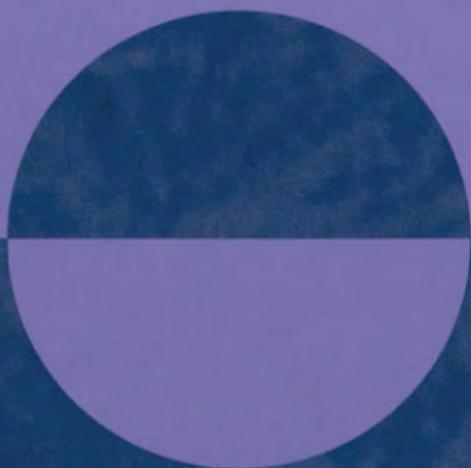


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DOREEN MASSEY

Flexible Sexism

Introduction

In the current debate around modernism and postmodernism, which is having its reflection in our field, both sides claim feminism for their own. Moreover, to feminists each offers possibilities. Postmodernism holds out the potential democracy of a plurality of voices and points of view, the end to a notion of science and society which has in fact (to be distinguished from 'by necessity') been unremittingly and tediously male, a patriarchal hierarchy with a claim to truth. Modernism, on the other hand, points to the possibility of progress and change. Things may be patriarchal now (including, OK let's admit it, modernism itself) but they need not always be so; more than that, it is possible to judge between alternatives, and history is on our side.

However, that it may be difficult to choose between the attractions they each at least in their rhetorics appear to offer, has as its other side that both postmodernism and modernism remain so frequently, so unimaginatively, patriarchal. This has been said before about the wider debate (for instance, see Fraser and Nicholson, 1988). If there is one thing which has most certainly demonstrated its flexibility in an age which as a whole is frequently accorded that epithet, it is sexism.

This feature is also disappointingly characteristic of the way in which at least some of the modernism – postmodernism debate has been conducted in our field, and it is the purpose of this paper to examine some of the ways in which this happens and to explore some of its implications. To this end I am focusing on two books which have been published

recently: Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) and Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989). These books have been chosen not because they are in any sense representative of the debate between postmodernism and modernism (indeed there is argument about even how they might be classified) but because they are, or may become, central to the discussion within geography. Nor is this paper meant to be a full review of either book; it simply reports on the thoughts which they aroused in me around one specific issue: feminism. For it seems to me that the absence from, indeed denial by, both these books of feminism and the contributions it has recently made, raise issues which are important for all of us, and which range from our style as academics to the way in which some of the central concepts of the debate are formulated. Indeed, the implications are perhaps in the end even wider than that. For both these books are centrally concerned with the relation between the poles of that impossible dichotomy: space and society. And, as the debate about this relation is crucial in the whole modernism–postmodernism exchange, it seems important to address its shortcomings. As we shall see, introducing feminism into this exchange challenges the views, not just of society but also of space, which these books develop.

I should also like to report that I had some hesitation about writing this paper. I do not like public mud-slinging and have tried not to indulge in it here, but the paper is at times very critical. Nor do I relish gladiatorial combats and I hope that the result of this paper will be more to open (or continue) a wider debate. For it is certainly not just with these two particular authors that I want to take issue. Similar critiques could be made of much of our work, probably including some of my own and other feminists'. These particular books, however, claim a generality and a breadth of scope which others do not, and it is for this reason that they are particularly important to examine. The questions, though, are ones which we should all address. Moreover, these books are also significant because, I am sure, neither of the authors would want to be thought of as anti-feminist. Yet, I want to argue, both books are in fact quite fundamentally so. And if they are so, as it were, in spite of their authors' best intentions it becomes even more important to think through how that comes about. For it should be stressed that what is being argued here is not that women, or even gender, should have been mentioned more often; but that the incredible lack of attention both to feminism and to what feminists have been arguing now for a considerable number of years in the end vitiates both of the wider, and very different, projects which these two books set out to accomplish.

Postmodern problems for feminists

Democracy and academic style

One of the main attractions of the postmodern perspective is that it would seem on initial viewing to offer the prospect of a greater democracy through its recognition of the reality of a variety of viewpoints, a plurality of cultures. This has its underside: those viewpoints and cultures may, for example, run counter to what we have been accustomed, from a modernist perspective, to think of as progressive, and postmodernism forbids us from evaluating. Moreover, as Harvey argues very well, mere recognition of the existence of something does not empower it.

None the less, one of the promises of postmodernism is that it will allow fuller appreciation of those who have for so long been banished to the margins, whether these be non-western societies, women/feminists, or subordinated class strata.

In such a context one of the emancipatory roles of the writer and intellectual could be precisely to help give voice to the previously excluded. This is not itself an unproblematical possibility, as the intricate debates in other disciplines, most particularly anthropology, bear witness (for reviews and debate see, for instance, Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Mascia-Lees et al., 1989). It is a debate which could profitably be further developed within geography. None the less, postmodernism can to some extent be seen as holding out some such progressive possibilities. And to some extent they have been taken up.

There is, however, another view of the role of intellectuals (particularly the paid professional intellectuals of academe) within the postmodernist project/era. And it is this one which I wish to take up here, for it raises important issues about who and how we are as 'academics'. Thus, Bauman (1988) has interpreted the concept of postmodernism as a response by intellectuals to their own discomfiture, their sense of dislodgement from previous authority. (The deliberate ambiguity of 'project/era' was thus apt in the context of this discussion.) Bauman's argument is that the concept of postmodernity has value precisely because it captures and articulates the changing experience of contemporary intellectuals. Intellectuals have become more self-aware – 'In the discourse of "postmodernity" . . . The participants . . . appear in the role of "organic intellectuals" of the intellectuals themselves' (p. 218), and this turning around of Gramsci's original definition is, so Bauman argues, a response to a growing sense of failure, uselessness and irrelevance. He goes on to develop an analysis of the reasons behind this 'status crisis' of the intellectuals and isolates three determinants as crucial: the end of the assumption of the superiority of

the West over the rest ('now at best ridiculed as naivety, at worst castigated as ethnocentric' [p. 220]), the decline of the state's need for legitimation (which 'has been replaced with two mutually complementary weapons: this of *seduction* and that of *repression*' [p. 221]), and the decline of the judgmental hegemony of intellectuals over the expanding sphere of, especially popular, culture ('what hurts . . . is not so much an expropriation, but the fact that the intellectuals are not invited to stand at the helm of this breath-taking expansion' [p. 224]).

This view has been developed further by other authors. Owens (1985) emphasizes not just the often-referred-to demise of the dominance of western culture but also the challenge to modernity from within the geographical bases of that culture: 'the causes of modernity's demise . . . lie as much within as without' (p. 58). And among the many different challenges to modernity from within has been the challenge from feminism. Bondi (1990) argues that postmodernism 'may be understood as a crisis in the experience of modernity among white, western men, and as a response centred on that experience' (p. 5). Moreover, it is argued, the nature of the response to the crisis is such as to find, somehow, a way of hanging on to intellectual hegemony, or at least of not letting anyone else have it. Thus Hartsock (1987, p. 196) argues:

Somehow it seems highly suspicious that it is at this moment in history, when so many groups are engaged in 'nationalisms' which involve redefinitions of the marginalised Others, that doubt arises in the academy about the nature of the 'subject', about the possibilities for a general theory which can describe the world, about historical 'progress'. Why is it, exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes 'problematic'? Just when we are forming our own theories about the world, uncertainty emerges about whether the world can be adequately theorised? Just when we are talking about the changes we want, ideas of progress and the possibility of 'meaningfully' organizing human society become suspect?

Similarly, Mascia-Lees et al., drawing on Lennox (1987), comment: 'When Western white males – who traditionally have controlled the production of knowledge – can no longer define the truth . . . their response is to conclude that there is not a truth to be discovered' (1989, p. 15).

There are a number of issues here. First, if there is anything at all in these interpretations (and I think there is, though it is by no means a whole explanation), then it is inadequate to try to explain the condition of postmodernity and the associated debates about representation simply as the result of 'time-space compression', as Harvey does. The arguments

just cited give more autonomy than does Harvey, not only to the sphere of culture and intellectual debate, but also – and more significantly from the point of view of the discussion here – to the sphere of political action. What is more, as Hartsock argues, political action and intellectual activity have been much more closely linked together in fields such as feminist studies, ethnic studies and Third World studies than they have been in more mainstream white male modernism (including much Marxism) for all its claims to political relevance.¹

But second, if this is a crisis in part within the groves of academe itself then, it has been argued, it is frequently conducted more with an eye to positions of power and influence within the academy than with any liberating project of the full recognition of others. This point has been made most sharply by Sangren. Writing of ethnography, he says,

whatever 'authority' is created in a text has its most direct social effect not in the world of political and economic domination of the Third World by colonial and neocolonial powers, but rather in the academic institutions in which such authors participate. (1988, p. 411)

And Mascia-Lees et al. add:

While postmodernist anthropologists such as Clifford, Marcus, and Fisher may choose to think that they are transforming global power relations as well as the discipline of anthropology itself, they may also be establishing first claim in the new academic territory on which this decade's battles for intellectual supremacy and jobs will be waged. (1989, p. 16)

Third, it is necessary in other words to recognize the power relations within academe and within intellectual debate. Thus, Rorty (1979) proposes that philosophy and intellectual activity should be persistently oppositional and that cultural exchange, indeed culture in general, should be conceptualized as a conversation, and a conversation in which the previously marginalized are invited to participate. But as Hartsock acerbically points out:

From having been constructed as void and lack, and from having been forbidden to speak, we are now expected to join in equal conversation with someone who has just realised that philosophy has been overconfident. (1987, p. 200)

These arguments raise serious issues for all intellectuals/academics about their behaviour within their own social group, about the nature of their writing, about the power structures of academe, and so on. And these

issues arise most acutely for those who are already established and, within these, for those who are members of the already dominant group of white males. For them, if ventures into postmodernism are not to represent simply an attempt at the restoration of their shaky authority as purveyors of truth (even if it is that the whole concept is a lot more complicated than it was previously thought to be), and if it is to be more than another play for status within academe on the part of those who already hold, as a group, most of the positions of power, then there has to be a fundamental questioning of the way they go about their craft.

