

“Toward a Theory of Spatial Justice”

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Introduction

The recent documentary *Detropia* picks up where so many stories of Detroit leave off. If the familiar story of Detroit tells its long slide into depopulation and dysfunction, then *Detropia* follows current residents in the city, trying to understand how they live their lives. During the film's arguably most tense scene, residents, gathered at a public meeting, denounce the mayor's plan to move city residents into neighborhoods of concentrated population. In another scene, three young men sit on a porch and joke about the pipe dream, often exposed in national media, of transforming Detroit's vacant land into viable agriculture.

These two scenes evoke what has become a national debate: what should Detroit become? Urban agriculture's proliferation in Detroit, for instance, is a frequent source of exposés on the city's future (Runk 2010), and is just one demonstration of what has become a spatially strange city: urban farming in Detroit has proliferated, one can hypothesize, because of the extraordinarily high land vacancy rates in the city. This vacancy has invited not only ambitious farmers, but also wildlife and prairie grass. Strangely, the very heart of twentieth century American industrial growth and decline has become the poster child of a newly imaginable, sustainable city. What should Detroit become? How should state and local governments, developers, residents, activists, and ambitious social and business entrepreneurs rebuild Detroit? Should they rebuild Detroit? These questions about Detroit's redevelopment – about visions of the city to come – are already being answered by various actors in Detroit. Whether in the context of a recently approved corporate mega-farm in downtown Detroit, or else an ambitious new planning document that seeks to paint Detroit a “canvas of green,” Detroit's future is the subject of much political debate, both within the city's limits and in the national press (Gallagher 2013; Gallagher 2012; Pardo 2012; Hulett 2012; Carey 2013)

It seems to me that these questions about the city's future are questions of *justice*. That is, they are questions about how Detroit should be ordered. At the same time, these questions about Detroit are

questions about *space*, that is, how the *city's geography* should be organized. Thinking about Detroit's future, as many people are increasingly wont to do, implicitly involves thinking about what geographer Edward Soja has termed *spatial justice*: what kind of ordering might these different proposals produce, and does that ordering produce just relations? This is the central question posed by thinking about spatial justice, a question that I grapple with in my dissertation. This question suggests a more fundamental and manageable one for this paper: what is spatial justice, and how can it help political theorists, geographers, and activists make sense of contemporary politics? This paper begins to answer that question, and does so by answering two questions that structure my discussion below. First, I ask, “what is spatial justice?” I answer this question by turning to the available literature on spatial justice, Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space*, and finally a too-brief analysis of John Rawls. The second question I answer is, “why spatial justice?” In that section, I argue that spatial justice extends on a central insight of environmental justice, provides new analytical tools for political controversies, and enriches analyses of both space and justice by taking seriously the insights of both.

What is spatial justice?

Spatial justice is likely an unfamiliar term to political theorists. Even in its natal discipline, geography, the term is something of a fringe concept. For environmentalists, it likely calls to mind the much more familiar “environmental justice,” a concept that has expanded the reach of environmentalism and allowed a critique of the disproportionate distribution of environmental goods and bads. One might rightly wonder, what is *spatial* justice?

Geographer Edward Soja, the concept's most visible proponent, is a good starting point: “Guiding the exploration [of spatial justice] from the start is the idea that justice, however it might be defined, has a *consequential geography*, a spatial expression that is more than just a background reflection or set of physical attributes to be descriptively mapped” (E. W. Soja 2010, 1). The organization of the spatial world influences the fair ordering of human relations. A straightforward

example of this relationship is the way in which highways cut up the metropolitan landscape, prohibiting certain kinds of movements (how and where one walks), enabling others (how and where one drives). This division of the urban landscape has given rise to critiques of the justice of this arrangement, both from activist and academic circles (Paterson 2007). Spatial justice is first and foremost an *analytical framework* that foregrounds the role of space – a set of material and ideological relations that act on, yet are formed by, social relations – in producing justice and injustice.

Although this beginning intuition is straightforward enough, it invites several other questions: what kind of justice can be deployed in analyzing the spatial arrangements? What can spatial justice do that environmental justice or social justice cannot? Given the appeal to justice, what sorts of normative criteria does it deploy? These questions are, at present, under-theorized. Soja, for instance, refuses to offer any “simplified cookbook definition”, leaving it to the reader to understand spatial justice as it develops in the book (E. W. Soja 2010, 6). Yet, Soja's approach leaves many of the most important questions of spatial justice unanswered. Soja dedicates one chapter to theories of justice, in which he marches from Plato to Iris Young in six underdeveloped pages (E. W. Soja 2010, 73–79), never taking a stand on what kind of justice he has in mind¹. Space and justice are both complex notions, and it's hardly obvious how they should be combined.

