What Makes Justice Spatial?  
What Makes Spaces Just?  
Three Interviews on the Concept of Spatial Justice

Critical Spatial Practice Reading Group

Nicholas Brown, Ryan Griffis, Kevin Hamilton  
Sharon Irish, Sarah Kanouse

Introduction

The idea of “spatial justice” can be a useful way to reframe cultural and political work so that both analyses and tools become more precise. The important work of defining new terminology, however, always carries with it the related danger of endless classification, obscuring the fact that language itself does not solve problems and, indeed, that many people have been fighting for justice-in-space for a long time – especially indigenous peoples and people of color.

Sensitive to both the promise and perils in shifting from the “social” to the “spatial” in matters of justice, five members of Critical Spatial Practice, a reading group affiliated with the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, contacted three people working in different ways and disciplines to discuss how their work contributes to the concept of spatial justice. Don Mitchell, a cultural geographer, Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, a historian and activist, and Jane Trowell, an artist and educator, were interviewed over email from November 2006 to March 2007. In what follows, they offer an account of spatial justice through a reflection on its practice contributing, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore has suggested of critical scholarship, an “important demystification…[that] makes its work, in my view, stronger. This strength derives from constantly reflecting on the theoretical, the ethical, and the methodical while always acting” (Murphy 2005: 181).
Interview with Don Mitchell

Don Mitchell’s scholarly work and political commitments are inseparable; he has written passionately and persuasively on the geographies and politics of labor and marginalization. His work reveals how landscape, space, rights, and culture are the products of social struggle and arenas in which power is both exercised and contested. Mitchell’s research has argued for the role of labor and laborers in the production of landscape, particularly the landscapes of migrant workers in present-day California, which resulted in his first book, *The Lie of the Land* (1996). His most recent book, *The Right to the City* (2003), analyzed the relationships among law, rights discourse, and public space in monitoring and controlling the behavior of the homeless, marginalized people, and political protesters.

Dr. Mitchell is Distinguished Professor and Chair of Geography at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University. He received his Ph.D. from Rutgers University in 1992. From 1996 to 2003, he was the North American editor of *Cultural Geographies*, and he became a MacArthur Fellow in 1998.

Mitchell’s work goes beyond calls for social or political “relevance” in research and practice by reminding us that determinations of relevance always unfold in a historical and professional matrix. With Lynn Staeheli, he has written that calls for relevance in professional practice “cannot be separated from questions about why research should be relevant, how research becomes relevant, the goals of research (including political goals), and the intended audiences and beneficiaries of research” (Staeheli and Mitchell 2005: 357). Those questions of why, how, what and for whom also lie at the heart of any movement for justice.

Along the wall in East Jerusalem

Source: Don Mitchell
A major thread running through your scholarly and political commitments has been the denaturalization of “commonsense” ideas about space, rights, and culture to reveal how each is produced through the complex and constant struggle between the organizing forces of capital and those who fight for liberation within and against them. Ideas about ‘social justice’ are similarly produced by conflict and contest, and often divergent activities in pursuit of both specific outcomes and more abstract procedures – some of which might materially conflict – to be carried out under its banner. While the messiness of the concept of social justice is in many ways a reflection of its vitality, the editors of Critical Planning have implied that supplementing questions of the “social” with questions about “space” may further our understanding of both the form and content of “justice.” What does an understanding of space have to contribute to struggles for justice? What does an analysis of the content and process of justice have to contribute to critiques of – and interventions in – spatial practice?

I can never decide if the fact that everything has to take place somewhere is so obvious as to be banal or quite profound. It’s probably both, which is part of the reason why thinking deeply about it seems always to open up new avenues of analysis and politics. Starting from the simplest of ideas – that our actions, our lives, our relationships, our struggles must take place – requires us to immediately ask about what kinds of places (or spaces) those are, who does and does not have access to them, and who can and cannot exercise power over or within them (and under what conditions). It also makes us think immediately about what happens when someone does not have access to the spaces that make life possible, much less good. Much of my own work starts from, and keeps coming back to, the liberal legal philosopher Jeremy Waldron’s arguments in his now more than fifteen year-old essay, “Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom” (1993).

In this essay, Waldron argues that, outside of some public spaces, homeless people simply have no place where they can be except at the sufferance of others, and as public space is progressively privatized, it is becoming more and more likely that, in the end, homeless people will have to simply cease to be. This is exactly where the blindingly obvious becomes profound – and critical in terms of social justice. When the privatization of public space is combined with our utter lack of interest in doing anything about homelessness, what we get is death – and if not death than an excruciatingly paternalistic set of public and private policies geared towards governing – and presumably rehabilitating – homeless people so that they will always be, in our spaces, as we want them to be. That is, they will be, as Waldron argues, comprehensively unfree. Now, Waldron’s argument certainly can be critiqued on any number of levels, but I think it is even more important to generalize it: to focus our attention on this question of how space makes it possible for anything to be, and thus justice is, at root, always a question of spatial access. That, in turn, and as I already suggested, requires us to think critically about power and control: about social and spatial structures, about those solidified social relations that are the landscapes and institutions within which we live (and against which we might struggle). Starting from this basic proposition thus creates a material (and materialist) basis for thinking about justice. Ideas, in this sense, are grounded in practices and in what is: if “ideas about social justice are produced by conflict and contest,” then it is conflict and contest in, over, and about real space.

The notion of public space is one that seems very contentious for critics of our current situation. Some, for example, argue that we are losing something, something that was found
in an earlier, more democratic iteration of our society, at least in spatial terms. Then others, like Rosalyn Deutsche, see that “public space” has always, and by nature, been exclusionary (based on race and gender), and that the loss is merely a fantasy of a more stable democratic past. While these debates have already been aired for at least the last ten years or so, do you find any use in articulating the difference between these visions of “public space”? Do you think these conflicting critical lenses would produce “real spaces” that differ significantly enough to make considering them worthwhile?