One aspect of this which is highly symptomatic revolves around the question of 'style', and in particular writing-style. Much writing in and about postmodernism verges on the pretentious, and on occasions the virtually incomprehensible to those not in a (fairly small) group. Moreover 'the left' is not immune from this (and not only among the postmodernists) – and indeed has provided over the years some of the worst examples of undemocratic writing. It is an issue which I should like to see debated, and that is why I raise it now.

For it occurred to me again while reading Soja's book. *Postmodern Geographies* has a strong, central argument, one which is extremely important to communicate, and one which might in general terms be accepted at least in part by many social scientists, whether or not they agreed in detail either with the manner of getting there or with whether it was demonstrated in practice by Soja's own examples. The book is full of rich insights and thought-provoking connections and ideas. I learned a lot from reading it. But the presentation of the argument is bemusing.

First, there is the question of structure. The book begins with a section called 'Preface and Postscript' and its opening sentences are:

Combining a Preface with a Postscript seems a particularly apposite way to introduce (and conclude) a collection of essays on postmodern geographies. It signals right from the start an intention to tamper with the familiar modalities of time, to shake up the normal flow of the linear text to allow other, more 'lateral' connections to be made.

In fact, what follows is a very conventionally structured argument (for which we should perhaps be grateful), the only 'novelty' being that there is overlap between some of the chapters, presumably an effect of this being a (well-reworked) collection of past articles. Most conventionally, the considerable amount of history which the book presents (for instance, about the development of the social/spatial line of thought amongst geographers) is both structured in an extraordinarily linear manner and leads with an ineluctable inexorability to the author and his current

argument. Far from 'tampering with the familiar modalities of time', or 'shaking up the normal flow of the linear text' and so forth, it imposes an order, an order which is linear, and of a particular linearity. Its function is to ratify the present, the contribution which is to come. This is not, of course, unusual. There have been a few such 'histories' written recently, with the apparent authority of the overseer, where many of us involved recognize neither our individual roles nor the play as a whole. What makes it particularly jarring in this book, though, is the fact that it contradicts so completely both those opening sentences and the expressed commitment to multiple voices and plurality. One effect of this is that it leads to problems with the construction of Soja's own argument. By focusing so unremittingly on one characteristic (historicism), and homing in on all examples which exemplify his point, he misses other themes, other examples, and indeed counter-examples. Just looking within geography itself, there was surely a long period, in the early and middle decades of this century, when geography as an academic discipline was intellectually immobilized by its exclusive focus on 'space' and its insistence that there was a world of purely spatial laws, spatial causes, and spatial relations.² It does not indeed seem so long ago that a great number of us were spending our intellectual energies trying to combat this very characteristic (Massey, 1984)! This was a discipline which could not have been less 'historicist'.³

But another effect of the linear way in which Soja constructs his history is that it omits, not just other themes, but other voices. It has a hermetic coherence which excludes deviant contributions. Non-Marxist geographers, for instance, are not heard from very much. Again, in complete contrast with the promise of the first paragraph of the book, there is little simultaneity here, just a procession of those *who are seen to have been* dominant or important. It is a disappointment because it belies the evident democratic intent. It is very un-postmodern in the best sense of postmodern.

In contrast, however, to the conventionality of the overall structure, the language in which the argument is couched is arcane and tortured. Presentations which play with form, which take a delight in their own artistry, are surely to be applauded, but the taste this book left with me was one of pomposity rather than of an attempt to communicate. There has been much debate recently about the construction of texts, and the effects and implications of different modes of construction. The case of the linear history was an example of this, and here we see a similar effect in relation to linguistic style. *Postmodern Geographies* left at least this reader (and I know I am not the only one; it has been the subject of some discussion) wondering what the author was trying to achieve. The concern most often expressed is that this kind of writing is less about communica-

tion than about self-presentation. This is a difficult issue, and I realize that to some extent at least it is subjective. Moreover, in this case I have some sympathy in the sense that Soja is trying to get geographical issues on to the agenda of the intellectual left. Writing to one's audience is an important skill, and I can well understand if he felt that the only way to gatecrash those august portals was to write like too many of them do. I suppose all I am arguing is that we should try to resist the temptation. For, if those of us who would in some way or measure sign up under the banner of postmodernism are to avoid the accusation of using the claimed potential democracy of the message simply to show off to each other, then we have to be very careful how, and for whom, we write. This of course applies to all of us, not just those who align with postmodernism. It is just that postmodernists' proclamations against authority, and their explicitly stated concern with the nature of the text, make such writing in their case particularly ironic. Nor am I trying to make the case that everything we write should be 'for the proletariat' otherwise known in the United Kingdom as the man (sic) on the Clapham omnibus. Styles will, and should, vary with the audience addressed (which is not the same as falling into their bad habits). It is not a question of being anti-intellectual, either; indeed it is in part bound up with precisely the distinction between being an *intellectual* and being an *academic*.

Moreover, the issue is reinforced in Soja's book because we are given clues as to what he was trying to establish himself *as*. We are told, for instance, that the author once went for a trip around Los Angeles with Fredric Jameson and Henri Lefebvre. What are we to make of this information? Perhaps what is being communicated is the sense of an in-crowd, and the fact that the author may be part of it. Thus, Soja refers to Jameson: 'Fredric Jameson, perhaps the pre-eminent American Marxist literary critic' (p. 62). Jameson repays the compliment: 'that new spatiality implicit in the post-modern (which Ed Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* now places on the agenda in so eloquent and timely a fashion)' (1989, p. 45). Soja refers to Harvey: 'A brilliant example of this flexible halfway house of Late Modern Marxist geography is Harvey's recent paper . . .' (p. 73) and Harvey is duly quoted on the back of Soja's book: 'One of the most challenging and stimulating books ever written on the thorny issue . . .'. On the back of Harvey's book we have Soja: 'Few people have penetrated the heartland of contemporary cultural theory and critique as explosively or as insightfully as David Harvey'.

Now, let us be clear what is being argued here. First of all, on the particular issue of quotes on the back of books, it is not sour grapes! Many of us are asked to participate in this kind of thing, and quite a few refuse. I realize that the pressure initially comes from publishers. It is part of the advertising to have "I think it is absolutely wonderful" – Big Name' or

“‘Best thing since sliced bread’ – Important Academic’ on a book. It establishes, supposedly, its credentials. I also realize that the competitive pressures towards this kind of thing are probably far worse in the USA than the ones I know in the United Kingdom. But still, ought we to go along with it? My own reasons for refusing in the past to write such plaudits have been based on straightforward dislike of the big-name syndrome and the individualism (and competitiveness) it implies. At least those of us supposedly on the left could refuse to participate on the grounds both of anti-elitism and of the recognition that research and the development of ideas is in reality (and could be even more) more of a collective process than that. Perhaps these are issues which we should debate openly.

But second, neither is it being pretended that this is a new phenomenon or specific to these authors. It is neither; and indeed I am sure that the geographers involved here would share some of my reservations. Nor, third and most certainly, is it being argued that we should not be complimentary to each other, and congratulatory on each other’s achievements. (Soja can be very nasty about less eminent figures – ‘self-serving’ is one adjective he employs, on p. 73.)

The combination of all these characteristics of style and presentation is, however, alienating. It seems designed to create a sense of a centre and a periphery. If the arguments cited earlier are correct and academics (and especially white male academics) today are feeling that there *is* a loss of status, a feeling that we (they) are not being regarded with the customary awe (at least among those from whom most academics are accustomed to receive it – those on the currently fashionable ‘margins’ never cared much for most of us anyway), then this is not the way to regain any kind of respect. This kind of response to a crisis chimes only too well with that negative aspect of postmodernist analysis which can only confirm the mutual incomprehensibility of self-defining groups, and greet it with a shrug of indifferent shoulders. On the other hand, it is a style which is in total contradiction to that more emancipatory aspect of postmodernism, the pulling down of hierarchies, the entry of the previously marginalized into the central forum of debate.

