Critical cultural geographers explore the same terrain as anthropologists who study space and place. We borrow their spatial strategies, while they return the compliment by capitalizing on the cultural. These papers represent a radical deployment of spatial analysis, one with potential for anthropologists. Allan Pred’s unspeakable spaces links a museum exhibit and public space, historically juxtaposing the artifacts in the exhibit and the people in the plaza to decode their racist message. Michael Watts’s geography of violence threads psychological repression and aggression through the eye of a political economic analysis of statehood. Are these papers, then, suggesting a new kind of spatial analysis? One that includes multiple scales—the space of the nation, the space of the city, the space of the sect or group, as well as the space of the object, building, square or even the human being? Are we seeing an expansion of spatial analysis to the symbolic realm where anthropologists search for cultural meaning?

Another dimension of these papers is their search for hidden meaning—the secret in the Watts paper, the unspeakable in Pred’s. These geographers bring their spatial tools and knowledge of the cultural to excavate what lies beneath.

In my own research, I connect spatial analysis of gated communities with what residents say about them, relying on critical discourse analysis to identify covert concerns with social order, elitism, and racism. Language, like space, is a form of social practice that is historically situated and dialectical to the social context, that is, both socially shaped and socially shaping. Since language is widely perceived as transparent, it is difficult to see how it...
These papers explore the absences, silences, gaps, and cover-ups of racist and violent practices. Which brings me to a second set of questions: Why are we so interested in studying silences, secrets, and the unspeakable? Maria-Luisa Achino-Loeb (2000) suggests that it is a way to investigate ideology through practice, in this case, the practice of not speaking, keeping secrets, or speaking in ways that cover up real meaning. Do our interlocutors agree or do they have their own understandings of why silence, secrets, and unspeakability have become an academic obsession. Is the silence deafening?

I recognize the bravado of these papers in my own struggle to get at "the dialogic unconscious," a concept by which the processes of repression can be studied discursively (Billig 1997:139). When interviewing gated community residents, I assume that some of the evidence of racism and elitism is "repressed"—hidden not only from the interviewer, because it is socially unacceptable to talk about class and race, but from the interviewee as well because these concerns are also psychologically unacceptable. According to Billig (1997), conversational interaction can have repressive functions as well as expressive one, so what is said can be used to get at what is not said. The reverse is also true as Watts and Pred demonstrate in their analyses.

Following John Dixon and Steve Reicher on desegregation in the new South Africa, I focus on the rhetorical dimension of intergroup contact to elicit narratives about maintaining, justifying or challenging racist practices (1997: 368–369). They identify a number of "disclaiming statements" they were able to elicit by asking their respondents about their new black neighbors in a legalized squatter settlement. In gated community interviews, I ask similar questions about "Mexican laborers" in San Antonio or "recent immigrants" in New York, that produce disclaiming statements and lead to a better understanding of the social categories—many of them racist—used by gated community residents.

Pred's and Watts's analyses of unconscious racism and aggression and my own interest in the discursive repression, however, raises a third question about these presentations. Why the theoretical turn to psychological analyses? What is there about the historical and sociopolitical moment that encourages, or even
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requires, a return to the latent, hidden, unconscious, and repressed as a mode of analysis? Is this a turning away from political economy, or an admission that political economy will only carry us so far, that it can not answer questions of individual motivation, and in this case, acts of racism and violence? And what about the return to Freudian concepts of repression and aggression? Are these to become our new tools for discovering meaning? Will they undermine our Marxist tools of political and economic analysis that freed us from the reductionism of psychological explanations?

Unspeakable Spaces

DID YOU SEE THE NEW movie Bamboozled (2000), Spike Lee’s recent critique of television’s portrayal of race relations? Like Allan Pred, he uses an historical form, a re-creation of the minstrel show to illuminate racial tensions and inequities in the present. And similar to Pred’s recounting of museum artifacts that include a negro penis and stretched skin, the black screenwriter collects antique “nigger banks” that depict black-face clowns and Uncle Tom characters. In Bamboozled, the juxtaposition of historical objects, video tapes of early black television series, all-white board meetings, and clips from contemporary television shows, demonstrates how racial inequality and degradation of black culture remains embedded in the social relations and visual material world of television. In Pred’s paper, the juxtaposition of artifacts in a turn-of-the-century museum exhibit, the relationship of the museum space to Stockholm’s most important public square, and the re-creation of the exhibit a hundred years later—without protest or public comment—also reveals that cultural racism still dominates Swedish social relations.

Allan Pred’s paper is a methodological tour-de-force as he winds his way from museum spaces to other spaces, objects to other objects, objects to spaces, interior spaces to exterior spaces, spaces to language, and spaces to spaces over time. His complex analysis reminds me of Victor Turner’s (1967) use of exegetical, operational and positional fields of meaning to understand ritual symbols. Pred’s systematic movement through the interstices of object/spaces/time/place renders Turner’s mode of symbolic interpretation incomplete. Every comparison—the presentation of the offensive penis in the original wax museum and its re-presentation in the 1999 “Itinerant Wax Cabinet” exhibit—or the museum
exhibition space with the disorderly, public spaces of Stockholm—produces a new level of understanding of what the unspeakable spaces are communicating.

I particularly like his depiction of the redesign of the Sergel's Square and how cultural racism remains ensconced in Swedish public spaces. His insights concerning the relationship of the increasing number of non-white immigrants, and their use of urban spaces and civic squares, highlight the power of spatial analysis to uncover silence, the unspeakable, and the unheard. His Swedish data confirm my contention that public space is closed and/or redesigned when hidden and "undesirable" elements of a culture become too visible (Low 2000). It is the visibility of the unspeakable that provokes citizens to complain, and the state or city to respond.

Geographies of Violence

MICHAEL WATTS'S PAPER TAKES A different, but equally insightful tack in his analysis of unprecedented violence against two marginal groups in contemporary Nigeria. Watts employs Freud's concept of the "narcissism of minor difference" to explain why the Nigerian state felt compelled to eradicate, "to literately snuff out," two parochial and in many ways minor popular expressions of local dissent. He argues that each of these movements exposed what he calls Nigeria's "public secret," that is "the very fiction of Nigeria as a nation." Both movements—each linking territory and place to identity—represented not only a challenge to the state and its ruling classes, but also dared to express the public secret of Nigeria's weak sense of national identity (Watts, this issue). In other words, Nigeria's brittle defense of a weakly constructed national symbol evoked narcissistic aggression against competing symbols of identity.

I find Watts' analysis deeply satisfying. He successfully links petrol capitalism and state building with an incomplete and immature national identity. Any attempt to reveal—or speak about—this flawed sense of statehood or imagined nationhood provokes a violent reaction. The closer the marginal religious group or political movement comes to recasting the truth, the more vociferous the reaction. I can think of many examples where this blend of political economic, spatial, and psychological analysis might apply. Even the gated community, while not killing out-
siders, is a reaction to the narcissism of minor difference. The collapse of the working class and shrinking of the middle class through the economic restructuring of the 1980s created class anxiety, symbolically encoded in walls, gates, and guards. Watts focuses on violence, but there are other social realms, those of class exclusion and segregation that productively draw upon his spatial/psychological/political economic analysis.

Notes

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