The existing literature on spatial justice, then pushes a central insight: geographic space is an important component in producing justice relations, yet it leaves some of the most theoretically interesting and important questions underdeveloped. To get a better purchase on how to theorize spatial justice, I turn now to its components - space and justice - which are terms with rich histories in their respective disciplines of geography and political theory. A too brief review of these literatures reveals that although these two disciplines have independently developed their respective components of the definition, spatial justice is far from an obvious concept. This no doubt owes itself at least in

¹ Soja's vagueness has captured the attention of some of his reviewers. See (Sandoval 2011; Davies 2011)

part to each discipline's boundaries: geographers attend to space while taking for granted justice's meaning; political theorists frequently develop theories of justice detached from any particular place in the universe. A theory of spatial justice must account fully for both a theory of space and a theory of justice.

I begin with a theory of space. The first thing to note about “space” is that it, like justice, is a deeply contested concept. There are several understandings of space that one might turn to in developing a theory of spatial justice. One line of thought in particular informs Soja's conception of spatial justice: space is a dynamic process, not an empty container, what Edward Soja calls a “socio-spatial dialectic” (1999). That is, the spatial ordering of the material world – where things *are* in relation to each other – does more than reflect power and politics, it *is* itself a kind of power and politics. Spatial relationships produce social relationships, and hence justice relationships. Think, again, of the form of the American metropolis: highways not only reflect certain political decisions, they also produce new political and social inequities like the distribution of pollutants, the displacement of urban neighborhoods to make way for vast expressways, and a metropolitan geography that creates a reliance on automobiles. Highways are not just mirrors of power, they themselves exert social and political power.

This understanding of the dynamic character of space was developed most forcefully by French sociologist Henri Lefebvre, whose 1974 *The Production of Space* set new terms for conceiving of space. In opposition to what he terms “abstract space,” imagined as an infinite, pre-social grid in which material processes occur (Lefebvre 1992, 1), Lefebvre argues that “physical space has no 'reality' without the energy that is deployed within it” (Lefebvre 1992, 13). To put this differently, “a space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products)” (1992, 83). Space is a process that we come to understand through locationally specific physical forms, what we colloquially call “places” (Tuan 2001). In this, space is much like a commodity. Much as Marx argued that one

cannot understand the commodity without understanding the social processes embedded in it, Lefebvre argued that space cannot be understood as a “thing” in which social processes happen: “We come to think in terms of spatiality, and so to fetishize space in a way reminiscent of the old fetishism of commodities, where the trap lay in exchange, and the error was to consider 'things' in isolation, as 'things in themselves’” (Lefebvre 1992, 90). Space is more than a container for social process, inscribed with man's workings; space is instead the set of fluctuating material, social, and ideological relations that act on each other.

This production view of space is shared by Soja and other geographers, most notably David Harvey (1996). To put this in slightly different terms that track Harvey's longer intellectual arc, Harvey adopts a *relational* view of space². This understanding of space argues that space does not pre-exist the things that make it up, as if space were some empty game-board to be filled with whatever social chess pieces we choose. Rather, space *is the relationship among those things*. Harvey favorably cites Alfred North Whitehead:

"Whitehead argued that we ought not to consider physical bodies as if they are first in space and then act upon each other. Bodies are in space, rather, only because they interact, so that space is 'only the expression of certain properties of their interaction' (Lowe 1962). Space and time are not, therefore independent realities, but relations derived from processes and events” (1996, 256).

Harvey, with Lefebvre, argues that space is a set of relations among things. Because space is made of relations among things that constantly shift, space is a dynamic process, not a pre-ordained map of the universe. Any given place is merely one moment in those ongoing processes, much like a commodity is merely one moment in an ongoing process of labor. Understanding space requires that we understand all the different connections and processes that make particular places. This is Lefebvre's point when he calls for “a movement from

2 Harvey takes pains to note that the standard, Cartesian understanding of space – space as a static grid of coordinates – can be an appropriate understanding (1996, 267). Still, he pushes the relational view throughout *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*, and moreover such a relational view is consistent with his other writings (David Harvey 1974; D. Harvey 1978) Consequently, I attribute a relational view to Harvey.

products...to production” (1992, 26). Rather than focusing on the manner in which things are distributed on a map, Lefebvre and Harvey seek to draw out the processes that give form to spaces. And perhaps most importantly, *social* relations are an important component of that spatiality.