DM > Rosalyn Deutsche is, of course, correct (though it is not only race and gender that are axes of exclusion – so too class, sexuality, disability and so forth). But to say that public space is and has been always exclusionary merely begs the questions: By what means does it exclude? Whom does it exclude (and therefore include)? To what effects? Are the relations and processes of exclusion somehow different in spaces labeled (legally, culturally, or whatever) as public, than they are in those marked private? And finally, in what ways have processes of exclusion and inclusion changed over time and space? So the issue is not a loss of public space, but rather the struggles that make spaces more or less public. I do not think it is hard to argue that, historically and through struggle, there have been moments of opening in public space; I think the past generation is more an era of closure – the bases for exclusion have grown rather than shrunk. It is fairly common in the literature, for example, to find discussions of the rise of “pseudo-public” space – those private properties like malls, festival market places, even now concert halls and arenas that are privately owned but

Modi’in Elit through a fence, Bil’in in the distance

Source: Don Mitchell
open to the public. In such “pseudo-public” spaces, the rules of exclusion are different than they are on publicly-owned, publicly-accessible property (like parks, sidewalks, streets). Class-based exclusions are stronger than they are on publicly-owned properties and so too often are aged-based ones.

So that is one way in which public spaces are being reworked and made, in fact, less public. But it is not the only way. Through a series of studies, Lynn Staeheli and I have come to the conclusion that we need to begin talking not only about “pseudo-public” space, but also pseudo-private property. The rise of Business Improvement Districts and other private organizations, for example, have enabled the encroachment of private property rules of exclusion onto publicly-owned property. In San Diego, for example, employees of the downtown Property-Based Improvement District now police the publicly-owned sidewalks and parks, and the director of the P-BID was not at all shy about telling us that his employees frequently remove people they do not like from those spaces – for no other reason than that they do not like them (and hence assume others will not either: they will scare off the “legitimate” users of the sidewalks and parks). Publicly-owned property is now more and more being governed as if it were private property with the “right to exclude” handed over to private, undemocratic interests; the P-BID has only accounting, not democratic, supervision by the City of San Diego.

Given that, I think these debates about public space, which are precisely debates about inclusion and exclusion, are vitally important. We need to examine carefully the relations and processes of exclusion and inclusions—relations and processes that are structured through formal laws, cultural norms, design strategies, etc. – that shape actually-existing city spaces, making them more or less public, more or less democratic. Or, more accurately, we need to examine these relations and processes to better understand how they shape the conditions of possibility for interactions in space that are more or less public, more or less democratic. There has never been a more stable democratic past, but there have been moments in the past when democracy has been more vital, and spaces have been opened up for more radical purposes. There have been moments in the past when, in fact, there has been space for the pushing of more radically democratic causes, and one of the things it is vital for us to do as analysts is not only find those moments and spaces, but to understand the conditions that brought them into being and thus to evaluate the ways in which the rise of things like pseudo-public space and pseudo-private property work – structurally – against democratic life.

CSP > You’ve written that public space has been central to most forms of organizing for social justice as it makes visible the rights claims of oppressed groups and figures them — through their imposition in common space — as matters of common concern. It’s widely acknowledged that public space has been disappearing from the built environment through the privatization of social life and due to increasing—and increasingly violent—state restrictions on public activities. Yet you’ve cautioned against this way of formulating the problem because of the way it conceptualizes public space as a “given” that can be taken away or as a technical matter of planning, design and regulation, rather than as what is produced and claimed through acts of political representation. Clearly, however, there is a dynamic between “designated” public spaces and acts of political representation; without spaces understood as public the space-claims of social movements are easily overlooked by
those who’d prefer to not see them. Would you say more about the dynamic between “designated” and “designed” public spaces and the claims to space made through political struggle? The contributions of planners, architects, and designers to the existing, oppressive spatial order are well-known, but what roles might they have in moving toward spatial justice?

DM > The other day an architecture student interested in public space and homelessness came to see me. He had with him a set of preliminary drawings for his thesis for a “homeless resource center” that would be, in his terms, “neither prescriptive nor curative” – that is a place where the homeless could come and “be” a bit more on their own terms than is often the case. What he wants to do is address directly Waldron’s concerns about unfreedom. What is most interesting about this, and maybe also most depressing, is that his dream is to find private money to create such a place, because he thinks it is only through the power of private property, and a deed clear and simple, that the rights of the homeless can now be advanced. He comes to this position knowingly: he has carefully studied squatter movements and homeless encampments; he has worked with radical homeless organizations. His goal is to take the private and design something more “public” than might now be possible (at least in regards to the homeless) than is possible in contemporary American public space, maybe even especially “claimed” space, given the sheer power of the forces arrayed against squatters, urban campers, and the like. We spent much time talking about all the tangible and more abstract forces that might be arrayed against implementing a vision such as his: neighborhood groups, other property owners, zoning and land use laws, building codes, property values, etc. But the point was, precisely, that he was seeking a way, with his skills as an architect, to directly intervene in the city to make it more just, even if, as he recognized so well, this intervention was limited and deeply contradictory. But of course, that is all we can ever do: intervene as we can, understanding the forces at work that shape that intervention and necessarily limit it, being alert to the moments when bigger opportunities (including greater solidarities) open up to us.

Sometimes those opportunities are fraught with danger. You note that without spaces designated as public, the claims of social movements can be easily overlooked. This is obviously true. But just as important is the degree to which even – or especially – those spaces that are designated public are now being regulated such that those who wish to overlook the claims – spatial, political, and otherwise – of social movements and activists is easy. In 2000 the US Supreme Court radically expanded what it called “the right to be left alone” to cover public space. They took the phrase, “the right to be left alone,” from a dissent in a 1928 case concerning the wiretapping of a private telephone line in a private home. Declaring this tapping a violation of guarantees that one can be secure in one’s person and property from state interference, dissenting Justice Brandeis declared the right to be left alone to be the “most comprehensive of rights and the right most valued by civilized men.” But now, for the 2000 Supreme Court, this right to be left alone applied to public space, not the private home, and as such it declared that henceforth it was the responsibility of protesters to look out for the rights of “unwilling listeners.” All the Court was doing, of course, was ratifying (but therefore also solidifying and strengthening) existing practice: the practice of creating protest and no protest zones, of creating stringent protest permit processes that highly
limit the “time, place, and manner” of protest, and so forth. For protesters, this has meant that they often have no choice but to break the law if they are to be heard by any other than themselves. The mere act of effective protest often becomes criminal activity. But this criminal activity can, nonetheless, be effective, as Seattle, Genoa, Gutenberg, Glen Eagles, and now Oaxaca have made plain.

