, parking lots, shopping malls, and parks, in which large numbers of day-to-day activities are performed. The concept of public space pervades numerous discussions in geography, planning, and related disciplines. Indeed, in recent years, academics' increased attention to the "militarized" and semipublic spaces of global cities like Los Angeles, New York, and London has reinvigorated discussions of what exactly is meant by "public space." In planning and architectural practice, there has been a parallel, although often less critical, attention to public spaces. For example, recent planning trends, especially the so-called new urbanism or neotraditionalism, have attempted to reproduce an idealized version of public space in new housing developments (Duany and Plater-Zyberk, 1992; Falconer Al-Hindi and Staddon, 1997; McCann, 1995; Till, 1993). As a result of this increased attention to public space, critical geographers have resolved "to raise questions about both the politics in and the politics of public space," by examining "how boundaries between what is public and what is private, what is material and what is

metaphorical, are constructed, contested, and continually reconstructed" (Mitchell, 1995, 1996a:128; Goss, 1993).

The "sadistic street environments" (Davis, 1990) of Los Angeles and other U.S. cities seem to bear little resemblance to a liberal conception of public space espoused by many architects and politicians. While Mike Davis' Los Angeles narratives often leave little room to think of the agency of those who negotiate the city on a daily basis (Duncan, 1994), his and others' discussions of public spaces in western-world cities suggest that the semipublic spaces produced by contemporary architects and planners are increasingly exclusionary. These spaces' structured, consumerized designs are intended to prohibit most free expression, and while the designs are never completely successful, most urban public spaces are pale imitations of the mythical agora. Of course, this state of affairs is, to a significant extent, the result of the compliance of large groups within society, especially those who frequent "festival markets" or desire to partake in the constrained diversity of neotraditional housing developments. Public space is increasingly commodified but is always in a process of being shaped, reshaped, and challenged by the spatial practices of various groups and individuals whose identities and actions undermine the homogeneity of contemporary cities.

The continually changing nature of public space and the rights people have to act in certain ways have increasingly been seen to produce various levels of resistance, from graffiti art to street riots (see Cresswell, 1996). While it is widely acknowledged that public spaces often constrain the actions of women (Wilson, 1992, 1995), cultural studies literature has begun to show how bourgeois public space has similar effects on people of color, gay men and lesbians, the homeless, and the young and the elderly (see, for example, Ruddick, 1996; Valentine, 1996). The resistance to dominant public space in which each of these groups is able to participate is constrained by numerous factors, including laws. As a result, resistance often works outside the law and uses violence in order literally to *take* space. As Mitchell (1995) shows, this spatial politics allows marginalized groups to create "spaces of representation" through which they can represent themselves to the wider public and insert themselves in the discourses of the bourgeois public sphere.

It is Lefebvre's ability to link representation and imagination with the physical spaces of cities and to emphasize the dialectical relationship between identity and urban space that makes his work so attractive to many contemporary urban researchers. His work provides a conceptual framework through which the spatial practices of everyday life, including violence and protest, can be understood as central to the production and maintenance of physical spaces. As the example of Lexington suggests, and as I will argue later, these imaginary geographies and urban public spaces of U.S. cities are thoroughly racialized.

Downtown as Abstract Space

Part of Lefebvre's project was to write a history of space by relating certain representations of space to certain modes of production through time. This history culminates in what he characterizes as the always incomplete imposition of modern, abstract space (commodified and bureaucratized space) over concrete space (the space of everyday life and experience). In using the terms "abstract" and "concrete" space, Lefebvre is drawing on Marx's distinction between abstract labor, which creates exchange value, and concrete labor, which creates use value (Gregory, 1994). For Lefebvre, abstract space is

a space of quantification and growing homogeneity, a merchandised space where all the elements are exchangeable and thus interchangeable; a police space in which the state tolerates no resistance and no obstacles. Economic space and political space thus converge towards an elimination of all differences. (1979:293)

In order for such a space to become dominant, two major processes must occur. First, there must be concerted attempt to define the appropriate meaning of, and suitable activities that can take place within, abstract space. As Lefebvre puts it, in a passage that speaks directly to why the protests in downtown Lexington were so shocking to most residents of the city,

[Abstract space] implies a tacit agreement, a non-aggression pact, a contract, as it were, of non-violence. It imposes reciprocity and a communality of use. In the street, each individual is supposed not to attack those he [*sic*] meets; anyone who transgresses this law is deemed guilty of a criminal act. A space of this kind presupposes the existence of a "spatial economy" closely allied, though not identical, to a verbal economy. This economy valorizes certain relationships between people in particular places (shops, cafes, cinemas, etc.), and thus gives rise to connotive discourses concerning these places; these in turn generate "consensuses" or conventions according to which, for example, such and such a place is supposed to be trouble-free, a quiet area where people go peacefully to have a good time, and so forth. (1991:56)

This construction of consent is central to the contemporary discussions of public space outlined above.