On page 74 of his book, in the middle of all this, Soja writes:

This reconstituted critical human geography must be attuned to the emancipatory struggles of all those who are peripheralized and oppressed by the specific geography of capitalism (and existing socialism as well) – exploited workers, tyrannized peoples, dominated women.

The comment in the margin of my copy is unprintable.

Difference and distance

But that quotation reveals something else as well. For it is not just in terms of style and textual strategy that *Postmodern Geographies* is ambivalent in its relation to postmodernism. So it is in the content of its theoretical stance and its arguments.

That quotation reveals on the one hand the recognition that a simple dualism of capital versus labour is not enough. Notions of peripherality, and of tyrannized peoples and dominated women get a mention. Yet, on the other hand, the thing by which they are peripheralized, tyrannized or dominated is assumed to be – uniquely – the geography of *the mode of production* (capitalism or ‘existing socialism’). It recognizes that there are more things in life than can be captured in the classic formulation, but it does not really take them on board.

This is not an ambivalence particular to that quotation. It is present throughout the book. The existence of racism and sexism, and the need to refer to them, is recognized, but it is assumed throughout, either explicitly or implicitly, that the only axis of power which matters in relation to these distinct forms of domination is that which stems fairly directly from the relations of production. No other relations of power and dominance are seriously addressed. The fact that patriarchy, for instance, is not reducible to the terms of a debate on modes of production, is not considered. Indeed, to take the point further, modernity itself is defined entirely in relation to capitalism, at times seeming almost equivalent to it. Thus, in the key section on the deconstruction and reconstruction of modernity, an initially rich and broad-ranging definition is step by step narrowed down. We move from a recognition that ‘the experience of modernity captures a broad mesh of sensibilities’ (p. 25) and an argument (still very broad in what it potentially encompasses) that ‘spatiality, temporality, and social being can be seen as the abstract dimensions which together comprise all facets of human existence’ (p. 25). The breadth of this statement is confirmed by the definition of social being as ‘revolving around the constitution of society, the production and reproduction of social relations, institutions, and practices’ (p. 25). Yet within a few pages this focus has been reduced, and modernization, each accelerated period of which is seen as giving birth to new forms of modernism, and which becomes conflated with modernity, is reduced to capitalism: ‘Modernization can be directly linked to the many different “objective” processes of structural change that have been associated with the ability of capitalism to develop and survive . . . This defining association between modernization and the survival of capitalism is crucial . . . Modernization . . . is a continuous process of societal restructuring . . . that arises primarily from

the historical and geographical dynamics of modes of production' (pp. 26–7).

Yet between the last two of these statements there is a fleeting moment of doubt, of acknowledgement that it is not as simple as this. 'Modernization', it is conceded, 'is not entirely the product of some determinative inner logic of capitalism, but neither is it a rootless and ineluctable idealization of history' (p. 27). Of course, it partly depends on how you want to define modernization, but there is clearly here a drawing-back from the earlier simple equation of it with capitalism. Yet the revised formulation is also unsatisfactory. The alternatives are not, in fact, limited to a single determinative inner logic on the one hand and total rootlessness on the other. For one thing, and quite apart from the ramifications of wider debates, there are other axes of social power relations by which our current societies are characterized, as well as those of class and capitalism. In Soja's formulation structures such as patriarchy are reduced to noises-off which account for the fact that there is no simple deterministic relation between capitalism and modernization. But why cannot such other axes of power and of social structuring be considered in their own right?⁴ Patriarchy is not in the index. Feminism gets one mention, and it is in the passage following the quotation cited at the end of the last section. The passage is dealing with the difficulties of politics in these times and much of it is insightful and useful. The pessimism of some of it is surely warranted. But then: 'Opposition to restructuring is made to appear as extremism [agreed], the very hope of resistance becomes tinged with the absurd [unfortunately true]. Marxism is equated only with totalitarianism [yes, we bitterly recognize that one]; radical feminism becomes the destruction of the family' (p. 74). What? Are these supposed to be equivalent statements? Even if the destruction of the family is a misreading of US radical feminism, is it to be equated with totalitarianism? Or even extremism? There are many feminists, including this one, who would not be unhappy to see the end of 'the family' in its current form (though that is not the same as arguing for its 'destruction').

The characterization of modernism mainly in relation to modes of production is paralleled by an unusual definition of postmodernism. Soja produces a carefully modulated argument here, and is careful too, as we shall see later, in stating his own relation to the wider projects of postmodernism, but in the end the most significant axis of his definition seems to be based around the importance of space. This leads to what seem to me to be some unexpected results. Both Harvey and Mandel turn out to be postmodernists, for instance. And, although the arguments in the chapters on Los Angeles do not establish how or why space is more important now, the arguments about the ontological significance of space

(which are very interesting) are general ones: they are not specific to the recent period. But apart from these apparent confusions there is a deeper issue, for the postmodern questioning of modernism has involved far more than that. Among other things it has challenged the existence of a single coherent narrative of a causal structure to which everything can be related, it has challenged the authority of the single author or viewer,⁵ and it has challenged the notion of a single universal subject, constructed – usually with blithe unintentionality – in the shape of a white western male heterosexual. In particular, it has been related to, though it is not equivalent to, the feminist critiques of modernism (see, among many writings in this area, Nicholson, 1990). None of this receives any attention.

Now, a number of people have already pointed out that *Postmodern Geographies* is, after all, a thoroughly *modern* text (for instance, see Dear, 1990; Gregory, 1990). Moreover, to be fair to Soja it should also be pointed out that he himself explicitly *disclaims* any intention to be thoroughly *postmodern* (p. 5). None the less, he also says that he does now feel comfortable with postmodernism's 'intentional announcement of a possibly epochal transition *in both critical thought and material life*' (p. 5, my emphasis). Moreover, some of his reticence about postmodernism seems, in my view quite legitimately, to come from its frequent abandonment of any progressive project other than multiplicity. But, given this, it is possible to make use of some of the changes in critical thought (including some of the uncomfortably searching questions posed by postmodernism) both to address the ways in which modernism was also profoundly flawed and to retain a position of political commitment. Yet there is here no recognition that modernism was or is profoundly patriarchal (for instance) nor that there are possible alternatives which can go some way to addressing the central dilemmas of modernism without leaving us floating in an apolitical void. Perhaps the strongest case for an alternative of this sort has been made by feminists (for instance, see Mascia-Lees et al., 1989).

That arguments such as these have not been taken on board is evidenced in Soja's treatment of his central concepts of space and place. The chapters on Los Angeles are crucial here. They are innovative and fun, and they reveal some worthwhile insights (although they do not seem to do any more in the end than move from the socio-economic to the spatial. It is unclear how, in the real content of the relation they posit between the social and the spatial they are distinct from much previous writing, or are an exemplification of the theoretical propositions laid out in the early part of the book). But they are designed in a particular way. They are very much long-distance views, overviews (literally, from a height, whether it be from the air or from City Hall).

This raises two issues. First, this is very much a visual approach, and in

modernism, vision was systematically and symptomatically prioritized over other senses. It has been argued to be the sense which allows most mastery; in part deriving from the very detachment which it allows and requires. And second this detachment, and the authority of the viewer which it helps to construct, is underscored in *Postmodern Geographies* by the very vantage points which Soja chooses to look from. The question of how one presents spaces, places and local cultures is a complex and unresolved one, or certainly that is true of how to do it democratically. The stance which Soja adopts is similar to that from which he writes his history. But such a stance ignores the major debates about the difficulties of such an approach. The work of Clifford and others has already been referred to. The collection by Clifford and Marcus (1986) is precisely concerned with how one constructs a text adequately to take account of the problems both of what he (Clifford) calls 'visualism' and of the recognition and reporting of distinct views and interpretations which are not simply absorbed into and re-presented by the 'author'. These writers, and others in the same vein, have in turn been criticized by feminists on a number of grounds.⁶ for the degree to which the complexity of the text can lead to such obscurity that few can understand; for the lack of recognition that they still remain unquestionably 'the authors'; for the introspective self-regard which some postmodern strategies can produce among anthropologists themselves; perhaps most of all, and which is related to commitment, for a lack of regard to the question of whom they are speaking *for*. So these issues are complex and certainly unresolved. But they do, none the less, have to be faced. At the very end of 'Taking Los Angeles apart', in the Afterwords, Soja himself says 'I have been looking at Los Angeles from different points of view' (p. 247), but he hasn't, at least not in the way in which many feminist or postmodernist arguments would have us do. The views are all quite clearly his. He argues that 'Totalizing visions, attractive though they may be, can never capture all the meanings and significations of the urban . . . There are too many *auteurs* to identify' (p. 247). Yet, in spite of his best intentions, this is what he has produced. Too few *auteurs*, too much *hauteur*!

Exclusively masculine modernism

Blue Velvet and Blade Runner

Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* is also, like *Postmodern Geographies*, and especially given the intrinsic difficulty of the argument it is developing, a major achievement.

But here again, reading it as a feminist, I was troubled. In some ways it is difficult to know where to get into this argument, partly because the book is such a seamless whole and partly because the main problem is precisely one of absence.