**CSP >** It strikes us that the regulation of homeless bodies and dissenting voices are rather similar—the mobile and propertied have the right to consume without exposure to the conditions that their consumption produces, whether it’s homelessness or dissent!

Your recent experience with the architecture student reminded me of another older text on homelessness and space, Talmadge Wright’s *Out of Place: Homeless Mobilizations, Subcities and Contested Landscapes* (1997). Wright discusses the importance of the social imaginary regarding homelessness by positing homelessness as an “ideological term that serves to maintain the borders between the cultural capitals of middle class society and the poor.” He suggests, quite strongly, that popular conceptions of homelessness substantially contribute

Palestinian, Israeli, and international activists participate in civil disobedience by locking themselves in a large pipe on the construction site of the separation barrier in Bil’in, a village in the West Bank.

*Source: Allison Brim*
to the persistence of inequities. Thus the roles of dominant spatial relationships and symbolic culture are significant in both maintaining and challenging inequity. While the student’s project you describe suggests a somewhat pragmatic approach to intervening in the space of the city (as it deals in compromise and use-value), what do you see critical symbolic culture (in a broad sense that could include street demonstrations as well as “media activism”) contributing to social justice?

DM > I have just returned from a week in Israel/Palestine. I was there for a conference organized by the group, Bimkom: Planners for Planning Rights, on Law, Human Rights and the Separation Barrier. At the conference I had the opportunity to see the brilliant film, *Bil’in: Habibti*. The film details the struggles of the people of Bil’in on the West Bank as they seek to stop the construction of the Israeli Apartheid Wall that will cut the village off from more than half its land (and effectively hand that land over to the Jewish settlement of Modi’in Elit). The Palestinians struggle in solidarity with numerous Israeli activists (including the indefatigable Anarchists Against the Wall) and other international supporters. The resistance is non-violent (though the film does expose how Israeli agents worked assiduously to foment violence among youth in the village and thus to throw the claims of non-violence into disrepute), and the resistance is clever. Many of the scenes of street theater are, in fact, highly reminiscent of the Situationist-inspired actions at anti-capitalist globalization demonstrations. What is both utterly predictable but still remarkable in the film is just how ham-fisted the Israeli army remains throughout the protests. Faced by demonstrators lying in the road with mock gravestones over their heads, they open fire with rubber bullets and tear gas. Faced by activists in wheel chairs who had been maimed in earlier struggles, they open fire with rubber bullets and tear gas. Faced by the erection of a caravan trailer on land destined to be on the Israeli side of the fence, a trailer symbolizing the way Modi’in Elit is illegally building on Palestinian land, they open fire with rubber bullets and tear gas. Faced with Palestinians, Israelis and Americans chained to olive trees slated to be ripped up, the Army opens fire with rubber bullets and tear gas. In each instance, the Israeli Army and the whole process of settlement and walling off is delegitimized. The effect on the viewer of the film, and I imagine anyone just a bit knowledgeable about what is going on with the Wall, is powerful. The sheer injustice of the Wall is made utterly plain; the sheer irrationality of the Israeli state’s plans (irrationality in terms of anything other than a raw land-grab and a process of what Oren Yiftachel calls “ethnocracy” – the creation of a racially/religiously purified land) is made inescapable. Obviously the people of Bil’in are fighting a campaign of resistance, so they are not always battling in a manner of their own choosing, but their creative use of space, of symbol, of media, and of solidarity is important. It is important in part because it so radically illustrates how and why the space of the village is contested, and what it means for one group or another to have control over it.

This sort of struggle is not rare. In his excellent book, *Boundaries of Dissent* (2006), Bruce D’Arcus traces a number of such struggles, from the American Indian Movement’s take-over of Wounded Knee to the media spectacle when the Federal Bureau of Investigation grabbed Elian Gonzalez to return him to Cuba to the tactics of the Zapatistas (Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) in Chiapas and around the world. One of the things that becomes clear from Bruce’s book is that while struggles over specifically urban spaces are vitally important (for all those reasons
we have already talked about), we cannot only be concerned these days with the urban, in large part because of how media interpenetrate our lives in all settings. But he also makes clear just how valuable symbolic struggles are and always have been. In particular he shows how vital it is to symbolically control specific spaces at specific times, as the students in Tiananmen Square in 1989 or the anti-war protesters on Chicago’s Lakeshore Drive in 2003 knew.

This is crucial for struggles with the homeless too, as the current conflict in Las Vegas makes clear. In the summer of 2006, the city council there voted to outlaw giving “indigent persons” free food in public parks. The idea, of course, is to drive the homeless out. For those providing food, the goal has always been the most material one: to get food to hungry people. But it has also been, in the process, to expose the current political economy for what it is. The ban on free meals led to a summer and fall of protest that was remarkable in its ingenuity and in garnering wide publicity. Protests sparked real debate in Vegas and beyond, not only about homelessness, but also the economy, the ways laws work, class privilege, and so on. Just recently a judge threw the law out. Providing food to poor people in parks is thus both deeply material and crucially symbolic—to the degree that division can be made—and it is precisely in the intersection of these two, the materiality of hunger, the symbolic force of food as a basic necessity denied some people, that both serving food to the hungry and protesting for the right to do that gains force. Yet, and crucially, these struggles in Las Vegas are also struggles over space: who can be there and under what conditions. They are struggles over inclusion and exclusion, over the rights of the poor and the rights of better-off nearby homeowners, over the rights of activists to use space for political causes, and the desires of the police and the city council for “order.” Such spatial struggles contribute to social justice first by the mere fact of their happening (they bring to light injustice) and then by sparking debate and other reactions (including rubber bullets, tear gas, and Las Vegas mayors declaring they are going to run all able-bodied homeless people out of the city) and forcing change. Such struggles contribute to social justice also by opening up—whether temporarily or more permanently—space for those whom the forces of order, control, and often ethnocracy seek not only to exclude but often to eliminate.