A second element in the production of abstract space is to render it ahistorical, devoid of any indications of the social struggles around its production, or traces of the concrete space it replaces. Abstract space must "be a

space from which previous histories have been erased" (Gregory, 1994:366). Central to this erasure is the power of the state to reshape the physical spaces of the city. Three related examples from the recent planning history of Lexington reveal the practices through which capital and the state have secured the undifferentiated abstract space of downtown—a space made safe for capitalism—by attempting to elide and marginalize the traces of the city's racialized geography and history. They are also indicative of certain social and economic conditions within Lexington in recent decades that, many believe, played a part in sparking the violence after Sullivan's shooting.

First, in a continuing policy of downtown redevelopment over the last three decades, the city center has been reconfigured as traditionally African American "clusters" (Kellogg, 1982) of housing have been torn down and replaced with sports arenas, exhibition spaces, and parking lots. Meanwhile, the city's downtown skyline has been revamped. Three- and four-story commercial structures that once contained shops, lunch counters, and cinemas (themselves remnants of a more blatant brand of racial segregation, but also symbols of African Americans' victories over legally sanctioned racism) were replaced in the 1980s by concrete and glass office buildings. Through redevelopment carried out by local developers and partially funded by the state, the city's downtown skyline now presents itself as a place of business with a distinctly Bluegrass, horsefarm feel (Raitz and VanDommelen, 1990; Popke, 1995).

This continuing process of homogenization in the downtown landscape is directly linked to a second example of this abstract space's denial of the racial differences within itself. From the 1830s to the 1850s, the city's courthouse square, in the heart of the contemporary downtown financial area, was a major regional slave market. As with courthouse squares throughout the U.S., the place is currently the sight for the construction and valorization of the official history of the city through the strategic placement of historical markers, statues, and monuments. Conspicuous by its absence, however, is any trace of the trade in human bodies that was central to the city's economy in the mid-nineteenth century. Despite the complaints of many residents of the city, the courthouse square's collection of war memorials, markers, and statues commemorating, among others, local Confederate commanders has not been joined by an emblem of the suffering and subjugation of countless Black slaves at the hands of the city's merchant elites, nor by a monument to the bravery of those involved in the underground railway which transported slaves across the Ohio River to the north.

A third example of the continuing project to secure the abstract space of business in Lexington's downtown by erasing African-American history and other differences that might cause friction is a project to delimit the territorial extent of the Central Business District through the construction of parks. One of these parks in particular, Thoroughbred Park, to the east

of the downtown, consists of a large grassy mound, a rock wall, a fountain, and numerous lifesize statues of racehorses and their jockeys careening toward an imaginary finish line. The orientation of the elements of the park makes it a convenient screen that separates the public spaces of downtown, symbolized by reflective glass and empty concrete plazas, from the public spaces of the streets to the north and east, often represented to the city by the mainstream news media as consisting of unruly Black youths, asphalt basketball courts, shotgun homes, and public housing projects (Jones, 1995, 1996; Schein, 1996).

While these examples suggest that abstract space is produced in capitalism's image to facilitate the continuation of this mode of production, it would be wrong to argue that the public spaces of downtown Lexington or any city are completely dominated by this representation of space. Indeed, as Lefebvre (1991:52) has been careful to note, abstract space is fundamentally contradictory because while it is a space that emphasizes homogeneity, it can only exist by accentuating difference. The image of homogeneity and unity that is a central feature of abstract space can, according to Lefebvre, only be achieved and maintained through a continued state-sponsored process of fragmentation and marginalization that elides difference and thus attempts to prevent conflict. This contradiction produces, in extreme cases, violent protests:

Cities are transformed into a collection of ghettos where individuals are at once "socialized," integrated, submitted to artificial pressures and constraints [. . .] and separated, isolated, disintegrated. A contradiction which is translated into anguish, frustration, and revolt (Lefebvre, 1972:168; see also Allen and Pryke, 1994:466).

The state in this sense produces and enforces normative definitions of space in order to maintain the segregation of people into "functional and hierarchical ghettos" (Martins, 1982:179). Groups who are not included in this image of the world that valorizes wealthy White suburbs and White downtown business spaces are continually made to feel out of place at the same time as they are told that if they want to prosper they must assimilate.

The contradictions inherent in abstract space provide the opportunity for oppositional groups continually to play a part in the production and reproduction of social space. Through their everyday practices, and through more unusual and dramatic events like the protest in Lexington, groups such as African Americans, whose lives, histories, and spaces are so often marginalized by capitalist abstract space, can challenge the dominant representations central to that space. Lefebvre provides a conceptual triad that, when contextualized in the racialized geographies of U.S. cities, allows us to think about how this process might occur.

Lefebvre's conceptual triad

Lefebvre's model has three moments encompassing two aspects of social space and the practices that mediate, and are mediated by, social space (Figure 1).