The absence is that of other points of view. Whereas Soja's ventures into postmodernism at least provoke him into wrestling with the necessity of recognizing the existence of a multiplicity of 'auteurs', Harvey's modernism is constructed (or perhaps I should say unreconstructed) around an assumed universal whose particular characteristics are not even recognized. Women, for instance, do not figure in the development of the argument, and neither does the possibility of feminist readings of the issues under consideration. The same could be said of other voices currently subordinated in this society and its dominant lines of intellectual debate. The issue is not confined to feminism. Nor is it that there should be a few paragraphs here and there on 'women, ethnic minorities, etc'. It is that the dominant view is assumed to be the universal, and that view is white, male, heterosexual, western.

The analyses of film are symptomatic. Of David Lynch's film *Blue Velvet*, Harvey writes:

In the more postmodernist format of the contemporary cinema we find, in a film like *Blue Velvet*, the central character revolving between two quite incongruous worlds – that of a conventional 1950s small-town America with its high school, drugstore culture, and a bizarre, violent, sex-crazed underworld of drugs, dementia, and sexual perversion. It seems impossible that these two worlds should exist in the same space, and the central character moves between them, unsure which is the true reality, until the two worlds collide in a terrible denouement. (p. 48)

This is inadequate on a number of grounds. First, in what sense is this an *incongruous* juxtaposition of worlds? Rather than it seeming 'impossible that these two worlds should exist in the same space', they are in fact necessary to each other; they are mutually constitutive, mutually dependent. Male violence, for instance, is a large part of what maintains the institution of marriage and its variants in contemporary society (see Valentine, 1989) and 'monogamy' has frequently been upheld by its negation, by outside interests, whether these took the form of nineteenth-century prostitution for the male, or the more 'egalitarian' (?) something-on-the-side more typical of today's professional middle classes. Prurience is one of the requirements for the existence of pornography. The film makes this mutuality clear itself in a jokey way when at the end it returns to the primary colours, white fences, and nodding flowers of small-town

USA with its waving, smiling, fireman with no fires to put out (is this really any less 'bizarre' than the other world?), and the robin on the window sill (over which they all coo) has in its beak a writhing bug, tortured in the midst of the rural idyll, and necessarily so in order that the robin may live. The question is not the existence of the underside, but whether or not we see it.

However, the meaning of a text is almost always a site of contestation or at least of implicit disagreement (Denzin, 1988; Grossberg, 1986). And so it is with *Blue Velvet*. Indeed, in the case of this film the debate has been explicit and extensive, particularly given Lynch's own admirable refusal to be categorized into any particular genre (for instance see Rabkin, 1986). It is therefore curious that Harvey does not refer to this. In contrast to Harvey's interpretation, Lynch himself has said, for instance:

'*Blue Velvet* is a trip beneath the surface of a small American town' (in Chute, 1986, p. 32)

(no intimations of incongruity here) and:

It's like saying that once you've discovered there are heroin addicts in the world and they're murdering people to get money, can you be happy? It is a tricky question. Real ignorance is bliss. That's what *Blue Velvet* is about. (Rabkin, 1986, p. 55)

Among the other possible interpretations of the film are feminist ones. The film is not just about the two sides of US (etc.) culture; but, as Lynch has himself said,

It's also a probe into the subconscious or a place where you face things that you don't normally face. (Chute, 1986, p. 32)

In this regard, Harvey's characterization, in neutral fashion, of 'the central character' fails to catch a crucial, and necessary, fact. This is a *gendered* central character, and it is male. The two worlds are indeed one, and they are two sides of masculine identity. *Blue Velvet*

operates with a series of simplistic oppositions – pretty-pretty suburbia versus inner-city decay, night versus day, virginal romance versus sadistic sex, purity and horror, and so on. As Jeff makes his Oedipal journey into the underworld, in this cartoon psychoanalytic drama, it soon becomes clear that these two versions of masculinity, the dark and the light, are really two sides of the same coin. (Moore, 1988, p. 187)

What the film is about, here, is 'masculinity having to face up to its darker side' (ibid., p. 187).

It is not casually the fact, nor accidental, that the central character is

male (and heterosexual). For, moreover, the two worlds, or sides of masculinity, are crucially represented in the film by – guess what – women. There is Sandy, of the suburban appearance of health and order (although Lynch is true to his theme again and even she has spots under the make-up), and there is Dorothy, of the world of wild sexuality and violence, the kind of thing they speak of in the suburbs, if at all, as disgusting. Woman stands as choices for men; as their Other. Their function is to help some man find his identity. As Moore (1988) points out in her article ‘Getting a bit of the Other – the pimps of postmodernism’, this is a characteristic which runs through much of postmodernism, from its initiating theorists (Lacan et al.), through Baudrillard (at times quite laughably so – see his writing on New York in *America* [1988]), to film: ‘the world of the feminine becomes a way of men exploring, rejecting or reconstructing their masculinity, of “getting a bit of the other” at the expense of women’ (pp. 187–8).

Further, the corollary of this is that women themselves are contained within one or the other of the alternative categories; they themselves have no option (Denzin, 1988; Gledhill, 1978). It is not just that *Blue Velvet* presents a world which denigrates women (McGuigan and Huck, 1986 – and I would argue that this is a problem not of the film, which is restrained in its portrayal, but of the world it is depicting), but that it makes the postmodern message of the film, the one drawn out by Harvey, exclusive to men.

Finally, even the postmodernists actually cannot face up to it. ‘Although the insecurity of identity that these films offer is pleasurable, it can also be unsettling if security is not restored by the end of the film’ (Moore, p. 188). Jeff settles down with Sandy; he is also in some measure instrumental in what he (though not necessarily she) would see as the ‘saving’ of Dorothy (that old male thing about their individual, special, relation to women of the *demi-monde*). The good thing about *Blue Velvet* is that it does not let us/you/him off the hook. The robin on the window sill is still torturing the beetle. Denzin (1988) argues that all this may reflect the contradictoriness of these postmodern times, but also, perhaps more acutely, observes:

It seems that postmodern individuals want films like *Blue Velvet* for in them they can have their sex, their myths, their violence and their politics, all at the same time. (p. 472)

And safely, one might add, since it’s all in a movie. But even then, ‘the Other’ cannot be *too* challenging, at least not to the supposed universal – the white, heterosexual male. While, as we have seen:

This 'getting a bit of the other' seems . . . to depend on women as the gateway to the other world . . .

and while it is also true that

increasingly black people and black culture is [sic] used to signify something radically different,

on the other hand,

Some kinds of 'otherness' remain just too threatening to be colonised in this manner – homosexuality for example seems to be seen as far too disturbing and difficult to offer this kind of escapism. (Moore, 1988, p. 186)

But Harvey misses all this. Had he wanted, this would have been an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the problems for feminism of current actually existing postmodernism. But if the problem of the postmodernists is that while celebrating the existence of the Other most of us are consigned to being means of constructing the identity of white, heterosexual men, the problem of the modernists is that they do not see us, really, at all. Or, if they do, it is as somehow deviations from the norm, troubling exceptions to the(ir) rule.

And so it is with Harvey. As Denzin (1988) points out, the hegemonic reading of *Blue Velvet* (by the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, *Christian Century*, *National Review*, *Playboy*, etc.) did not analyse these gender issues in the film. Neither does Harvey; and for classically modernist reasons. In these readings of the movie, masculinity is not in question. The male is not even recognized to be gendered. He is the universal.

But it is perhaps unfair to concentrate too much on the analysis of this particular film. Harvey's reference to it was after all quite a brief one, and it occurred in the context of a wider discussion. Let us look, then, at one of the more extended analyses of film which are to be found towards the end of the book and to which a whole chapter (ch. 18) is devoted. Let us take the case of *Blade Runner*. One of the key threads in this movie is the struggle by the female replicant Rachel to prove that she is not a replicant. However, in order to do this, and thereby to survive, replicants have to prove a history, and their relationship to it; they must, most crucially, enter and establish a place in the symbolic order. And the symbolic order used in *Blade Runner* is that of Freud. So Harvey, drawing on this analysis of the film, which as he says is that of Giuliana Bruno (1987), describes Rachel's (ultimately successful) attempt at survival through the establishment of a (human) identity. As he writes,

But she can re-enter the symbolic realm of a truly human society only by acknowledging the overwhelming power of the Oedipal figure, the father . . . In submitting to Deckard (trusting him, deferring to him, and ultimately submitting to him physically), she learns the meaning of human love and the essence of ordinary sociality. In killing the replicant Leon as he is about to kill Deckard, she provides the ultimate evidence of the capacity to act as Deckard's woman. (1989, p. 312)

There are a number of points to be made here. First of all, Harvey does not comment on the particularity of this process of a replicant finding an identity as a woman. She learns the meaning of love through submission (Harvey's word) to a man; she establishes an identity – as 'Deckard's woman'. It is not an appetising prospect, and one wonders whether, if survival had not been dependent on it, she would have bothered. This point is a more significant one than it perhaps sounds in that one of the things which Harvey misses is that Rachel is not just establishing *an* identity, she is establishing a sexual and specifically a *female*, identity. In Bruno's terms 'To survive for a time, the android has to accept the fact of sexual difference, the sexual identity which the entry into language requires' (1987, p. 71).