Interview with Waziyatawin Angela Wilson

Waziyatawin Angela Wilson’s scholarship purposefully and courageously defies academic disciplinary boundaries, emphasizing that “the physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual are inseparable” in Indigenous ways of knowing (Wilson 2004: 73). In addition to interviews and oral histories, Dr. Wilson draws on a wide array of scholarship, including work by bell hooks, Paulo Freire and Frantz Fanon. She also refers to the writings of Métis scholar Howard Adams, Brazilian Augusto Boal, Tunisian author Albert Memmi, Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan and Kenyan intellectual and activist Ngugi wa’Thiong’o.

An enrolled member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, Dr. Wilson has written and edited numerous publications in the past decade, as well as co-organized the biennial Dakota Commemorative March
since 2002. Dr. Wilson, a professor of Indigenous History at Arizona State University in Tempe, received her Ph.D. from Cornell University in 1995.

As people who are classified as white, the five members of the CSP group attempt to identify our locations and roles within the U.S. system of white supremacy. We find Wilson’s words compelling: “For non-Dakota people, you can begin to help us when you come to terms with your own role as oppressor. Although you cannot gift us our freedom from oppression, as only we can do that for ourselves, you can help to educate those around you and assist us in overturning colonial systems and institutions” (Wilson 2006: 21).

The biennial Dakota Commemorative March, 2006

CSP > A third commemorative march has just taken place (November 7-13, 2006), with people walking the 150 miles from Lower Sioux to Fort Snelling in Minnesota, to remember the suffering in 1862 during the forced march of about 1700 women, children and elders. Of the 2004 march you wrote in your introductory essay for In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: The Dakota Commemorative Marches of the 21st Century: ‘Ultimately, I conclude that this commemorative walk was about empowerment: ‘Despite the physical and emotional hardship — or maybe even because of it — we were taking hold of our past and controlling our history in a powerful, public effort. We were beginning a process of reclamation, steeped for seven generations in the memory and strength of our ancestors’” (Wilson 2006: 14). An engagement with/in space, land, and territory seems to be a significant...
A feature of the Dakota Commemorative Marches and one that operates on many levels. For example, on one level the marches facilitate internal processes of reconnecting with an ancestral homeland. On another level, the marches can be understood as an emphatic assertion of presence—an external affirmation of basic humanity (“WE ARE HERE”) and a reclaiming of history and space through bodily acts of truth-telling. Would you expand on the significance of space/land/territory in the marches, in particular the ways in which the marches serve to affirm and reconnect you to the territory in which your ancestors once lived? To what degree does this connection determine how justice is conceived and articulated by those participating in the marches?

WAW > To understand how Dakota conceptions of spatial justice might be altered through participation in the Dakota Commemorative Marches, it is important to understand the changes in those perceptions as a consequence of colonialism. Prior to European and American invasion, Dakota people maintained a strong sense of being the rightful and inherent occupants of the place we call Minisota Makoce (Land Where the Waters Reflect the Heavens). Our ancestors understood that Minisota was our homeland, that we were a people who came from the land, and that the land had been entrusted to our care. Everything about our way of life made perfect sense only in our homeland, our language, our spirituality, our economy, our kinship system, our diet, our health, our education and our political organization. There existed tremendous strength in the knowledge that we were living according to the laws that had been set for us on the lands we were meant to occupy. With invasion, conquest and colonization, all of that changed. Our own people have been made to feel unworthy and undeserving of our homeland. We have been led to believe that we cannot expect more, so most of our people who eventually returned to southern Minnesota in small numbers have been content with the four tiny reservations now held in trust for us by the federal government when we used to have millions of acres. Most of our relatives who fled westward or into Canada, or who were forcibly removed, feel like they have no rights to our homeland. We have been taught to be grateful for the miserable scraps grudgingly “given” to us by the United States government. Participation in the Dakota Commemorative Marches calls all this into question.

When we walk each mile on the commemorative march we realize in a very concrete way that we are deemed trespassers by the people who invaded and colonized our homeland. Aside from a short distance when we walk on the Prior Lake Reservation in Shakopee, we are bombarded with physical reminders of our “guest” status. While walking on country roads, “No Trespassing” signs frequently line the roads on both sides, indicating to us that while the roads might be considered some kind of public space available to everyone, that we cannot stray too far from them without risking arrest or some kind of physical violence. On our first day of the 2006 march, we were nearing the end of our day’s journey when a white farmer shouted at us as we passed, saying that he was going to shoot our dog if the dog stepped foot on his land again. We were all worried by his comments, especially for the children, and we certainly didn’t want this white man to start shooting off a gun with four or five dozen people close by. The dog who had joined us on the march was not ours, he had followed us from early in the day when we passed his house, but this did not matter to the white farmer. He associated the dog with the group of Indians walking by his property, and he didn’t like...
any of us being there. The planners of the march, in particular, are acutely aware of the lack of jurisdiction we now have over our homeland because of the hoops we need to jump through so that we will not be ceaselessly harassed by state, county, or township institutions and authorities. Even marchers who are not part of the planning pick up on this as we deal with different law enforcement officers and as they see the reactions of white Minnesotans to our efforts. Most apparent to march participants, however, are all the reminders that everything we encounter is not of our making (again, the short time in Shakopee is the exception here). We travel through towns that were not created by us, through landmarks that do not express Dakota values or worldview, and through or on man-made structures that represent foreign notions of “civilization.” We take our greatest solace along the march in the presence of the Minnesota River that we loosely follow, the trees, the hills, the sun, the clouds, and the animals. We take solace in everything natural, I think because it reminds us that there was a beautiful world in existence in our homeland prior to invasion.