Yet the character of a production is twofold, and so, too, is the character of space: “Though a *product* to be used, to be consumed, it is also a *means of production*; networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it” (Lefebvre 1992, 85). Just as commodities can serve as both outcomes of and inputs into labor, so, too, space is both object and subject in social processes. Again, the American interstate is a good example: highways come into being through appropriations committees, state bureaucracies, gravel pits, and the existence of other, connecting highways. Yet once constructed, highways also spur suburban housing developments, organize daily movement, and become a taken for granted feature of the landscape. The space of a metropolis is not prior to, but is made up of, its highways, residences, patterns of movement, and the like. Spaces are both made of and constitute other human processes.

Importantly, the production of space occurs not just at the material level, but also ideologically. For Lefebvre, the production of space involves three elements: physical, mental, and social (Lefebvre 1992, 33; Elden 2002). Space is always made of all three of these analytically distinct components. Although more focused on the market's role in producing space, Harvey, too speaks of space as a social construction comprised of mental, material, and social processes (Harvey 1996, 210–215). This tripartite character of space makes it fundamental for understanding political and social power, and this was one of Lefebvre's most urgent points: “Change life! Change society! These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space...new social relationships call for a new space, and vice versa” (Lefebvre 1992, 59). For Lefebvre, Marxist analysis had failed to recognize that space was the realm where the material and the ideological were fundamentally intertwined, such that any

social revolution would necessarily involve the production of not only a new physical space – a new geography of spatial relations that enabled a Marxist economy – but also a new knowledge of space – a way of conceptualizing space that accounted for its dynamic character. Lefebvre argued that Marxist analysis had, to that point, remained enraptured with a particular understanding of space – what Lefebvre calls 'abstract space' – a knowledge of space that ultimately undermined the very possibility of Marxist revolution by failing to see that a new economic order would produce an entirely different space..

In summary, the production of space views space as a set of social, material, and ideological relations that are constantly acting on each other. This understanding of space creates one especially interesting insight for theories of justice: if, as Harvey and Lefebvre hold, all social processes are spatially produced, then relations of justice are also spatially produced. And if this spatial production of justice is true, then every theory of justice must necessarily produce and deploy a knowledge of space. That is, space is much more fundamental to theories of justice than most political theory makes explicit.

The aim of a theory of spatial justice is, in part, to make explicit the link between space and justice. I use two strategies to accomplish this. First, I ask about the normatively just space. By attending to theories of justice, we can gain some critical purchase on whether particular spatial arrangements are just. The current literature on spatial justice has grossly oversimplified the deeply contested character of justice. Because spatial arrangements are a site of political contest about the fair ordering of politics, rival theories of justice will produce radically different ways of understanding what the just space is.

Second, I seek to put theories of justice in place. That is, I ask “what knowledge of space is deployed in this theory of justice?” An abstract space? A productive space? Something else? How does that understanding of space influence this theory of justice? This approach is similar to the

familiar strategy of much environmental political theory, which seeks to analyze the relationship to nature implicit in canonical political theory.

Following the above discussion, there are basically two questions that I ask of theories of justice: 1) what is the normatively just space according to a given theory of justice?; 2) what kind of space does any theorist of justice produce? In the next section, I want to briefly suggest the direction of this analysis by turning to John Rawls. I analyze Rawls here not because I think he is the best or most important object of analysis; instead, I think Rawls plainly demonstrates how to approach an analysis of spatial justice. My interpretation of Rawls is, at this point, preliminary, and I offer it primarily to suggest a methodological approach to spatial justice.

So first: what kind of space is just for Rawls? In a Rawlsian scheme, when is a given place just? I think that the best place to start is Rawls' distributive principles. Quite simply, Rawls' just space is one in which basic requirements of just distribution – equality of basic liberties, and the distribution of all other social inequalities according to the “greatest benefit to the least advantaged” (Rawls 2001, 42–3)- are met. There are two ways in which one might determine if this condition is met. First, “space” can be the *context* for justice relations, a way of measuring the distribution of social goods. Are hospitals distributed on a map in such a way to meet the minimum requirements of the difference principle? In other words, do hospitals exist in such a way to serve different communities across a given metropolitan area, county, or state? If so, then the demands of distributive justice have been met. Are pollutants distributed unequally so as to disadvantage the least well-off in society? If so, then the difference principle is violated, and the space is unjust.