It is interesting, and surely significant, moreover, that it is precisely and only at this point that Harvey disagrees with Bruno (nor, possibly, is it insignificant that he talks of Bruno as 'he' and calls her Giuliano!). Bruno writes:

Of all the replicants, only one, Rachel, succeeds in making the journey. She assumes a sexual identity, becomes a woman, and loves a man . . . Rachel accepts the paternal figure and follows the path to a 'normal', adult, female, sexuality: she identifies her sex by first acknowledging the power of the other, the father, a man. But the leader of the replicants, Roy Batty, refuses the symbolic castration which is necessary to enter the symbolic order. (1987, p. 71)

It is precisely this contrast with which Harvey disagrees. He puts Roy's refusal simply down to the fact that survival in his case is unlikely anyway. I do not know which interpretation is more valid in relation to the film, but it is interesting that this disagreement precisely underlines Harvey's unwillingness to engage on the terrain of sexual identity. For that, of course, might further undermine the supposed universality of one fraction of humanity, the heterosexual male.

This disagreement with Bruno, moreover, is linked back to the earlier lack of comment on the manner of Rachel's acquisition of an identity. Bruno makes it clear that what is involved is submission, and that some

may go along with it, and others may refuse. Although he recognizes submission, it is not seen as so problematical a process by Harvey, and later he clearly believes that Rachel really does fall in love with Deckard. Thus, for instance, the possibility that she might be feigning, in order to survive, does not seem to occur to him. Yet women have often had to resort to feigning, in various ways, and often with far less at stake than survival (as another recent movie *When Harry Met Sally* recently pointed out). Moreover, not only does Harvey believe that Rachel really falls for Deckard, but he is disappointed because

The strongest social bond between Deckard and the replicants in revolt – the fact that they are both controlled and enslaved by a dominant corporate power – never generates the slightest hint that a coalition of the oppressed might be forged between them. (1989, p. 313)

Now that quite took my breath away. On page 312 we are reading all this about Rachel having to submit to Deckard, and on page 313 we are wondering why she does not enter into an alliance with him. The wider political implications of this kind of male-based analysis have recently been analysed by Hart (1989), and I shall return to the point in a later section. But wishing for coalitions of the oppressed without first analysing the contradictions and power relations within those potential coalitions is to court political failure.

What illustrations illustrate

In the chapter on postmodernism in part I of *The Condition of Postmodernity* there are five pictorial illustrations. Every one of them is of a woman, in every case a naked woman. Harvey makes no comment on this.

His commentaries ponder the superimposition of ontologically different worlds, or the difference between Manet and Rauschenberg, but they are oblivious to what is being represented, how it is being represented and from whose point of view, and the political effects of such representations. David Salle's *Tight as Houses* is the most evident case of this, where Harvey gives no indication that he has grasped the simple pun of the title and its clearly sexist content. Whose gaze is this painting painted from and for? Who could get the 'joke'? The painting is treated with deadly seriousness by Harvey, who cites Taylor (1987) on how it is a collage bringing together 'incompatible source materials as an alternative to choosing between them' (Harvey, p. 49). My own response, as someone who was potentially *in* that picture, and who saw it with completely different eyes, was: 'Here we go, another pretentious male artist who still thinks naked

women are naughty'. Any deeper meaning in the picture (though it was hardly intellectually startling when revealed) was entirely obliterated, from my reading position, by the sexism of the image used to convey it.⁷ The painting assumes a complicit male viewer. For women, in contrast, the position is different: 'to look at and enjoy the sites of patriarchal culture we women must become nominal transvestites. We must assume a masculine position or masochistically enjoy the sight of woman's humiliation' (Pollock, 1988, p. 85).

To push this issue of positionality further, one can consider the interpretation of those who figure in the illustrations. Try, for instance, looking at Harvey's plates 1.7 and 1.8 (Titian's *Venus d'Urbino* and Manet's *Olympia* – dubbed 'seminal' by Harvey) while reading the following:

I shall be represented analytically and hung
in great museums. The bourgeoisie will coo
at such an image of a river-whore. They call it Art.

Maybe. He is concerned with volume, space.
I with the next meal . . .

. . . It makes me laugh. His name
is Georges. They tell me he's a genius.
There are times he does not concentrate
and stiffens for my warmth.

(Duffy 'Standing Female Nude', 1985)

But this is a first response, drawn from the anger I felt on first reading the chapter. Let us, therefore, look more seriously. For apart from this very evident level of sexism in the selection and use of illustrations, there is a deeper problem. By not getting to grips with the feminist analyses and critiques of modernism, Harvey both misses an important aspect of its character and, in consequence, fails fully to understand the nature of the criticisms directed against it. Moreover, this whole feminist debate centrally relates to Harvey's core concerns – modernism, postmodernism, space and politics.

It is useful to begin this argument from Manet, who is widely recognized as being one of the founders of modernism in painting. In his analyses of Manet, Harvey follows Crimp (1985), particularly in the comparisons with Titian and with Rauschenberg. Indeed, it is presumably because he is drawing on Crimp's analysis that Harvey selects that particular Rauschenberg (another voyeuristic view of a woman – *Persimmon*) rather than any other combine of his which could be drawn on to make the same points (about collage, reproduction, juxtaposition and unrelatedness) – see, for

instance, Hewison (1990). Yet the analysis of Manet's *Olympia* is curiously limited. Neither it, nor the wider consideration of 'time-space compression and the rise of modernism as a cultural force' (ch. 16), analyse a theme which should be central to Harvey's project – the socio-political implications of the spatial organization of the painting itself and of the modernist art of which it is exemplary. This is all the more curious because the article which follows Crimp's in the Foster collection is on precisely this subject. It is called 'The discourse of others; feminists and postmodernism' (Owens, 1985), and it is not referred to by Harvey.

It is now a well-established argument, from feminists but not only from feminists, that modernism both privileged vision over the other senses and established a *way* of seeing from the point of view of an authoritative, privileged, and male, position (Irigaray, 1978; Owens, 1985; Pollock, 1988).⁸ The privileging of vision impoverishes us through deprivation of other forms of sensory perception. 'In our culture, the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing, has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations . . . the moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality' (Irigaray, 1978, p. 50). But, and more important from the point of view of the argument here, the reason for the privileging of vision is precisely its supposed detachment. Such detachment, of course, can have its advantages, but it is also necessarily a 'detached' view from a particular point of view. Detached does not here mean disinterested. One of the aims of some postmodern artists has been precisely to investigate the interests modernist detachment serves. And, in a widely quoted passage, Irigaray has pointed out that 'investment in the look is not privileged in women as in men. More than the other senses, the eye objectifies and masters' (1978, p. 50). And in the illustrations which Harvey has selected the patriarchal content is doubled by the fact that not only do we have here the classic modernist male authoritative gaze but it is looking at – very particular representations of – women.

Now, as Pollock (1988) points out, 'it is a striking fact that many of the canonical works held up as the founding monuments of modern art treat precisely with this area, sexuality, and this form of it, commercial exchange'; 'it is normal to see women's bodies as the territory across which men artists claim their modernity'.⁹ And, she goes on, 'we must enquire why the territory of modernism so often is a way of dealing with masculine sexuality and its sign, the bodies of women – why the nude, the brothel, the bar? What relation is there between sexuality, modernity and modernism?' (p. 54; see also Duncan, 1990).¹⁰ Chadwick (1990) and others have made the same point, Chadwick talking of 'the extent to which the major paintings . . . associated with the development of modern art wrest their formal and stylistic innovations from an erotically based assault on the female form' (p. 266).

There are many lines of analysis, argument and debate which run from here. There is the issue of what this form of representation does to women, how it actively produces conceptualizations of what is feminine and what is masculine, how it influences the form of gender relations, how it thereby contributes to the physical and social circumscribing of women's lives (Cowie, 1978; Pollock, 1988). For, *contra* the overall force of Harvey's argument, which itself belies occasional individual statements of resistance to economism, representation is not merely reflection; it is itself an active force in moulding social relations and social understanding.

But there is also the issue of what it means to ignore these debates about modernism and its ways of seeing. For the implications are not 'confined' to the 'specific' and 'local' issue of feminism. Opposition to this authoritarian gaze, and to the claims it makes, is central to the critique of modernism made by some postmodernists. It is, moreover, a crucial point at which issues about theorizing, about the validity of 'master narratives' and so forth relate most intimately to issues concerning spatial organization. There has, further, been substantial work in this area amongst cultural geographers. The writing of Cosgrove (1984) on the use and implications of perspective in the concept of landscape is an obvious example. By not taking account of the feminist literature, therefore, a whole line of argument central to the relationship between modernity, space, and social relations has been closed off.

'Other' spaces of modernism

The spaces of modernism which are mostly celebrated are the public spaces of the city. It was in the rapidly growing western cities, especially Paris, that modernism was born. And the standard literature from Baudelaire onwards is replete with descriptions of boulevards and cafés, of fleeting, passing glances and of the cherished anonymity of the crowd. The spatial and social reorganization, and flourishing, of urban life was an essential condition for the birth of the new era. But that city was also gendered. Moreover, it was gendered in ways which relate directly to spatial organization.