The power of this realization cannot be overstated. What this suggests is that the people who invaded our homeland, claiming a superior right to it, have not “improved” the land, but have, in fact, desecrated it. In addition, they do not have a legitimate spiritual or moral entitlement to what they claim with a fierce sense of ownership. Furthermore, when we see these beautiful lands, we begin to wonder why we have no legal claim to them. We know that the blood and bones of our ancestors have marked the landscape for thousands of years. We feel a resonance with this part of Ina Maka (Mother Earth) who seems to recognize us as her children. We begin to think about all our relatives out West and in Canada who have no land to come home to, we think about our small pockets of people confined to our current tiny reservation, and a growing unease ensues. We begin to wonder about the possibilities of land reclamation for our nation, about the recovery of a way of life that made perfect sense only in our homeland, and about the meaning of justice. Suddenly, complacency with colonialism is no longer appealing, and we have a growing desire to live as Dakota people on Dakota lands.

CSP > Would you reflect on the connections among time, space and social justice, particularly in connection to the biennial Dakota Commemorative March that you have co-organized? You have noted how the march has larger ramifications: “On a broad scale, then, this project is part of a growing Indigenous movement toward reclaiming our past through more appropriate and accurate renderings of Indigenous history. On a local level, this work is about taking back our Dakota history” (Wilson 2006: 11-12). The attention to the local level suggests that justice is not a universal concept nor is it static one—what it means and how it is enacted depends largely on its context, all of which change over the course of time. Can you talk more about this idea of a multiplicity of justices and how the Dakota Commemorative Marches are situated within broader scales and larger movements for justice?

WAW > Since few Indigenous people individually or collectively have successfully influenced the representation of our own history in contemporary written texts or educational institutions, we have tenaciously held on to our own historical accounts regarding our past. We do so because we recognize that within our historical perspective lies our humanity, not in the savages which still characterize us in most historical texts. Within our stories rests a narrative that speaks of our fierce and painful attempt to maintain what was ours
while also holding accountable the perpetrators of horrible crimes against us. It is what we must do if we are not to sink into the depths of self-loathing, to a rejection of our Indigenous identity that colonial forces have tried to force upon us.

What emerges to counter that dark alternative is a celebration of the courage that allows us to stand up and declare to the world that our spirit of resistance lives; that we as Indigenous People will never forget that we were once free and independent peoples with beautiful ways of being and interacting in this world; that we have not fallen prey to the notion that the society that now dominates these lands is somehow superior; and, that we believe in our inherent right to be Indigenous people in our homelands. This is especially true when we speak publicly about the atrocities that were perpetrated against us by Europeans and Euro-Americans, or when we speak proudly of the struggles of our people against that brutality. Because all Indigenous peoples resisted their own subjugation on some level, every Indigenous nation has its own stories to tell, to celebrate, and to invoke when necessary.

As a Dakota woman, I believe that the time has come for us to bring our stories to the light of day, to share them and discuss them publicly, and to insist that they never be brushed aside again. This is a notion that has always been brewing within some family lines but has become more public in recent decades. For example, this December [2006] I will travel back to Minnesota with my family to participate in the Fort Snelling-to-Mankato spiritual run to honor the thirty-eight Dakota men who were hanged in the largest mass execution in United States history. This ninety-mile relay run has been occurring every December 26 since
1987 when the vision for this run was given to Willie Male Bear. 1987 marked the 125th commemoration of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 (referred to previously as the Sioux Uprising) and the original mass hanging carried out by white Minnesotans at 10 a.m. on December 26 of that year. The thirty-eight men were hanged because they were considered by the white invaders to be thieves, rapists and murderers who perpetrated horrible violence against innocent white settlers. In honoring these men, we are declaring a rejection of that characterization and embracing our memory of them as heroes, patriots and martyrs who fiercely defended our lands and way of life against invading forces. This is really powerful.

Implicit in the memorial run for the thirty-eight, as well as the Dakota Commemorative March, is a call for justice. We raise questions about what kind of society would perpetrate such heinous acts as the ethnic cleansing of a people or a mass hanging so spectacular it can boast a world record. Certainly it is not a just society, especially if it has not expressed any contrition or made some kind of reparations for those injustices. But initially these larger truths were not a prominent part of our discussions about the meaning of the commemorative march. We began with an educational agenda that included bringing awareness about this painful history to white Minnesotans, but our own awareness has grown and broadened. We now realize that Indigenous commemorations of such events do much more than promote historical accuracy, they compel a reworking of the existing social order. And, unfortunately, because Indigenous peoples in the Americas were treated so brutally across the board, it is likely that every Indigenous nation has such truths to tell. Collectively, we have the moral and spiritual position to undercut the legitimacy of the United States government and reclaim what has been stolen from us. Truth-telling in this context, then, becomes a major act of decolonization. Consequently, part of the key to our future liberation ironically rests inherently in our stories of suffering. Our own healing from the suffering (that is now transmitted intergenerationally) will come with justice and liberation.

CSP > Using this most recent march as a case in point, please describe the roles of space in your social justice work in general. We are thinking particularly of embodied movement, ritualistic marking and prayer offerings as you and others walk through the Minnesota landscape. The big question that connects all three interviews is what is the difference between spatial justice and social justice? And, more importantly, how what does an engagement with/in space contribute to social movements and the struggle for justice?