1. *Representations of Space*—the space of planners and bureaucrats, constructed through discourse. This space always remains abstract since it is *conceived* rather than directly lived. It is only encountered through the understandings and abstractions contained in plans, codes, and designs that shape how we conceptualize ordered space. This form of social space is the dominant form and is central to the production of abstract space.
2. *Representational Space*—the space of the imagination through which life is directly *lived*. "It is space experienced through the complex symbols and images of its 'inhabitants' and 'users'" (Lefebvre, 1991:33) that often draws on physical objects found in space in order to symbolize lived experience and to produce meaning. The works of artists, photographers, filmmakers, and poets may be representational spaces that, through their uses of symbolism, construct counter-discourses and thus open up the possibility to think differently about space.
3. *Spatial Practices*—the everyday routines and experience that "secrete" their own social spaces. These practices—the

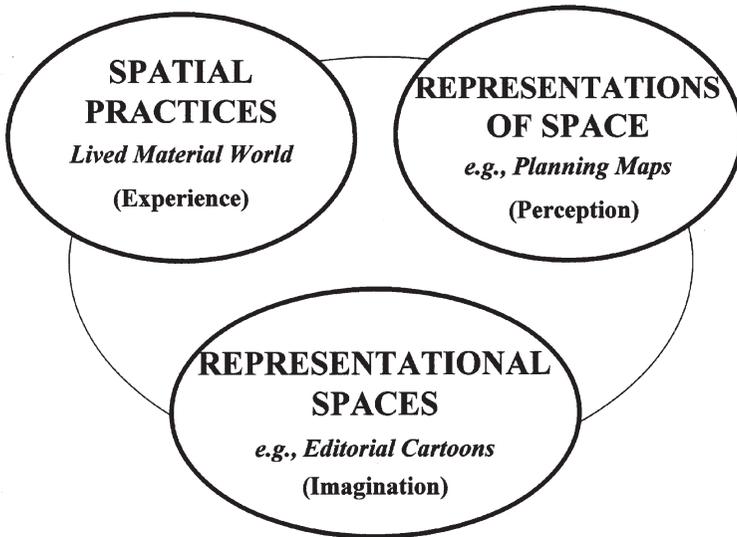


Figure 1 Three moments in the production of space (after Lefebvre, 1991; Roberts and Schein, 1995).

everyday activities of life—continually mediate between the two forms of social space, working within the bounds of the conceived abstract spaces of planners and architects while simultaneously being shaped and shaping individuals' perceptions and uses of space. While planners may designate the downtown streets to be public, individuals' perceptions may induce them to use the streets in different ways, feeling out of place in some parts of downtown or unsafe in others. The continual interplay of the two types of social space exists in a mutually constitutive relationship with the spatial practices of the "users" of space (Lefebvre, 1991:38-40; Merrifield, 1993: 522-527; Roberts and Schein, 1995).

Race, Protest, and the Production of Space

The demonstration after Tony Sullivan's shooting is a useful case through which to operationalize Lefebvre's triad and to show how its application in U.S. settings must recognize the importance of racial identities. The demonstration and the reaction to it—especially two editorial cartoons and an editorial column published in the following days—show how space is continually produced and reproduced in U.S. cities through imagination and in reference to the question of race. Indeed, the editorial cartoons are significant examples of the manner in which visual imagery is crucial to the production of racialized geographies.

In the following paragraphs, I will use the editorials as moments around which to construct a discussion of the relationships between representations of space, representational spaces, and spatial practices in the production of public space. This will support my argument that while Lefebvre's failure to explicitly discuss race is problematic, his conceptual triad provides the opportunity to set racial identity at the center of our understandings of U.S. urbanism. I will suggest that the representational spaces of the cartoons and the editorial have had a significant impact on the spatial practices of Lexington's residents because they shine a harsh light on the role of planners and the everyday lives of middle-class Whites in the production of exclusionary, abstract, public spaces in the city.

In contrast to this racialized image of the city, the dominant view of Lexington before the demonstration saw the city as a single, happy community where everyone worked together for a common future. In the wake of the demonstration, two things became clear: first, large numbers of the population did not feel part of this imagined community; and second, the city's physical and social barriers which defined the boundaries of "safe" public space could easily be transgressed by groups of people who are usually excluded from those places. The local daily newspaper,

the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, was quick to acknowledge the cracks that had appeared in this dominant conception of community and the permeability of the physical boundaries which exist within the city. Not surprisingly, given local newspapers' vested interests in the maintenance of certain patterns of social relations in their cities, the editorial writers were also quick to emphasize that the community could be salvaged and set back on course through united action.

The *Herald-Leader's* editorial cartoonist, Joel Pett, who is White, was less sanguine about the state of race relations and about the future, however. In Lefebvre's terms, Pett's cartoons are representational spaces—spaces of "subjects' rather than of calculations"—that work in the realm of the imagination through systems of nonverbal symbols and signs drawn from the material practices and ordered spaces of everyday life (Lefebvre, 1991:362). As such they had a profound effect on how people in Lexington perceived the public spaces of downtown after the demonstration, and they also provided an uncomfortable commentary on the city's racially segregated suburbs.