First, it was gendered in the very general sense of the distinction between the public and the private (Wolff, 1985). This period of the mid-nineteenth century was a crucial one in the development of the notion of 'the separation of spheres' and the confinement of women, ideologically if not for all women in practice, to the 'private' sphere of the suburbs and the home (Davidoff and Hall, 1983; Hall, 1981). The public city which is celebrated in the enthusiastic descriptions of the dawn of modernism was a city for men. The boulevards and cafés, and still more the bars and

brothels, were for men – the women who did go there were for male consumption. Nineteenth-century Paris presented very different impressions and possibilities for men and for women.¹¹ Thus Pollock (1988), in thinking through the relation between ‘space and social processes’ (her terms) in relation to art history, argues that one possible approach might lie ‘in considering not only the spaces represented, or the spaces of the representation, but the social spaces from which the representation is made and its reciprocal positionalities’ (p. 66).

But the social spaces from which the generally cited central cultural products of modernism were made were the public spaces of the city – the spaces of men. This has a number of implications. First, many of the paintings (even, or perhaps especially, those of women) were set in places where women of the same class as the painter simply could not go. Thus, to pick up again the theme of *Olympia*, Pollock discussing the picture alongside that of the barmaid in Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergères* asks:

How can a woman relate to the viewing positions proposed by either of these paintings? Can a woman be offered, in order to be denied, imaginary possession of Olympia or the barmaid? Would a woman of Manet’s class have a familiarity with either of these spaces and its exchanges which could be evoked so that the painting’s modernist job of negation and disruption could be effective? . . . Would it enter her head as a site of modernity as she experienced it? (1988, pp. 54–5; see also Morgan, 1990)

Indeed, could a woman experience modernity, defined in this way, at all?

Second, one of the key figures embodying the experience of this definition of modernity is the *flâneur*, the stroller in the crowd, observing but not observed. But the *flâneur* is irretrievably male. As Wolff (1985) has argued, the *flâneuse* was an impossibility. In part this is so because ‘respectable’ women simply could not wander around the streets and parks alone. (This was for reasons of socially constructed ‘propriety’, but for those ‘non-respectable’ women who did roam the public spaces movement would still be effectively restricted by the threat of male violence.) In part, the notion of a *flâneuse* is impossible precisely because of the one-way-ness and the directionality of the gaze. *Flâneurs* observed others; they were not observed themselves. And, for reasons which link together the debate on perspective and the spatial organization of painting, and most women’s exclusion from the public sphere, the modern gaze belonged (belongs?) to men.¹²

Third, moreover, and reinforcing all of this, the *flâneur*’s gaze was frequently erotic. And woman was, and was *only*, the object of this gaze. Baudelaire’s embarrassingly awful views on this are probably now too well

known to need citing again.¹³ But once again, the subject, the author, of the whole performance is – not by chance but necessarily in its very construction – male.

What all this together implies is that the experience of modernism/modernity as it is customarily recorded, the production of what are customarily assumed to be its major cultural artefacts, and even its customary definition, are all constructed on and are constructive of particular forms of gender relations and definitions of masculinity and of what it means to be a woman. This is not ('just') to say that modernism was or is patriarchal (this would hardly be news, nor differentiate it from many other periods in history); it is to say that it is not possible fully to understand modernism without taking account of this. To return more directly to Harvey, modernism is about more than a particular articulation of the power relations of time, space and money. Harvey has produced a fascinating, if arguably economic, exploration of the relation between the definition, production and experience of space, on the one hand, and modes of production and class formation, on the other. But it completely misses other ways, other power relations, in which space is also structured and experienced. Harvey mentions none of the arguments which have been addressed in this section. He discusses suburbanization at a number of points, but does not mention the separation of spheres. Or again, he discusses how Frédéric Moreau, hero of Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale*, 'glides in and out of the differentiated spaces of the city, with the same sort of ease that money and commodities change hands. The whole narrative structure of the book likewise gets lost in perpetual postponements of decisions precisely because Frédéric has enough inherited money to enjoy the luxury of not deciding'. Comments Harvey: 'it was the possession of money that allowed the present to slip through Frédéric's grasp, while opening social space to casual penetration. Evidently, time, space and money could be invested with rather different significances, depending upon the conditions and possibilities of trade-off between them' (pp. 263–4). Well, yes, nearly but not quite. Frédéric, as he casually penetrated these social spaces, did have another little advantage in life too.

As Pollock (1988, p. 5) has very persuasively argued:

A feminist historical materialism does not ... substitute gender for class but deciphers the intricate interdependence of class and gender, as well as race, in all forms of historical practice. None the less there is a strategic priority in insisting upon recognition of gender power and of sexuality as historical forces of significance as great as any of the other matrices privileged in Marxism or other forms of social history or cultural analysis ... a feminist analysis of the founding conditions of modernism in the

gendered and eroticized terrain of the modern city directly challenges an authoritative social historical account which categorically refuses feminism as a necessary corollary.

The implications of ignoring feminist analyses go beyond the 'local' issue of gender relations.

Moreover, there is a further point, which can be explored by inquiring what happened to women who were painting pictures in and of this period. The point is not that there were some and that they are rarely considered by male art historians and other commentators, though this is true (see Chadwick, 1990). The point is, not that women painted, but that what they painted and the way they painted was different. This occurs in a number of ways, each to do with the relation between space and social organization. First, there is the fact that, as would be expected from the preceding discussion, the paintings are of different places/spaces from those of men. They are not of brothels, or of the apparently endless fascination of the *folies*, they are not of backstage at the theatre; they are much more frequently of the domestic sphere, of balconies and gardens, and, when they move outside, the parts of the public sphere they deal with (a box at the theatre, a park) are distinct from the main preoccupations of male painters. Second, however, the spatial organization of the paintings themselves is sometimes also distinct. Thus, for example, Pollock (1988) points to the fact that they may be organized in such a way that the viewer is drawn more into the picture itself, reducing the feeling of the detachment of the spectator, and reducing also thereby the authority of the spectator's gaze. Moreover, this refocusing is also sometimes brought about by a clear disruption of standard Enlightenment notions of perspective; this is a different way of representing space. Last, it is arguable that this in turn may bring back 'into the picture' the senses other than vision, thus deprioritizing at least a little vision in relation to the other senses and thereby challenging one of the central tenets of modernism-as-it-is-normally-described.

And that extended hyphenation is, of course, the point. It has been argued by a number of women that the usual view of modernism, and perhaps most specifically of its art, is frequently only a partial conception of modernity (for instance, see Wolff, 1985). If that is true of many of the male 'authorities' on the subject, it is *a fortiori* the case with Harvey who, through his whole argument (and this is a more general concern about the discussion) draws only on mainstream (or what was to become mainstream) culture, whether this be gallery art, famous architects, or big-budget movies. This leads to an unnecessarily monolithic view of the modernist period; it shifts the definition of what it was and, by missing

out the voices on the margins and in the interstices of what was accepted, it also misses the full force of the critique which those voices, among them feminists, were making of the modernism he does discuss.¹⁴

All this becomes fully apparent in another way when Harvey considers the work of Cindy Sherman. She is postmodern and female. Harvey clearly does not like what she does and is more than a little disturbed by it. He describes visiting an exhibition of her photographs:

The photographs depict seemingly different women drawn from many walks of life. It takes a little while to realize, with a certain shock, that these are portraits of the same woman in different guises. Only the catalogue tells you that it is the artist herself who is that woman. The parallel with Raban's insistence upon the plasticity of human personality through the malleability of appearances and surfaces is striking, as is the self-referential positioning of the authors to themselves as subjects. Cindy Sherman is considered a major figure in the postmodern movement. (p. 7)

There is a whole host of problems here. Later, Harvey refers to Sherman and a range of other postmodernists in a discussion of the current crisis of representation. That there *is* such a crisis is not in doubt. But Harvey here (p. 322) and throughout the book identifies the cause of this crisis as 'the experience of time-space compression in recent years, under the pressures of the turn to more flexible modes of accumulation' (p. 322).¹⁵ After all the feminist debate about representation, to which I have just referred, and the directly political critique of modernist representation, it is surely inadequate to put the whole crisis down to time-space compression and flexible accumulation. There was *political* and a specifically feminist criticism of the mode of representation which was dominant prior to the crisis. Much of this postmodern work is thus not just part of a crisis, it is also a social comment. Thus when Harvey writes: 'The interest in Cindy Sherman's photographs (or any postmodern novel for that matter) is that they focus on masks without commenting directly on social meanings other than on the activity of masking itself' (p. 101), he is missing much of the point.¹⁶ Deutsche (1990) in her review of Harvey and Soja has pointed out very clearly that much postmodern art has concerned itself with images precisely to reveal their social importance as sites where meanings, and subjects, are produced. Thus, 'to the extent that this is its goal, postmodernism's concentration on images is emphatically *not* a turn away from, but rather toward, the social' (p. 23). And in this context she refers specifically to the work of Sherman. Crimp (1982) too, whom Harvey cites elsewhere, argues that what Sherman is doing is attacking 'auteurism'.