Yet Rawls' just space might also be more than the measure of distributive justice, it might actually fill in the *content* of distributive justice. Taken as a material as well as social phenomenon, certain kinds of physical goods (access to light, parks, aesthetically pleasing materials) might be distributable. For example, building codes that guarantee renters' access to outside light attempt to

ensure a just distribution of a certain kind of space. Space is not just an indicator for justice, but is itself a good to be distributed. One might also think of “public space” as a kind of space to be distributed, and its distribution subject to principles of justice.

In both these instances – space as context for justice or space as the content of justice – we might argue about whether a particular good falls under the purview of basic liberties or the difference principle. Yet in each instance, we can begin to see what kind of space is just in a Rawlsian scheme. One aim of a theory of spatial justice is to deploy that insight about the just space in the context of hospitals, schools, public space, and so on. Contesting the injustice of spatial distribution has been the familiar strategy of a major strand of environmental justice: the distribution across a map of certain kinds of pollutants, or unequal access to food, is an important issue of just relations. This same concern for the geographic distribution of social goods also emerges at moments in Soja's book on spatial justice (E. W. Soja 2010, xvi).

Yet one of the most important insights of a critical theory of space as presented by Lefebvre and Harvey is that space is far more than a thing to be distributed, whether as the context for or content of justice. This leads me to the second major question to ask of theorists of justice: what kind of space does Rawls' theory of justice produce? That is, space is simultaneously a material and ideological thing that is constantly produced in both thought and deed. Rawls' theory of justice, no less than any other theory of justice, must necessarily have a knowledge of space that undergirds a theory of justice, even if that space is only ever implicit. What kind of space does Rawls have in mind? The dynamic, productive, relational kind that Lefebvre and Harvey promote? A Cartesian grid, the realm of abstract space?

Without being too sure of the answer to these questions, I want to suggest that the well-worn debate between Rawls and Sandel can offer some insight about the space that Rawls produces. Sandel famously argues that at the heart of Rawls' project is the idea, expressed in the original position, that Williams, “Toward a Theory of Spatial Justice”

there is a self prior to its ends (1984, 86). Sandel critiques this understanding of the self, demonstrating that Rawls himself, despite his best efforts to detach the self from ends, overlooks the “constitutive attachments” that humans necessarily have and give us form (1984, 90–91). Rawls, in other words, seeks his principle of justice by detaching us from the communities we inhabit.

This point of contention demonstrates a spatial feature of Rawls' theory of justice: if Sandel is right that Rawls detaches the self from community, Rawls also detaches the self from space. To reiterate a point I make above, social relations – the community that Sandel argues is so fundamental to selfhood – are always spatial. The attempt to detach the self from those ties must also attempt to detach them from their spatiality. Agreement about the well-ordered society requires a despatialization, a denial of social position: “In the original position, the parties are not allowed to know the social positions or the particular comprehensive doctrines of the persons they represent” (Rawls 2001, 7). It is no accident that aspatiality is fundamental to Rawls' account: Rawls transports us from the actual social positions we inhabit onto a Cartesian grid, anywhere and nowhere. My preliminary reading of Rawls suggests that he produces an abstract space in which any social arrangement (the veil of ignorance) is imaginable. This is the space that Soja, Harvey, and Lefebvre critique, and is also an important focal point for Rawls' critics.

By understanding Sandel's critique of Rawls as a critique of aspatiality, theorists of justice can better understand later disagreements between Rawls and his critics. Two other theories of justice, in particular, come into view: Iris Young's justice as non-oppression and the capabilities theory of justice. Both these theories ground justice in lived experience, and they also make implicitly spatial critiques of Rawls. Young makes “the city” - the realm where the social production of space is most visible – to be a model for just relations; she offers this example as a corrective to the spatial and social arrangements found in Sandel's hazy-eyed agrarian communities (Young 2011, 230–237). Nussbaum, on the other hand, makes *position* – the social, emotional, physical, and legal context of one's existence – an

Williams, “Toward a Theory of Spatial Justice”

important component of evaluating justice (Nussbaum 1992, 220). In my dissertation, I'll more fully develop this spatial disagreement. For now, I hope to have given some indication of the implicit importance of space in theories of justice.