Representing Race and Space

On the day after the demonstration Pett published a cartoon (Figure 2) which depicted Lexington as a city starkly divided between Blacks in the east and Whites in the west. On this racialized map of the city, Pett inscribed a quote from Martin Luther King that condemns violence and prejudice. For cartographers, this image of Lexington is not much more

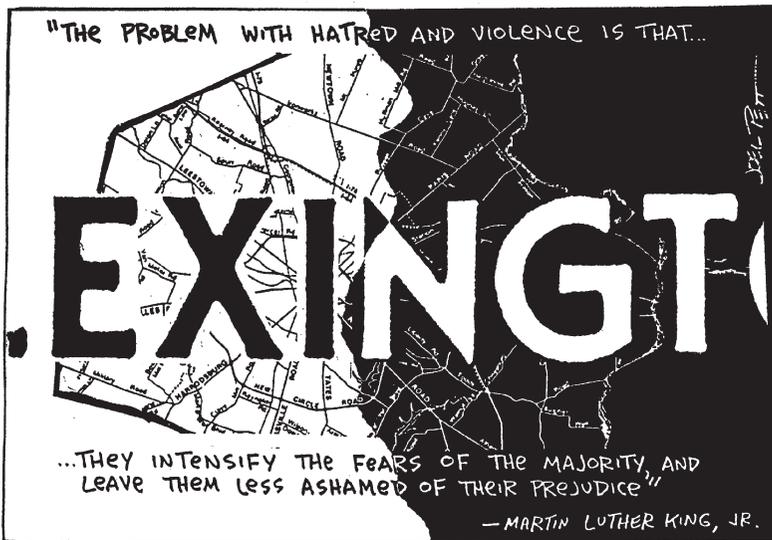


Figure 2 A city divided: Pett's first cartoon, October 26, 1994. Used by kind permission of Joel W. Pett.

than an artist's impression. Lexington's population is only 13.4% African American, the majority of whom live in the northeast of the city—in Bluegrass-Aspendale and other neighborhoods. A census map of the city depicting racial distribution would show that Pett's east-west division is simplistic to say the least. The Black population is concentrated in the northeast, but the southeast (colored black by Pett) contains some of Lexington's whitest neighborhoods. This "inaccuracy" does *not* diminish the power of the image as a representational space that works against dominant discourses by revealing the social divisions they maintain.

Indeed, the image had power precisely because it brought home what was already clear to the city's residents: the city *was* segregated and *did* suffer from violence and prejudice. Furthermore, Pett's image uses as its base one of the most common versions of the city's census tract map. The artist's impression of the city's racial segregation, combined with a state map, suggests that the local state has been thoroughly implicated in maintaining the spatial boundaries within the city as part of its project of maintaining abstract space. Indeed, this recognition also lent symbolic power to the protests outside the city government offices the previous afternoon (see Lefebvre, 1991:374-375).

Pett's cartoon brought the continued struggles over space on the edges of downtown to the attention of the whole city. Furthermore, the racial geography of the city was central to the editorial published on the front page of the *Community Voice Newsjournal*, a bimonthly, largely African-American newspaper. Entitled "Real Fear," the editorial is worth quoting at length as it cuts to the heart of the topic of this paper—the role of racialized experiences, perceptions, and imaginations in the production of the public spaces of U.S. cities (Harvey, 1989:220-221).

It was a day of real fear, a day Lexington's worst nightmare came true . . . A large crowd of angry African-Americans making their way . . . to the heart of Downtown Lexington.

Lexington finally received a taste of what it's like for an angry group of young African-Americans to *be somewhere other* than their own neighborhood. As long as incidents like this take place in Charlotte Court, Bluegrass Aspendale or other areas isolated from Lexington's wanna be lily white existence it's o.k. . . . But things took an unexpected turn when the anger and frustration was not taken out in the hood, but taken out downtown in broad daylight for the entire nation to see (Henry, 1994:1, my emphasis).

The protest in the wake of Tony Sullivan's shooting broke down the reified social and institutional barriers within the city. The protesters were quite literally *out of place*. Their mass transgression into downtown

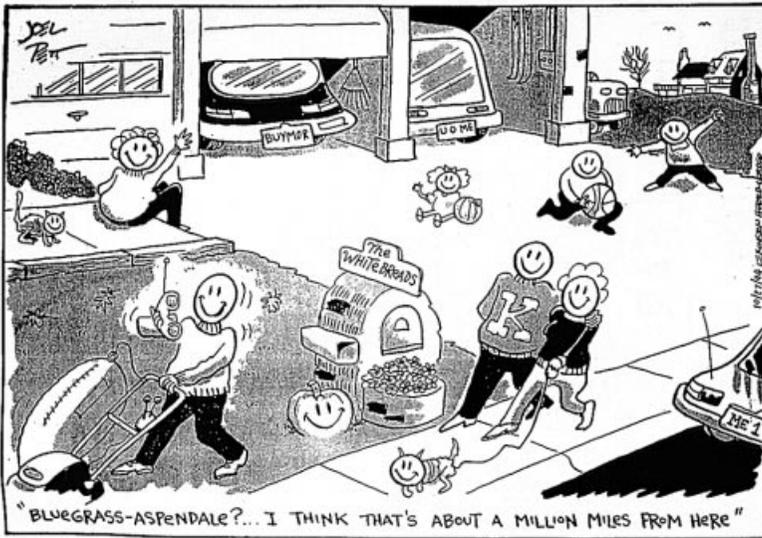


Figure 3 The Whitebread: Pett’s second cartoon, October 27, 1994. Used by kind permission of Joel W. Pett.

secreted new material spaces in the short term and contributed to a continuing process of spatial restructuring in the medium to long term.