Moreover, it is not just a general socio-political point which can be drawn from Sherman's photographs, but a specifically feminist one. Harvey says he was shocked to find that all these different images were of 'the same woman'. It is an unintended admission, for that is precisely the effect they are supposed to have on the patriarchal viewer. Thus Owens comments that they

reflect back at the viewer his own desire (and the spectator posited by this work is invariably male) – specifically the masculine desire to fix the woman in a stable and stabilizing identity. But this is precisely what Sherman's work denies: for while her photographs are always self-portraits, in them the artist never appears to be the same . . . while Sherman may pose as a pin-up, she still cannot be pinned down. (1985, p. 75)

It is, precisely, a way of disrupting the normally dominant pleasures of the patriarchal visual field.

Moreover, maybe she *is* all of these things, *and* they are masks. Sherman's work reveals how socially constructed and how unstable 'gender' is and how, indeed, the last few centuries of western culture has produced a 'femininity' which does indeed have a lot to do with self-presentation, in masks for others, in masquerade (Chadwick, 1990, pp. 358–9; Owens, 1985, p. 75).

Finally, Harvey seems to object particularly to the fact that Sherman took these pictures of herself ('the self-referential positioning of the authors to themselves as subjects'). Would it have been less disturbing had a man taken an authoritative picture of this woman? – like Manet painting Olympia, perhaps?¹⁷

Gender, then, is a determining factor in cultural production. It must be so also in relation to its interpretation. We have seen this, in this section, in specific relation to modernism. At the end of *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Harvey argues for a recuperation of one form of modernism – Marxism. He recognizes, too, that it must be reworked in order to treat more satisfactorily of difference and 'otherness', and that it is not enough simply to add categories on: they should be present in the analysis from the beginning. Yet in his own analysis of modernism and postmodernism one of the most significant of those 'differences' – that which revolves around gender – is absent.

Politics – and academe

I have great sympathy with the overall projects of both these books. Soja is struggling to be postmodern, but really remaining in many ways

modern; Harvey is quite clearly for modernism but wanting, he says, to change it in ways which will respond to certain inadequacies. I, too, would like to retain strong aspects of what characterizes the modernist project, most particularly its commitment to change, hopefully progressive; I also agree strongly with Harvey's defence of much of what has been achieved in its name. But it is necessary also to recognize the inadequacies of the modernist project in its dominant form. One problem of both these books is that they neither fully recognize the issues nor adequately respond to them. The answers which postmodernism has so far provided may well be mistaken, but the challenges it poses must surely be addressed.

Moreover, one stream of thought which has been raising many of the same issues for far longer, which has been debating a set of answers which do not fall into the traps of postmodernism, which do not disintegrate into localism (in Lyotard's sense, which has nothing to do with the specifically geographical – see Massey, 1991), which do not abandon theories which have sufficient scope to deal with issues such as gender and class, which are historical and sensitive to differentiation . . . is feminism. The list of characteristics just mentioned is taken from Fraser and Nicholson (1988), but many others have been debating similar issues. Other than contributions already mentioned there are, for instance, Flax (1986), Harding (1986, 1987 and many others), Haraway (1983), Jardine (1985) and Morris (1988).

This literature is not mentioned by Soja or Harvey. Not one of the above authors is mentioned by either of them.¹⁸ At a number of points in this paper it has been noted that the potential contributions of feminism have simply been ignored. This is perhaps particularly glaring because so many feminists have written on the issues of space and society which are central to the debate in hand. Why, then, are they not considered? Is it that many men feel they do not have to read the feminist literature? Is it seen as a 'specialism'? Harvey has said (1985) that he likes to think of himself as 'a restless analyst'. It is an attractive and appealing image. But maybe he has not been restless enough. It should not be acceptable that a large part of the central literature is simply missing from what sets out to be a comprehensive overview, and that whole lines of debate are simply ignored.

Fraser and Nicholson mention a number of other features which are potentially characteristic of a new mode of theorizing which is neither modern in the old sense nor postmodern in its usual style. The attention to cultural specificity and to differentiation within society and over time is developed into the statement that such theory 'would be non-universalist. When its focus became cross-cultural or transepochal, its mode of attention would be comparativist rather than universalizing, attuned to changes and contrasts instead of to "covering laws"' (1988,

p. 390–1). I have to say that I am uncertain about this in some ways. (These are confusing times and I think we should be open enough to admit that on some things we may remain undecided.) But this characterization of theory does contrast strongly with Harvey's. Harvey constantly runs together universalism and internationalism. But, often, they are absolutely not the same thing. Indeed in some ways they are potentially antagonistic to each other. A true internationalism is surely a non-starter without the prior recognition of diversity. And the 'universals' on which so much analysis is based are so often in fact quite particular; not universals at all, but white, male, western, heterosexual, what have you. The long attempt to force such universals down unwilling throats is now demonstrating its failure in part precisely by provoking the most reactionary forms of cultural specificity. 'Finally,' write Fraser and Nicholson,

postmodern-feminist theory would dispense with the idea of a subject of history. It would replace unitary notions of 'women' and 'feminine gender identity' with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation. (1988, p. 391)

Again, this is easier said than done. But in all kinds of ways, the approaches in the two books which have been discussed here show how poverty-stricken is the analysis, and how open to progressive political criticism is a failure even to wrestle with these problems, and their attendant possibilities. The question of 'authorship' seems to be central. White western men write academic texts and interpret the world for each other; and the universal author of history is understood to be a male, heterosexual and modernizing in the western image. So Harvey fails to understand what Sherman is saying precisely because it is about these things – author(ity), and feminism. Although he discusses perspectivism, for example, and its relation to individualism (for example p. 245) and the modernist 'aura' of the artist as producer (pp. 55 and 245), the full implications are not drawn out and explored. Yet those implications are political, in the widest sense of the word. As Deutsche concludes:

Postmodernists who problematize the image – artists like Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Silvia Kolbowski, Mary Kelly, Connie Hatch – reject such vanguard roles. They have been saying for years that, thanks to the recognition that representations are produced by *situated* – not universal – subjects, the world is not so easily mapped anymore. (1990, p. 23)

Feminists, as Pollock points out, 'have nothing to lose with the desecration of Genius. The individualism of which the artist is a prime symbol is gender exclusive' (1988, p. 11).

There are implications also, therefore, for the way we are, and could be, as academics. There are huge questions being raised, in parts of geography, in anthropology and elsewhere, about our role as interpreters of the world. Yet neither of these books addresses these questions. There are issues about the hierarchies within our own fields, and whether we really need to take ourselves *quite* so seriously. *The V-Girls* poke fun at the way we can get out of control. Their subject in this sketch is . . .

Manet's Olympia: posed and skirted

The panel assembles behind a cloth-covered table, a water pitcher, plastic glasses, and sits down. Five dark-haired women, probably in their mid to late twenties: Martha Baer, Jessica Chalmers, Erin Cramer, Andrea Fraser, Marianne Weems. Four wear tailored suits, heavy-framed glasses: the signifiers of High Seriousness. It is time for a panel discussion on 'Manet's Olympia: Posed and Skirted.'

The moderator, fluttery and apologetic, wears a dress.

⋮

MW: I will open with a note Manet penned just as he began *Olympia* to M. Moron, a florist located a few blocks from his studio.

Monsieur Moron,

I cannot stand the geraniums. Please send something pink, and less expensive.

Yours sincerely,

Edouard Manet.

This telling reference to money, a worry throughout his life, is echoed in the repetition of the notes to follow.

⋮

MB: It wasn't until very recently, in 1983, that the art historian M.R. Frank made the staggering critical discovery regarding Manet's *Olympia* for which I think we will all be hereafter indebted. In his paper entitled 'Hidden Elements', Frank first noted that there was 'a black person in this painting'. Just two years later, in 1985, S.L. Park wrote 'and we can also see in the near background, just behind the nude, a black person.'

Since that time only one critic, C.M. Paine, has attempted to explicate the extreme belatedness of this discovery. Paine has argued that this tardiness on the part of *Olympia*'s critics follows directly from the fact that so few black people have actually *seen* the painting and that thus museum-goers most versed in this type of analysis have been scanty.

AF: In his May 11, 1865, letter to Manet, Charles Baudelaire wrote of *Olympia* and I quote: '... and the cat (is it a cat, really?) ...' In my paper today, I would like to return to this fundamental question.

Among the many interpretations of the cat in Manet's *Olympia*, the interpretation by Sir Finding of Hisownimage is here supported with further evidence.

(Grover, 1989, pp. 13–14)

Let me repeat, lest I be misunderstood. This is emphatically *not* to be anti-intellectual. (*The V-Girls* themselves are writers and teachers.) But it *is* to be anti the games of academe. What *The V-Girls* are criticizing are the power relations implicit in the transmission of knowledge and in our institutions of learning.