WAW > Spatial justice for Indigenous peoples will always be more difficult to address than for any other population of people within the borders of the United States. I believe it is in the Indigenous context that spatial justice is most closely tied to social justice. That is because of land. The most dramatic level of colonization has been the colonization of our lands, because every single inch of land now claimed by the United States was stolen from Indigenous peoples (since every treaty was broken by the U.S. government, even treaties became merely another means for land theft, albeit “legal” theft). Given this history, spatial justice for Indigenous peoples would require a return of that stolen land. Anything less will always be a compromise of justice, but it is difficult to imagine the return of every inch of land. I really believe that (non-Native) Americans would be perfectly willing to completely exterminate all of us before agreeing to
return to their various countries of ancestral origin and hand our lands back to us. So the question that immediately emerges is: how much land needs to be returned for there to be some semblance of spatial justice? Few Indigenous people believe that we have been treated justly or that what we currently have in terms of land-base represents a just solution. But there is little to no agreement about what a just land dispersal might look like, because this is a question that few of us have allowed ourselves to contemplate. We have allowed the forces of colonialism to impact the parameters of our vision regarding justice and, as a consequence, most of us have difficulty imagining a future not prescribed by current boundaries. This is a question, however, that we must begin asking within our families and communities, as it is central to our struggles for self-determination and liberation from colonialism.

On the Dakota Commemorative Marches we have begun to ask those questions. When we set out in 2002 with the prayer stakes that we were going to plant each mile, we understood that those would be visible prayers to remind ourselves and others of the bloodshed and horror of the forced marches in 1862. White Minnesotans would be reminded that our people suffered a policy of ethnic cleansing from our homeland so that they could occupy our lands instead. We understood that we wanted to remind them of the gross injustice associated with that history. What I didn’t realize at the time was the sense of empowerment that would come with placing those prayer stakes in the ground. Not only would they serve as a visible reminder of the injustice that occurred in 1862, they would also serve to reconnect us to our homeland. We have a claim to that land that no other population of people on earth can claim, and we were invoking it in the name of our ancestors, the ones who represent the first generation of people who were forced to leave under threat of death. We were not asking permission to place those stakes in the ground, we were reclaiming our inherent right to honor our ancestors in our own way, a way that made sense from our cultural perspective. It was clear that something powerful was happening as we engaged in this act, because we were re-imprinting the landscape with our cultural markers. There is literally no Indigenous presence in most of the small towns we travel through. Indigenous presence has been erased from the landscape along with our people. So the act of placing our stakes in their towns is also a symbolic act of defiance of that purposeful erasure.

As I have discussed in the *Footsteps* book, I believe this experience has offered a grounding for a growing social movement. I think within the next decade complacency will die within our communities, and we will have inspired a new generation to work toward social justice. As Indigenous peoples, social justice necessarily includes a reclamation (at least a partial reclamation) of all that we have lost. The notion of spatial justice is intricately interwoven with our land claims.

The commemorative march allows us the freedom to contemplate another reality, another relationship with our homeland that has been denied us since 1862. We get strength and courage from the land, and our answers to our struggles will come through our relationship to the land. Not only is there much that the land provides to us, we also must provide much to the land. These are lessons that are only learned through our respectful interaction with it. The commemorative marches have provided us the first baby steps along that journey.
CSP > Could you speak directly to the current situation around Indigenous people’s land claims in the U.S.? Are there reflections on legal property rights – the systems that produce (sell, develop, etc.) space in the U.S. and Indigenous land claims – that could feed our understanding of the extent to which spatial justice for Indigenous peoples might be attainable as you define it? We assume that readers of the journal are interested in doing whatever they can to understand and perhaps act in solidarity with the Indigenous movements around land claims and might benefit from such a discussion.

WAW > Hmmm…. This is tricky. Certainly other scholars/intellectuals could comment on the state of current land struggles and court cases, any number of Indigenous lawyers especially. However, I see the legal system as another institution of colonialism, and I do not expend any energy whatsoever on pursuing legal means for land restoration, though many Indigenous people are currently trying to pursue land claims by making treaty claims in court. Someone like Winona LaDuke has written extensively on various land struggles among Indigenous populations; she would be a great one to comment on this, though even she has pursued land reclamation by raising funds to purchase stolen lands back, a remedy that hardly suggests some kind of justice. I am hesitant to throw out any figures about percentage of land that would need to be returned to “satisfy” Indigenous interests, because the issue is so complicated. Scholars like Ward Churchill have pointed out that there are more than a billion acres of federal, state and corporate lands in the U.S. that could be returned without touching a parcel of privately-owned land. Similarly, I have publicly stated that Minnesota (Dakota homeland) has approximately 11 million acres of federal, state, tax-forfeited, and metro commission lands that could be returned without touching any privately-held lands.

I think planners could conceivably do a great deal to help with land restoration projects, but they have to first agree that land should be returned.

Interview with Jane Trowell

Jane Trowell is one of four co-directors of the London-based critical arts collective PLATFORM. Since 1984, the group has engaged in a transdisciplinary practice at the intersections of critical pedagogy, environmental education, community activism, and the arts. Their multi-year, thematic inquiries frequently focus on understanding and transforming the impacts of transnational corporations, with particular attention given to oil companies and their social, ecological, and human rights costs. Each investigation is realized in many different forms, such as free publications, educational initiatives, memorials, sound-walks, and public events.

Trowell joined PLATFORM in 1991. She has lectured and published widely on PLATFORM’s approach to pedagogy, drawing on the work of bell hooks, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and Ivan Illich. With a background in art history and music, Trowell has an MA in radical art education and is currently based at the University of London.

Trowell stresses that people working to promote social justice must locate themselves within the politics they are engaging and to be frank about the power relations involved. She writes, “Perhaps one can see how the politics of the artist as benign missionary, friend, trickster, engineer, researcher, educator or
activist needs to be laid open, carefully, slowly. Who we are in these contexts is as much our own political assumptions as the political assumptions of those who have funded us to be there...and the political assumptions of those whom we are working with” (Trowell 2003).

CSP > Education and “engaged pedagogy” are central elements of PLATFORM’s approach. Would you comment on the relationship in PLATFORM’s work between pedagogy and spatial and social justice? How have you spatialized pedagogy, and what limitations of pedagogy has PLATFORM encountered in the struggle for justice?