The next day, Pett published a second cartoon that addressed what he seems to regard as the cause of the racial divisions in Lexington: those who live in the racially segregated suburbs in the southeast of the city where the vast majority of residents are affluent Whites. The cartoon (Figure 3) shows a two-car suburban family, the Whitebread, smiling happily in their front yard. Mr. Whitebread, mowing the lawn, is talking into his cell phone, presumably to a journalist who has asked him the location of Lexington’s public housing. Mr. Whitebread replies, “Bluegrass-Aspendale? . . . I think that’s about a million miles from here.”

The image of the community and geography of the city Pett portrayed in this cartoon has come to haunt the deliberations of many politicians, planners, businesspeople, and activists within the city. The vivid image of the “white bread” affluence, characteristic of Lexington’s southern suburbs, was set within newspaper pages filled with stories of the frustration of the city’s Black youths who see little prospect for economic advancement in the city. The bland, almost blank, smiling faces of the Whitebread family allowed many of the city’s White population to see themselves as others (in this case many African Americans) see them. (Perhaps a strategic inversion of the old racist fallacy which suggests that all people of a certain *non-White* group ‘look alike’?)³

In the representational spaces of Lexington's White imaginations, Bluegrass-Aspendale often *did* seem a million miles away. The neighborhood is only a few miles from the southern suburbs, but many in the city who have discussed the issues of exclusion and racism since the Sullivan shooting have noted that the everyday lives and social spaces of White, middle-class businesspeople in the downtown area and the largely African-American service workforce which cleans and secures their offices overlap in contradictory ways but almost never connect on any equal basis (see Allen and Pryke, 1994). They are held apart by the socially produced abstract space of the downtown in order to maintain a veneer of "white bread" homogeneity. The events after Sullivan's death were an occasion when different lifepaths (or spatial practices, to return to Lefebvre's words) did connect and revealed the contradictions inherent in abstract space. The result was protest and animosity that profoundly reshaped Lexington residents' perceptions of their city (Lefebvre, 1991:365).

In the years since the shooting, Lexington's business community, politicians, planners, and activists have drawn on the experience of the demonstration as they engage in an ongoing negotiation over the future of the city's economy and quality of life. They have attempted to reassert a bourgeois, exclusionary notion of "community" and reestablish the dominance of homogenized, abstract space. One consultant hired by the chamber of commerce to facilitate this planning process described the city as the most divided place in which he had ever worked. Despite their efforts, however, an editorial in the *Community Voice* published in September 1996 suggests that racial/spatial divisions in Lexington are as pronounced today as they were when Sullivan was shot.

Lexington is really like two separate cities. The dreaded North end, where all the evil happens, and the South end, where only occasional evil happens.

. . . Occasionally, North enders will ride through the South end neighborhoods to see the new growth of homes and gated communities. South enders are quite a bit less likely to venture into the North end. For all accounts and purposes, there are no shoppes [*sic*] for them to spend their money, no restaurants to eat at, no new growth or neighborhoods—or so it has been defined to them. . . (Cordray, 1996:1).

These imaginary geographies of the city have been central to the continuing production of and struggle over the public spaces of the city and have played a central role in discussions of race, protest, and the politics of public space in contemporary Lexington (Figure 4). In Lefebvre's theorization of the production of space, representational spaces can be pulled apart from spatial practices and representations of space for heuristic purposes, but in the end they are mutually constitutive moments in

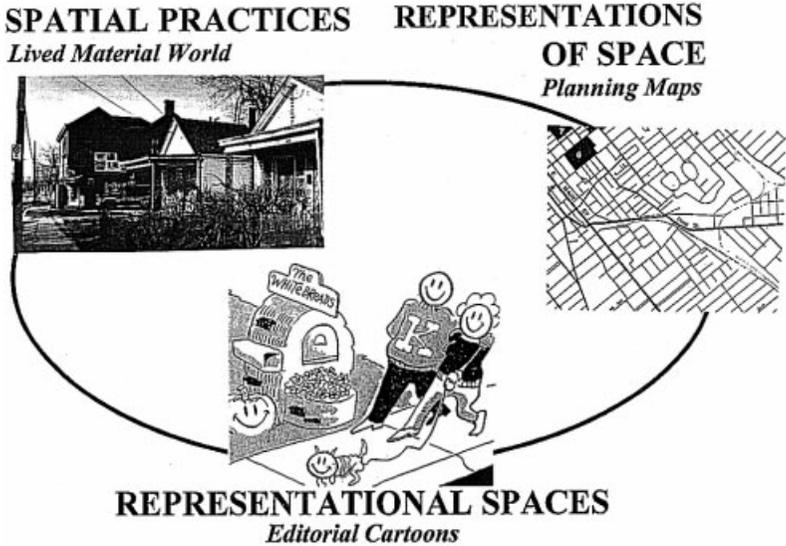


Figure 4 Contextualizing Lefebvre in the U.S. city. Detail of the cartoon used by kind permission of Joel W. Pett.