To summarize, spatial justice is an analytical framework that makes space, understood as a physical, social, and mental production, a central category for understanding justice. Theorizing spatial justice involves both understanding how spatial relationships produce social relations and developing normative frameworks for evaluating those social relationships. Interpreting available literatures on justice through a spatial lens can both reveal new ways to understand theories of justice and help to develop a theory of spatial justice.

Why spatial justice?

But why study spatial justice? Why fill in the contours of this admittedly vague concept? What fruit do I expect it to harvest? I have two answers, which I explore below.

But before I answer those questions, I want to offer some reserved thoughts on the relationship between spatial justice and environmental justice. As David Schlosberg recently noted, environmental justice is now a broad frame for social criticism that rethinks both “environment” and “justice” (Schlosberg 2013, 38). In particular, “environment” is understood as the places where we famously “live, work, and play,” such that every place – urban, suburban, rural, wilderness, park - is a site of environmental concern. This expanding scope of environmental justice is seen in analyses of not only “civil rights and anti-toxics movements, but also indigenous rights movements, the labour movement (including farm labour, occupational health and safety, and some industrial unions)”, but also “transportation, access to countryside and green space, land use and smart growth policy, water quality and distribution, energy development and jobs, brownfields refurbishment, and food justice” (Schlosberg 2013, 41). This exhaustive list leaves little outside its borders: environmental justice can seemingly frame nearly any justice concern. On first glance, it appears that spatial justice is simply

another name for environmental justice. What is unique about a spatial analysis? Especially as environmental justice might frame, for example, contests over the dispersion of highways and unjust transportation infrastructures, what might spatial justice bring to this conversation?

I have two answers. First, environmental justice can be seen as one particular way of conceptualizing, deploying, and practicing spatial justice. That is, spatial justice as an analytical framework that aligns itself with, yet exceeds, environmental justice. My interest in spatial justice concerns its insights about the productive power of the spaces we inhabit, an insight often at the center of environmental justice. For example, to the extent that urban gardening movements appeal to the transformative power of neighborhood gardens, and to the extent that these movements appeal to environmental justice, they also imply an understanding of spatial justice as I develop it here. Planting gardens in vacant lots produces a certain kind of neighborhood space that reduces crime, provides food security, and gives residents a stake in their neighborhoods (Lawson and Miller 2013, 17–18). To the extent any environmental justice analysis takes seriously this insight about the productive power of spaces, it is sympathetic to a spatial justice analysis. In this sense, spatial justice and environmental justice are aligned in important ways.

Second, although they can be aligned, spatial justice provides a different frame of analysis than environmental justice. Given that environmental justice is one version of spatial justice, we can gain new insight into environmental justice by asking the same questions of EJ that I do of Rawls: what knowledge of space do environmental justice activists and theorists produce? That is, what is the space of environmental justice? The environmental justice movement is nothing if not diverse, which makes this question especially difficult to answer. Yet at the heart of environmental justice is a focus on *environment*, however broadly conceived, most often with overtones of ecology or nature. Spatial justice enables a critical examination of this environmental space, and opens some important questions for environmental justice: What are the possibilities and liabilities of this space, “environment?” What

does the link to nature occlude, open up, or otherwise produce, especially in an environmentalism “after nature” (Escobar 1999)?

To put this differently, although spatial justice is sympathetic to environmental justice, it has a different lineage and in this sense can yield different analyses around some political contests. To demonstrate the difference between space and environment, consider the example of gentrification. One major approach to studying gentrification is to study it through “the environment”, or as “eco-gentrification,” by focusing on the production and consumption of goods that attends the gentrification process (Quastel 2009). On the one hand, this analysis captures the most fundamental insight of spatial justice: this neighborhood transformation alters the flows of ecological processes and the makeup of the neighborhood, and so produces neighborhoods. In this sense, eco-gentrification implicitly develops a spatial analysis, charting the ways in which spaces produce certain relationships to resources, and critiquing the injustice of that arrangement. On the other hand, these approaches focus on the production of *environments*, with strong connotations of ecological processes. Although this analysis is helpful in its own right, a focus on the productive power of space more generally opens a different, and equally useful, set of considerations (about which I say more below). Where eco-gentrification literature asks “how does gentrification alter ecological flows?” spatial justice asks “how does gentrification change not only ecological flows, but also how people relate to each other and their neighborhoods?” My point is not that these analyses are mutually exclusive; instead, environmental justice in practice, because of the space it imagines, often does not ask more broadly spatial questions. My hope is that spatial justice can capture the insights of environmental justice while also allowing some critical distance on environment.