JT > Spatially, place forms a fundament of our research for all of our projects. Where are we? What story can be told that is specific to this place but leads us to the general? How can we use the here-and-now nature of this place to put dynamism under the wider issue? We try to get away from the white cube and the black box—the art world and modernist performance paradigms that inoculate against place specificity. Problems with this can arise when the line between pedagogy and activism is crossed. A group of young children participating in our project for Southwark Summer University called “The River Detectives” studied the course of the local river Peck in south London. We also looked at recent cuttings from the local papers where some parents had been protesting about a local busy road. The children became so immersed in the reality and energy of “the real” that their decision was to stage a protest against the burial of the Peck on Albany Road. They wished to stretch a banner across the road and stop the traffic. We had to negotiate a tricky line here as they had indeed felt empowered to ACT, but to what extent had they been manipulated by us and to what extent was it the mark of a highly successful project? When you work pedagogically it can end in revolution. Or it can remain – to your knowledge – a one-off. These are the challenges.

CSP > Based on your experience, what do spatial practices – spatial means of consciousness raising – accomplish? How does working in space – working spatially – add to the impact and/or effectiveness of PLATFORM’s projects? How do people respond to these projects?

JT > PLATFORM uses spatial practices as an intrinsic part of most projects. Working through issues using public spaces and places is a strategy that multiplies the possible ways in which the participant can receive or make sense of the issues under discussion. One could call this a somatic practice – by putting the body into public space one implicates the self in a way that is different than intellectual approaches (although at times an intellectual approach is the most strategic).

By using public space, the self becomes aware of questions of power. How comfortable am I in this space? How welcome or unwelcome am I here? If working in a group, the self becomes aware of these questions in relation to the temporary community of that group. How comfortable are we, here? Are we welcome? Would we be welcome or perceived as a threat if we were differently constituted (race, gender, age group, etc.)? Spatial practices encourage or challenge one’s own embodiment of the issues. In the project “Gog & Magog,” small groups of invited individuals from finance, the oil and gas industry, campaigning and community activism are taken on a guided performance-walk around the web of institutions in London’s Square Mile which contribute to the
For those who are sighted, visuality and the visually incidental intrinsic to public space become the backdrop for the issues under discussion. This allows for connections to be made that are not in the control of the facilitator, guide, etc. The role of the facilitator or guide is to design public space experiences that focus the body on particular landscapes sights, and sounds, but the control of this is mitigated by the incidental. This allows, at best, for subconscious connections to be made. Sometimes these are the most powerful. However, the participant is at one and the same time the viewer and the viewed. To catch sight of a group of people focusing on a place or site – beyond the tourist destinations – is to raise the possibility of a question for those incidental viewers: What is of interest there? Why would they make that a focus of attention? Again a kind of immeasurable criticality is fostered. In an evolution of the project “Gog & Magog,” a podcast “opera for one” has been created by artist-activist John Jordan with James Marriott (PLATFORM) and composer Isa Suarez. “And While London Burns” takes listeners on a walk that engages them through the thoughts of a fictional City worker who is questioning his career and a narrator who acts as guide and interpreter of the sites and their meaning in relation to climate change and the fossil-fuel economy. “And While London Burns” was launched in November 2006 and has been downloaded 9,000 times at the time of writing (February 7, 2007). Even if we take it that only a 10th of people have actually done the walk, starting from Bank and ending at Monument, this is a serious amount of interest. The piece has been picked up by the daily London freebies, the Independent, the Guardian and the Financial Times newspapers, and was featured in the influential BBC2 nightly TV news and analysis program “Newsnight” (February 20, 2007). Part of the piece’s success is that whereas the subject of climate change commonly inspires numbness, paralysis or fear, this work captures the imagination and action through the process of placing your body in real space. It actually embodies action – you can physically do something about your feelings about climate change; you can download this opera and go on this walk; you can walk past some of the hidden edifices of the oil industry, engage with some analysis, be swung by the use of music in conjunction with landscape, become involved in the fate of the protagonist. And even if you can’t be in London, you can visualize it from wherever you are. It places you in space.

But of what use is this embodiment, this making vulnerable of the self through a critical use of public space? In our experience it leads to a more lasting set of questions and at best, a more lasting change. One cannot divorce the self from the issue. It becomes apparent that the self is the issue. Not only can one
not see the same place in the same way any more, but also one cannot see one’s own self in the same way any more. Through projects such as “Gog & Magog” these changes are monitored through a longitudinal approach – we are committed to the ongoing fostering of a community of intent, a grouping of participants who wish to engage over time. Through this approach we are able to see how sights, ideas, encounters and analyses uncovered through the “Gog & Magog” process “take” over time. As an approach to deep change, we believe that public space practices are indispensable, precisely because of the vulnerability that all (including the facilitator) have to grapple with as an intrinsic part of the process. And this spatiality, we believe, is crucial to an understanding of social justice.

CSP > Your website states, “PLATFORM has long used the walk as an important form for public space work. We have explored walking as a research tool, as a ritual, as performance, as intervention, as a political tool, and as a tool for sharing insights and information.” Walking has certainly been a recurring theme in many of PLATFORM’s projects. The projects are not about walking per se, but rather use walking as a spatial tool to investigate various aspects of the city, the corporation, and the transnational network. Can you talk about the different ways that PLATFORM has used walking – as a means of spatializing, making visible, measuring against bodies, witnessing, and constructing points of entry – and also about how walking has succeeded and/or failed in these different applications? How do you imagine the relationship between walking and spatial justice?

JT > PLATFORM has used walking from the very outset. We walk to research – almost every project is made in relation to specific places and spaces and, as such, we have to pace it and observe it from the ground, be part of it and the social flow around it at different times of day and year. Researching through walking gets our confidence up intellectually, artistically and politically. We become part of the flow. Or we observe when we simply do not fit or stand out. Where, when and how? Whether it is walking around the coast despoiled by the disastrous February 1996 “Sea Empress” oil spill or walking and talking with villagers along an oil pipeline in Georgia and Azerbaijan, or spending hours in London’s financial district, walking makes us apply theory to practice. The vulnerability of the body is key here. We walk as ritual – many projects have contained ritual walking by which I mean walking to mark a path as special. Some

And While London Burns - An operatic audio tour across The City.