a single process. They are part of the production of the social/physical spaces we experience, perceive, and imagine on a daily basis. These spaces are always already racialized. The spatial practices of everyday life in Lexington’s public housing or in any other part of the city shape planning decisions but are also *ordered* by the representations planners and others construct. Planning maps order the spaces of the city by keeping land uses and also people *in their place* through their connection to the forces of the state and their ability to produce and secure abstract space through the marginalization of difference. Representational spaces—the work of artists like Pett—are a third and equally important moment in the process. Pett’s cartoons in the days after the demonstration drew on spatial practices (walking the dog) and representational spaces (the census tract map) to highlight the racialized geography of the city and to show White suburbanites how they may be perceived by others who live in Lexington.

Conclusion: Contextualizing Lefebvre in the U.S. City

“Marked” Bodies and the Production of Public Space

The example of the demonstration in the wake of Tony Sullivan’s shooting is used in this paper to support the argument that Henri Lefebvre’s theoretical framework for understanding the production of space must be

applied with great care in any given context. In U.S. cities, Lefebvre's analysis must be carefully contextualized with regard to the racial coding of the production and maintenance of abstract, exclusionary public spaces—spaces that extend beyond street environments into every aspect of life and play a role in constituting identity—by capital and the state. Lefebvre's three moments—the conceived, the lived, and the perceived—capture bodily experiences toward space and therefore suggest that the racially “marked” bodies will have a particular relationship to, and constitutive role in, the production of abstract spaces which always attempt to elide difference. As Merrifield notes,

Lefebvre gives centrality to the *body* in the understanding of the relationship between [the different moments of his triad]. . . . The relationship to space of a “subject” who is a member of a group or society implies a certain relationship to their body and vice versa (Merrifield, 1993:524, his emphasis; see also Lefebvre, 1991:40).

Recent discussions of bodies and public space have stressed the gendered and exclusionary nature of city streets and the manner in which homeless people have been progressively banished from public open space. The equally important work of understanding the place of racially “marked” bodies in public space is relatively less developed, however. Susan Ruddick's recent discussion of the construction of difference in public spaces shows that race also is a vitally important category in the production of space. African-American stories of “encounters with Whites in public space graphically illustrate the role that racism plays in the formation of subjective identities and with few exceptions belie any hope for an open-minded public space” (Ruddick, 1996:136). Contemporary public spaces are designed to keep the frequency of uncomfortable encounters to a minimum and to maintain a rigid power relation between Whites and people of color when such encounters do take place, while at the same time maintaining a veneer of unity and homogeneity. In order to produce and maintain the stability of these spaces, “contemporary designers of urban ‘public’ space increasingly accept signs and images of [social] contact as more natural and desirable than contact itself” (Mitchell, 1995: 120). Therefore, when real contact between normally segregated social groups—such as young African Americans and White business people—occurs in a situation where racial hierarchies have been broken down, the event is all the more newsworthy and shocking to the suburban middle classes.

The benefit of Lefebvre's theorization of space in this regard is his insistence on the importance of representations of bodily, lived experiences of space, especially when it is recognized that these representations are thoroughly mass-mediated by the work of journalists. As Ruddick (1996:139)

notes, the media has a critical place in the production of identity and space. "It is one discursive medium through which . . . images [of subject and object] are generated and maintained, representing interactions to the public at large." Joel Pett's cartoons and the *Community Voice* editorials have played an important role in representing images of identity and racialized geographies to the public in Lexington. Their narratives of race relations and racialized spaces of Lexington contradict the more traditional images of racial categories presented by the city's mainstream journalists. While more mainstream journalists continue to cling to the homogenizing notion of the city as one "community," Pett and the *Community Voice* editorialists have written a rather different geography of public space in the city and have been able to insert it into the public sphere through their strong, uncompromising imagery.

The production of public space can be seen, then, as a continual struggle between the state and capital trying to produce and maintain a seemingly homogeneous but fundamentally contradictory abstract space, on the one hand, and subaltern groups, often working through oppositional elements in the media, asserting their "counter-spaces" and constructing their "counter-publics," on the other (Lefebvre, 1991:381-385). In the U.S. city this process of contestation and struggle is fundamentally and inescapably racialized and entails not merely the making of certain streets as "White" or "Black" spaces but simultaneously the social construction of subjective identity and political activity through spatiality. The recognition of this fact sheds important light on Lefebvre's words. Indeed, the following statement from *The Production of Space*, which outlines Lefebvre's view of the state's continual struggle to elide difference, is given more weight, I think, when contextualized within the racialized geographies of the U.S. city:

Differences endure or arise on the margins of the homogeneous realm, either in the form of resistances or in the form of externalities (lateral, hetrotopical, heterological). What is different is, to begin with, what is *excluded*: the edges of the city, shanty towns, the spaces of forbidden games, of guerrilla war, of war. Sooner or later, however, the existing center and the forces of homogenization must seek to absorb all such differences, and they will succeed if these retain a defensive posture and no counterattack is mounted on their side (Lefebvre, 1991:373, his emphasis).⁴