Whatever its distance from environmental justice, spatial justice does offer two broad payoffs, the first of which is analytical: foregrounding space can lead to more robust theories of justice and better ways to analyze complex socio-spatial phenomenon. To understand how it is that thinking Williams, “Toward a Theory of Spatial Justice”

explicitly of space can enrich an analysis of justice, I want to take a brief detour through Clarissa Hayward's work on the relationship between states and citizens. Hayward criticizes political scientists who view the state as an entity that merely responds to race, class, and other social differences. She argues that, instead, “states play a critical role in constructing social identities and differences. They help define, institutionalize, and order the categories and the relations that produce and maintain identity/difference” (2003, 501). States are active participants in producing social identities.

Hayward demonstrates her point by turning to the American city. Racialized identities are made and remade through state policy: restrictive covenants, zoning laws, and red-lining all helped to produce and maintain the black American ghetto (2003, 503). In turn, the ghetto creates social inequalities that “translate into deliberative inequalities” (2003, 507). The American city, argues Hayward, is one example of how states make social boundaries that influence political equality.

Recognizing that states play an active role in making differences, Hayward also argues that those differences are more and less democratic:

“Boundaries can define relations of identity/difference in ways that are more, or less, democratic. They function more democratically when they sort in ways that are relatively nonhierarchical; when they are amenable to change by those they affect; and when they are permeable, so that the identities and differences they produce are made present to one another. Boundaries function less democratically when they sort in ways that define relations of privilege and deprivation, power and powerlessness, dominance and marginality; when they are relatively resistant to democratic contestation and change; and when they render difference invisible to identity, creating seemingly unbridgeable distances among interdependent persons and groups” (2003, 509).

States create communities that are more or less democratic based on the relations they create among citizens. Democratic theorists, argues Hayward, should be more attentive to the kinds of differences that states create when they theorize democratic relations, rather than assuming that the only ethically salient role for states is to respond to differences.

Hayward argues for the productive capacity of states: states create spaces (in her case, the

American ghetto) that create differences among citizens; in turn, these differences can be evaluated by democratic criteria. Although Hayward offers an implicit argument about space, states, rather than space, receive the bulk of her analysis. By focusing on states, Hayward provides a valuable analysis of the dynamic interaction between states and citizens; both produce each other, and such a dynamic relationship is amenable to normative democratic analysis.

Just as Hayward examines the productive power of states, I want to conceptualize the productive power of spaces. Hayward, while incorporating space into her analysis, depicts the city as primarily an outcome of state policy; the state, sometimes inadvertently, structures politics through the arrangement of the city. Space, in this view, is a malleable thing on which states act. Although the state is undeniably active in the making of space, it is hardly the only actor so involved. In other words, although Hayward acknowledges that space structures politics, the only actor that she examines in the making of that space is the state. Yet one crucial point in so much spatial theory is that spaces are a negotiation among many different actors. Sometimes, this negotiation takes the form of outright resistance: Henri Lefebvre argues that total state control of space can never be complete because multiple, unequal groups *practice* space (1992, 391). As such, a space of resistance – what Lefebvre calls “differential space” - is always left open. As another example, consider geographer Doreen Massey's description of a busy shopping district in London:

“Under the railway bridge the newspaper stand sells papers from every county of what my neighbours, many of whom come from there, still often call the Irish Free State. The postboxes down the High Road, and many an empty space on a wall, are adorned with the letters IRA. Other available spaces are plastered this week with posters for a special meeting in remembrance: Ten Years after the Hunger Strike. At the local theatre Eamon Morrissey has a one-man show; the National Club has the Wolfe Tones on, and at the Black Lion there is Finnegan's Wake. In two shops I notice this week's lottery ticket winners: in one the name is Teresa Gleeson, in the other, Chouman Hassan” (1994, 153)

After establishing the deep Irish identity of this neighborhood, Massey takes the reader through a similar tale of the district's Indian heritage. My point is that these spaces are made in ways that states

never anticipated. Although the British Empire no doubt had a hand in the making of this particular shopping district, it is also a space that is made in spite of that contribution. The point in the cases of both Lefebvre and Massey is that spaces aren't unilaterally founded and then left to do their work; rather, the negotiation of spaces – their constant practice and hence reproduction – means that social and spatial practices are in a dynamic relationship: as much as spaces influence racial identities, social relations from a variety of directions influence, utilize, and reproduce space. Hayward comes close to capturing the dynamism of space in conceiving of politics, yet her focus on the state is only one way in which those spaces are produced. Theorizing the relationship between space and politics will require more thorough understanding of the production of space.