Source: PLATFORM
projects have involved what to the passer-by would be largely invisible – a ritual walk from Brighton to London by two members of PLATFORM marked the shift of the organization from that seaside town to London. A ritual walk from Weimar to Buchenwald among three members of PLATFORM, punctuated by readings, moved us literally and physically from “civilization” to barbarism. Most walks are public visible rituals however – a flow of thirty-five people walking from the source of the buried river Fleet in London to its mouth at Blackfriars Bridge mimics the course of the river itself. We walk as protest or as a reclamation of space – to occupy unloved or co-opted parts of the city, to say “we have a right to be here too” and “this place should come under the gaze, too.” To a degree, our performance walks in the City of London (the financial center) are assertions that citizens have every right to be there, observing not St Paul’s Cathedral or other historic monuments, but the headquarters of Deutsche Bank or Swiss Re or Royal Bank of Scotland. Walks such as “Loot! Reckoning with the East India Company” and our latest production, “And While London Burns,” place the walker between ancient and modern, here and elsewhere, fiction, memory and fact. As I mentioned above, “And While London Burns” is an audio tour that focuses on the fossil-fuel industry through a fictional character; “Loot!” takes groups of 20 people around the sites of the East India Company (1600-1858) in London’s “Square Mile” (financial district) and East India Docks, making parallels with contemporary ethical issues in transnational corporate business. (For more on “Loot!” see the Museum of the Corporation web site under References.) We walk as spectacle – a group of people walking together sends a message that they are curious and investigating together. Depending on the visibility of the walkers, this can make varying impacts. To walk in Britain – the country that founded the Ramblers Association in the 1930s out of protest at denial of rights to roam – remains a tricky aspect of civil rights. In Britain, Thatcher’s Criminal Justice Act means that the police may, at any time and at their discretion, break up any group containing more than twelve people who are occupying public space. In Blair’s Britain, the new one-mile exclusion zone around the Houses of Parliament post-9/11/01 and the 7/7/05 bombings mean that anything which the police wish to construe as spontaneous protest is prohibited, and that you have to apply for permission to enact a democratic right to gather or even to read, ritually, the names of British soldiers who have died in Iraq…. And you might be refused.

Walking is not an uncomplicated act in itself either. There is a politics of even being able to walk. Not everyone has legs. Not everyone can use the ones they have. The roll of a wheelchair or child’s buggy, the tap of a cane or crutches, the extra perception of bravery and vulnerability of a protest of those pushing prams... Not everyone is expected to walk, especially en masse: the exceptional Million Man Marches in the USA – the sight of thousands of African-American men asserting their right to be, their right to an equal chance; women’s “Take Back the Night” marches—needed now more than ever in the light of last fall’s (November-December 2006) horrific murders of five prostitutes in the English town of Ipswich.... Walking is intrinsically about social justice and spatial justice. It cannot be otherwise. To that end, the biggest challenge of using walking as a visible intervention in spatial justice is that it is all about the social and economic context of the walk and walkers. Who is doing the walking? What is the risk? And whom do they walk for? Or as Henry Gi-

CSP > Process (“the creative processes of democratic engagement”) is also a prominent feature of PLATFORM’s methodology—an emphasis that privileges slowness, thoroughness, and complexity. Can you talk a bit about the relationship between time and spatial justice in PLATFORM’s work?

JT > In terms of timescales, we try to bear in mind both nature’s and transnational corporations’ timescales. Nature is constantly evolving in unexpected ways and is entirely the result of complex interplays of environmental conditions, climate and chance. Big corporations such as Shell and BP think in twenty-five to fifty-year spans as is made evident by their “scenario planning” exercises. However, the big difference is that a corporation can die in an instant—see Enron—whereas the nature model makes us shapeshift. This isn’t entirely as clean-cut as that though: never forget that Nokia started out as a tire company and BP is already positioning itself as “Beyond Petroleum.”

There is a tension here, however. You can hear some of us say that activists and campaigners should slow down and that artists should wake up. Sometimes it becomes strikingly clear that artists in the European-influenced world are as affected by crazed urgency as activists. On occasion this causes arguments internally as much as externally. The biggest challenge is when external events drive time—a big political moment, the publication of a governmental report, a major anniversary. These things push the internal dynamics. It’s a big question: PLATFORM’s informal mantras of “Democracy is more important than speed” and “Sink the project for a principle” come hard up against so-called real life. Differing senses of urgency can destroy collaborative practice. And senses of urgency are driven by philosophical or even existential positions and feelings. Is the planet dying? Can we wait to strategize? Or must we move Now, Now, Now. At these points the greatest democratic nerve is tested.

CSP > The big question that connects all three interviews is what is the difference between spatial justice and social justice? And, more importantly, how/what does an engagement with/in space contribute to social movements and the struggle for justice? Considered in its entirety, PLATFORM’s work makes a compelling case for the significance of space in social movements—in other words, space clearly matters as site of struggle. Based on your experience with PLATFORM, how would you say that spatial justice expands our understanding of—and ability to realize—social justice?

JT > Spatial justice is social justice. Environmental justice is inseparable from social justice. Justice embraces all conditions.

Critical Spatial Practice is a reading group composed largely of artists, architectural historians, and cultural landscape studies scholars. It is affiliated with the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Critical Spatial Practice members involved in these interviews were Nicholas Brown, Landscape Architecture, Ryan Griffis, School of Art and Design, Kevin Hamilton, School of Art and Design, and Sharon Irish, School of Architecture, all from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; and Sarah Kanouse, Department of Cinema and Photography, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.
Lead Photograph

New Orleans, Post-Katrina - Nicholas Brown

References