Protest and the Politics of Public Space

Understanding the importance of race in the production of space in U.S. cities is only a first step, however. As Lefebvre notes, the possibilities for and character of marginalized populations' "counterattacks" against the

production of abstract space must also be examined in context. Lefebvre's theorization of space and the work of numerous geographers with an interest in public space are intended to "point the way towards a different space, towards a space of a different (social) life and to a different mode of production" (Lefebvre, 1991:60). As Mitchell (1995) and others have shown, the spatial practices of marginalized social groups can provide great insight into how a politics which problematizes generally held definitions of public space can be achieved. Discussions of how public space is produced and what it might look like in the future must be related to a politics that reshapes and reconceptualizes urban public space and asserts what Lefebvre saw as two interrelated rights: the right to the city and the right to difference.

The right to the city, for Lefebvre, has a positive and negative aspect. It is the right of every social group to be involved in all levels of decision-making which shape the control and organization of social space. It is also the right not to be excluded from the spaces of the city center and segregated in residential neighborhoods. The right to the city is logically extended by the right to difference: the right to be free from externally imposed, pre-established classifications of identity. Lefebvre's concern for rights resonates with recent work on identity politics, public space, and the public sphere. In this work, spatial practices are central to the assertion of different views and political projects. Mitchell, for instance, argues that public spaces gain political importance when they are *taken* by marginalized groups and restructured as "spaces for representation." In this conceptualization, public spaces are material places; sites from which political activity flows. In the homogenized, exclusionary public spaces of contemporary U.S. cities, marginalized groups often feel that they must employ violent tactics in order to secure the spaces from which they can represent themselves (Mitchell, 1995; Smith, 1992).

In Lefebvre's terms this process of violent struggle is necessary in order to produce the "differential spaces" or "counter-spaces" where the rights to the city and to difference can be articulated. These counter-spaces and the spatial practices woven through them reveal the contradictions of the abstract spaces of the state and capital and, on the relatively rare and shortlived occasions when they are produced, provide hope for the production of truly open and inclusive public spaces where "marked" bodies can negotiate the future on a free and equal basis.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Joel Pett for allowing me to use his work and to J. P. Jones, Wolfgang Natter, David Organ, John Pickles, Sue Roberts, and Jonathan Smith for discussing some of these ideas. Bobby Wilson and David Wilson provided valuable and appreciated comments as reviewers and Dick Walker has been most helpful. Also, I am

indebted to Katherine Jones, Jeff Popke, Karl Raitz, and Rich Schein, whose work on downtown Lexington has informed this paper. All assertions are wholly my responsibility.

Notes

1. "Race" is understood as a problematic social construction that assigns behavioral characteristics on the basis of physical appearance. As such, it is fallacious. Nonetheless, it is an important signifier of status differences in U.S. cities and therefore is an important political-economic force and a significant object of study.
2. I want to stress that I do not hold an essentialist view of U.S. urbanism. Issues of public space and social justice in U.S. cities are overdetermined processes and cannot be boiled down to a singular cause. I do feel, however, that racial identities need to be dealt with seriously in discussions of contemporary U.S. urbanism.
3. Other, not unconnected, meanings can be drawn from this image. It highlights "white bread affluence" in Lexington, but also indicates that discussions of "quality of life" in Lexington's planning process tend to draw upon "traditional," heteronormative definitions of the family.
4. Again, contextualization is important here. Writing in France in the early 1970s, Lefebvre had a tendency to refer to the edges of the city when he discussed marginalized social groups. Of course, in U.S. cities, as opposed to European cities with their massive government-funded peripheral housing estates, marginalized groups tend to live near the center but are, nevertheless, excluded from the spaces of the central business district.

References

- Allen, J., and M. Pryke (1994) The production of service space. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12:453–475.
- The Black Public Sphere Collective (1995) Preface. In The Black Public Sphere Collective (Eds.) *The Black Public Sphere*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp.1–3.
- Castells, M. (1977) *The Urban Question*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Cordray, D.L. (1996) City—community . . . you decide. *Community Voice Newsjournal* 6 September, p.1.
- Cresswell, T. (1996) *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Davis, M. (1990) *City of Quartz*. London: Verso.
- Davis, M. (1992) Fortress Los Angeles: the militarization of urban space. In M. Sorkin (Ed.) *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*. New York: Hill and Wang, pp. 154–180.
- Duany, A., and E. Plater-Zyberk (1992) The second coming of the American small town. *Wilson Quarterly* 16:19–50.
- Duncan, J.S. (1994) Me(trope)olis: or, Hayden White among the Urbanists. In A. King (Ed.) *Representing the City*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 253–268.
- Falconer Al-Hindi, K., and C. Staddon (1997) The hidden histories and geographies of neotraditional town planning: the case of Seaside, Florida. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 15:349–372.