With spatial justice, I aim to theorize this argument that lies only ever implicit in so much political science literature: space mediates politics. I foreground space through theories of justice. Just as democratic theorists misapprehend democratic norms when they set aside the state's role in producing differences, many pressing issues of justice are poorly conceptualized when the productive power of space is left out.

To exemplify the power of an explicitly spatial analysis, I want to return to the example of gentrification, the process whereby urban neighborhoods become wealthier and whiter over time. One oft-cited harm of gentrification is displacement, the forcible movement of people from an area owing to circumstances beyond their control (Marcuse 1985, 205). Gentrification studies further divides displacement into two types: direct displacement and indirect displacement. Direct displacement occurs when any given household must move from its particular unit: rents go up, or landlords harass the residents until residents move out, or cities seize property through eminent domain. The case for forcibility is straightforward: people must move owing to circumstances beyond their control. Indirect displacement (sometimes called exclusionary displacement) is trickier: “When one household vacates a housing unit voluntarily and that unit is then gentrified or abandoned so that another similar household

is prevented from moving in, the number of units available to the second household in that housing market is reduced. The second household, therefore, is excluded from living where it would otherwise have lived” (Marcuse 1985, 206). Indirect displacement differs from direct displacement in that it involves replacement within a neighborhood: residents, in search of replacement housing in a neighborhood, cannot afford it. The question of whether or not indirect displacement counts as coercion has been subject to much debate, and this debate illustrates the trouble of thinking through social justice without considering space as a production.

Both gentrification's apologists and critics treat space as an empty field within which politics occur and people are distributed. There are certain social criteria that tell us whether or not a just distribution has been made, but space is rendered merely the context within which that distribution occurs. This understanding of space, for instance, allows legal scholar J. Peter Byrne to reject direct displacement yet to apologize for gentrification. Byrne claims that no person has a right to any given neighborhood – that is, no justice claim is available to residents seeking replacement housing in a gentrifying neighborhood (Byrne 2003, 413). Perhaps surprisingly, Byrne does recognize a social right that frequently goes unfulfilled: affordable housing. In fact, says Byrne, the biggest harm of gentrification is that states fail to secure affordable housing for those in need (2003, 406). Byrne puts it starkly, “While public policy should seek to provide decent housing for all in safe and diverse neighborhoods, it is not clear what the moral claim is to maintain a high level of low-income units in any particular area, particularly when the means of doing so are directed at preventing influxes of more affluent people that benefit the city as a whole” (2003, 413). While affordable housing should be available in general, it is stripped of any distinct spatiality. “Decent” housing should be available in “safe and diverse” neighborhoods; space is merely a background for just conditions. Furthermore, the “city as a whole” is the relevant scale of analysis. People will be scattered across a map of the city as the outcome of calculations of justice. Byrne thinks of space as merely the background in which social

justice plays out. As I will soon argue, recognizing space as a production rather than a background would open new lines of inquiry into gentrification.

Not just gentrification's apologists, but also its critics think of space as a background container. Displacement is one of the major axes on which gentrification scholarship has proceeded, and is “a critical litmus test,” a primary normative critique of gentrification (Newman and Wyly 2006, 24). It might seem as if displacement actually captures what I hope to make visible with spatial justice: it treats space as a constituent element of justice relations. And in a way, it does: researchers intuitively suggest that the spaces that people inhabit are important elements of their lives; thus, they should not be forced to move. Yet these scholars' empirical concern is often to figure out whether or not such displacement is occurring, not to understand the space produced through gentrification and its consequent effect on justice relations among citizens³. The implicit understanding of neighborhoods is that they are an object of politics and a field within which residents are distributed, sometimes justly, other times not. Strangely, in the gentrification literature, displacement is despatialized: force among citizens, not the production of space, is supposed to be the criteria on which gentrification is judged. The concern, in other words, is for who exercises a disruptive power on space.