- Fischler, R. (1994) Strategy and history in professional practice: planning as world making. In H. Liggett and D. Perry (Eds.) *Spatial Practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, p. 45.
- Fyfe, N.R. (1996) Contested visions of a modern city: planning and poetry in post-war Glasgow. *Environment and Planning A* 14:387–403.
- Goss, J. (1993) The “magic of the mall”: an analysis of form, function, and meaning in the retail built environment. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 83:18–47.
- Gottdiener, M. (1985) *The Social Production of Urban Space*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Gottdiener, M. (1993) A Marx for our time: Henri Lefebvre and *The Production of Space*. *Sociological Theory* 11:129–134.
- Gregory, D. (1994) *Geographical Imaginations*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Harvey, D. (1973) *Social Justice and the City*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Harvey, D. (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Henry, W. (1994) Real fear. *Community Voice Newsjournal* 28 October:1.
- Jones, K.T. (1995) Habitat for Humanity and the construction of urban space in Lexington, Kentucky. Paper presented at the AAG meetings, Chicago, March.
- Jones, K.T. (1996) View of a changing downtown: the spatial legibility of Lexington, Kentucky. Paper presented at the AAG meetings, Charlotte, NC, April.
- Kellogg, J. (1982) The formation of Black residential areas in Lexington, Kentucky, 1865–1887. *Journal of Southern History* 67(3):21–52.
- Lefebvre, H. (1972) *La Pensee Marxiste et la Ville*. Paris: Casterman.
- Lefebvre, H. (1979) Space: social product and use value. In J.W. Freiburg (Ed.) *Critical Sociology: European Perspectives*. New York: Irvington, pp. 285–295.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The Production of Space*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell. First published as *La Production de L'espace* (1974).
- Lefebvre, H. (1996) *Writings on Cities*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Lexington Citizen Summit. (1995) *Strategies, Plans, Dreams and Schemes*. Lexington, KY: Lexington Citizen Summit. (Copy available from the author.)
- Lexington Herald-Leader* (1991a) Food quality at stores in inner city questioned. June 19:A1, A8.
- Lexington Herald-Leader* (1991b) North side shops for grocery answers. June 23:A1, A12.
- Liggett, H. (1995) City sights/sites of memories and dreams. In H. Liggett and D.C. Perry (Eds.) *Spatial Practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 243–273.
- Martins, M.R. (1982) The theory of social space in the work of Henri Lefebvre. In R. S. Forrest, J. Henderson, and P.R. Williams (Eds.) *Urban Political Economy and Social Theory*. Aldershot, England: Gower, pp.160–185.
- McCann, E.J. (1995) Neotraditional developments: the anatomy of a new urban form. *Urban Geography* 16:210–233.
- Merrifield, A. (1993) Place and space: a Lefebvrian reconciliation. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* NS 18:516–531.
- Merrifield, A. (1995) Lefebvre, anti-Logos and Nietzsche: an alternative reading of *The Production of Space*. *Antipode* 27:294–303.
- Miewald, C.E. (1997) Is awareness enough? The contradictions of self-care in a chronic disease clinic. *Human Organization* 56:353–363.
- Mitchell, D. (1995) The end of public space? People’s Park, definitions of public, and democracy. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85:108–133.
- Mitchell, D. (1996a). Introduction: public space and the city. *Urban Geography* 17:127–131.
- Mitchell, D. (1996b) Political violence, order, and the legal construction of public space: power and the public forum doctrine. *Urban Geography* 17:152–178.

- Nast, H.J., and M.O. Wilson (1994) Lawful transgressions: this is the house that Jackie built . . . *Assemblage* 24:48–55.
- Popke, E.J. (1995) (De)constructing urban space: capital restructuring and the construction of meaning in downtown Lexington. Paper presented at the AAG meetings, Chicago, March.
- Raitz, K.B., and D. VanDommelen (1990) Creating the landscape symbol vocabulary for a regional image: the case of the Kentucky bluegrass. *Landscape* 9(2):109–121.
- Roberts, S.M., and R.H. Schein (1995) Earth shattering: global imagery and GIS. In J. Pickles (Ed.) *Ground Truth*. New York: Guilford.
- Ruddick, S.M. (1996) Constructing difference in public spaces: race, class, and gender as interlocking systems. *Urban Geography*. 17:132–151.
- Schein, R.H. (1996) Controlling landscape in a southern city. Paper presented at the AAG meetings, Charlotte, NC.
- Smith, N. (1992) New city, new frontier: the Lower East Side as wild, wild west. In M. Sorkin (Ed.) *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Soja, E. (1980) The socio-spatial dialectic. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 70:207–225.
- Soja, E. (1989) *Postmodern Geographies*. London: Verso.
- Till, K. (1993) Neotraditional towns and urban villages: the cultural production of a geography of “otherness.” *Environment and Planning D:Society and Space* 11:709–732.
- Valentine, G. (1996) Children should be seen and not heard: the production and transgression of adults’ public space. *Urban Geography* 17:205–220.
- Wilson, E. (1992) *The Sphinx in the City*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wilson, E. (1995). The rhetoric of urban space. *New Left Review* 209:146–160.
- Young, I.M. (1990) *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.