Spatial justice provides critical gentrification scholars a better way of understanding the injustice of gentrification, and hence a different intellectual agenda. Space – in this case, the gentrified neighborhood – is not merely a background for social conditions but an active participant in them; space produces social and justice relations. If this is true, then a different set of questions about gentrification and justice come into view: does gentrification render equitable social relations, independent of the empirical fact of displacement? Does gentrification come into being through hierarchical, or otherwise unjust, processes? What kinds of differences, political identities, and subjects come into being through gentrification? Does gentrification produce unjust relations among

³ One of several notable exceptions is (Freeman 2006), an ethnography of a gentrifying neighborhood's residents.

the gentry, the working class, and city governments? Although I don't yet have answers to these questions, for now, I want to point out that new questions come into view when space is foregrounded as an active participant in justice relations. Understanding space as producing social relations offers a more robust way of thinking about political controversies like gentrification.

Although spatial justice has much potential as an analytical lens, I want to stress that its power arises from its emphasis, not its semantic distinctiveness:

“It is important to stress that seeking spatial justice is not meant to be a substitute for or alternative to the search for social, economic, or environmental justice. It is intended instead as a means of amplifying and extending these concepts into new area of understanding and political practice. Calling it spatial justice is not meant to imply that justice is determined only by its spatiality, but neither should spatial justice be seen as just one of many different components or aspects of social justice to be comparatively gauged for their relative strength...In the view taken here, everything that is social (justice included) is simultaneously and inherently spatial, just as everything spatial, at least with regard to the human world, is simultaneously and inherently socialized” (E. W. Soja 2010, 5–6).

The power of spatial justice is to put a spotlight on space. Although the questions raised by spatial justice *might be* captured by environmental or social justice, in practice, such theorizations are rarely attentive to the production of space. Conceptualizing “spatial justice” explicitly forces this analysis. Debates about gentrification are one example of how a robustly theorized spatial justice, focusing on space rather than force among social actors, can offer a new vocabulary for and way to analyze political debates.

My second reason for analyzing spatial justice is to explore the intersection of geography and political theory. Geographers and spatial theorists have long hoped that studying space would offer some liberatory and political potential. This was Henri Lefebvre's claim in his canonical *The Production of Space*(1992), and remains a central component of much critical geography. Soja, for instance, gushes about the emancipatory potential of thinking about space: “...whatever your interests may be, they can be significantly advanced by adopting a critical spatial perspective. Spatial thinking

in this sense cannot only enrich our understanding of almost any subject but has the added potential to extend our practical knowledge into more effective actions aimed at changing the world for the better” (2010, 2). Because space produces political relations, then political theorists have tended to overlook an important element of our social existence. As suggested in my above discussion of Clarissa Hayward, very little political theory explicitly recognizes the spatiality of politics. Even while Hayward writes explicitly of the productive power of spaces, states are her primary focus. Studying spatial justice can help us understand how political theorists might take seriously spatial thinking.

But if political theorists have tended to ignore space, then just as much geographers have tended to under-theorize, yet appeal to, political theory. Indicative is Erik Swyngedouw's agenda-setting article for the field of Urban Political Ecology, a subfield of geography. Swyngedouw, an influential scholar in the field, argues elegantly for the production of different kinds of landscapes within the city and the need for urban political ecologists to attend to such differences. Crucially, he views this recognition of heterogeneity as part of a political project: “The political programme of urban political ecology, then, is to enhance the democratic content of socioenvironmental construction by identifying the strategies through which a more equitable distribution of social power and a more inclusive mode of environmental production can be achieved” (Swyngedouw 2003, 914) Yet this political programme remains underspecified: what does it mean to “enhance the democratic content of socioenvironmental construction?” What is “a more more inclusive mode of environmental production”, given that many geographers view environmental production as always by definition inclusive? And is “inclusivity” a benchmark of democracy?

Spatial justice, then, is one way of fostering a conversation that should occur, but rarely does, between political theorists and geographers. Spatial justice offers an opportunity to study these two complementary disciplines together.

Conclusion

By theorizing spatial justice, I hope to develop an analytical framework that is gaining ground in urban planning and geography, yet remains theoretically undeveloped. I hope to extend an insight at the heart of environmental justice – the places we live, work, and play have a profound effect on the social relations among us, and hence the justice relations among us. By extending this analysis to space more generally, I hope to give a new language to theorists of space, justice, and contemporary political conflicts.

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