All this finds its reflection in the wider politics which these books advocate. Here too the difficulties of difference – perhaps, at its simplest, the fact of complexity – are simply erased by the steamroller of an analysis which insists that capital and labour (and in fact mainly capital, for neither book allows much space for resistance, even from labour) are all there is to it. Soja is the more reticent about setting out a political position, though it is implicit throughout and the quotation cited earlier demonstrated his conviction that what we should be fighting in the West is capitalism, and only capitalism, for via that the problems of sexism and racism would also be confronted. At one point he argues that: 'The political challenge for the postmodern left, as I see it, demands first a recognition and cogent interpretation of the dramatic and often confusing fourth modernization of capitalism' (p. 5). This is necessary, surely, but it is not enough (and though this is labelled 'first' we are not given any more). If there is one thing to be taken on board by the political and social shifts of recent decades it is that, unfortunately maybe, things are just not that simple.

Harvey is much more explicit about his politics. It is absolutely stated that everything must be subordinated to – just as, theoretically, it is reduced to – a question of class. Thus on p. 46 he is discussing ideas, such as Foucault's, which 'appeal to the various social movements that sprang into existence during the 1960s (feminists, gays, ethnic and religious groupings, regional autonomists, etc.)[!]. But, he argues, such movements leave open 'the question of the path whereby such localized struggles might add up to a progressive, rather than regressive, attack upon the central forms of capitalist exploitation and repression. Localized struggles ... have not generally had the effect of challenging capitalism ...' There are two major points here. First, in what sense, precisely, is feminism (to take the case under discussion in this paper) a 'local' struggle while class struggle, it is to be presumed, is 'general'? One can only argue such a

position if it is held that there are no patriarchal structures not reducible to class. Second, and consequently, why is there an assumption that what these 'local' struggles are fighting is capitalism? Surely what feminists are fighting is patriarchy. People, such as myself, may be both feminists and socialists and see themselves trying to struggle on both fronts (though sometimes with despair, as when reading passages such as these). One's identity, and the struggles we are engaged in, are far more multifaceted than Harvey's position is capable of conceiving.

At the end of his book, Harvey pulls together his theoretical and his political positions, arguing for a further development of Marxist formulations. This, surely, is a positive step, and one which I would wholeheartedly support. But as it is spelled out it becomes clear that what this would mean in Harvey's formulation is continued subordination for all those people in parentheses, those who do not in their complex identities match the postulated, uncomplicated-because-unanalysed, universal. Thus, consider the following:

The importance of recuperating such aspects of social organization as race, gender, religion, within the overall frame of historical materialist enquiry (with its emphasis upon the power of money and capital circulation) and class politics (with its emphasis upon the unity of the emancipatory struggle) cannot be overestimated. (p. 355)

How to have your cake and eat it too! There are four comments. First, I am absolutely in favour of thinking through issues of gender 'within the overall frame of historical materialist enquiry'. Second, however, we have to be sure what that means. Materialism is far wider than an 'emphasis upon the power of money and capital circulation'. This is less materialism than economism; and it simply could not deal even with many of the gender issues raised earlier in this paper. Third, again yes – we need to think through ways of constructing 'the unity of the emancipatory struggle'; but, fourth, this emphatically cannot be achieved by forcing all struggles under 'the overall frame of ... class politics'. What Harvey's position means is a unity enforced through the tutelage of one group over others. As Hadjimichalis and Vaiou have recently written, in the context precisely of debates within our field,

In a contradictory way, by advocating 'unity' and ignoring divisions (theoretically, practically and prospectively) the left itself has contributed to deepening divisions ... 'Unity' must be gradually built up upon the articulation of differences and individual experiences. (1990, p. 21)

Yet even while he recognizes the need to construct alliances in the search for unity, Harvey forces everyone into one mould: 'The very possibility of a genuine rainbow coalition defines a unified politics which inevitably speaks the tacit language of class, because this is precisely what defines the common experience within the differences' (p. 358). Any on-the-ground experience of trying to build alliances would demonstrate the inadequacy of this view. There is here no understanding of the need to recognize conflicts (remember *Blade Runner*?) and complexity and to deal with them in their own right, as unities which are articulations of genuine and often contradictory differences.

Milton Keynes
published in 1991

Notes

- 1 But if modernist accounts such as Harvey's miss out resistance and political struggle, this is absolutely not to argue that the majority of postmodernists do the opposite. All those lists of dualist differences between modernism and postmodernism (or Fordism and post-Fordism) obscure the fact that an awful lot remains tediously the same. One of the problems of some postmodernism is its treatment of 'others' as titillating exotica and as primarily constituted, in effect, to affirm the identity of the central character. They are certainly only more rarely represented as active, and actively resisting (see next section; Bondi, 1990; Moore, 1988).
- 2 Gregory (1990) also makes this point, and analyses its effects, in relation to disciplines other than geography.
- 3 The critique of geography at that point was very much concerned with bringing in social processes as the explanation of spatial patterns. Various formulations of structural causality, including a structuralist Marxism, were important here. In that context, interestingly enough, introducing social process was emphatically not the same thing as introducing time/history. Indeed, Soja (p. 18) argues that structuralism has been 'one of the twentieth-century's most important avenues for the re-assertion of space in critical social theory'. This seems to me to be an equally problematic formulation. A 'configuration', in the terms in which Foucault and structuralism used it, may be synchronic; but that does not make it spatial. A structuralist perspective can of course be *used* to analyse both history and geography and to link the synchronic with the diachronic; but in some versions it might also be understood as challenging that very dichotomy.
- 4 To argue this is, in my view, absolutely not to be anti-Marxist, still less is it to be anti-materialist. The point is more that what we are offered in this analysis is a very unreconstructed Marxism.

- 5 This has already been pointed out in relation to the linear history in *Post-modern Geographies*, and it will be taken up again in later chapters.
- 6 Most obviously they are taken to task, as in 'mainstream' theory in a number of fields, for heralding now as major discoveries things which feminists have been saying for many years.
- 7 Interestingly, this sexism extends to the institutions of the art world as well as its practitioners as, argues Chadwick, there has been a reaction against postmodern pluralism. Thus: 'The pluralism of the 1970s has been viewed as a symptom of the disintegration of the set of practices ... through which Modernism was defined. By the late 1970s, a reaction against pluralism, and a backlash against women and minorities, could also be observed within the dominant institutions and discourses of the art world. Exhibitions celebrating the "return" to painting, and focusing on a new generation of male neoexpressionists – for example, David Salle, Julian Schnabel, and Francesco Clemente – were remarkable for their exclusion of virtually all women' (Chadwick, 1990, p. 347). It is also to be remarked that Harvey's selection of a postmodern painting is precisely by one of these artists, and from this period (1980).
- 8 In this context, it is surprising that Harvey does not even refer to the work of John Berger.
- 9 And looking at Salle's contribution one could make the same point, of course, about male *post-modern* artists.
- 10 Once again on references: this article by Pollock is about modernity and space, surely central to Harvey's concerns, yet he does not reference it – the full title is 'Modernity and the spaces of femininity'. She also discusses the presence of the black maid in Manet's painting.
- 11 Indeed, even if it produced a city for men in the ways enumerated, nineteenth-century urbanization was very important for women, especially for those wanting to live with other women. These impressions and possibilities also, of course, varied by class (see Pollock, 1985; and below), but I am assuming Harvey would readily accept this.
- 12 George Sand, determined to discover the streets of Paris for herself, had to dress up as a boy to do so (Wolff, 1985, p. 41).
- 13 But it probably *is* worth noting how similar they appear to be to Baudrillard's as he wanders New York (Baudrillard, 1988). It is something which the great men of modernism and postmodernism seem to share – yet both are held up to us as figures to admire.
- 14 Thus, the editorial of a recent edition of *Feminist Arts News* contained the following: 'This issue of FAN reveals the complexities and richness of women's work in modernism, practices which redefine modernism itself. The map of modernism as a progressive linear development is replaced with histories of its discontinuities and reformations. No longer a story of how New York replaced Paris, but a dissection of the wholesale theft of African cultures and images, of the silences on women's work, and a long overdue address to Black Women's creativity in, and deconstruction of, modernism' (vol. 3, no. 4).
- 15 The full quotation is: 'It [the preceding discussion of film] supports the idea that the experience of time-space compression in recent years, under the

pressures of the turn to more flexible modes of accumulation, has generated a crisis of representation in cultural forms, and that this is a subject of intense aesthetic concern, either *in toto* (as I think is the case in *Wings of Desire*) or in part (as would be true of everything from *Blade Runner* to Cindy Sherman's photographs and the novels of Italo Calvino or Pynchon).'

- 16 One might also ask some serious questions about the social meaning of some of the canonical works of modernism.
- 17 Indeed, as Kelly has pointed out, perhaps the most crucial aspect of *modernist* art theory is precisely its insistence on signifying 'authorial presence' (Kelly, 1981, cited in Elliott and Wallace, 1990).
- 18 Harvey has one reference to Hartsock (1987) which he uses simply to take an unsubstantiated swipe at postmodernism. Noting that some authors emphasize 'the opening given in postmodernism to understanding differences and otherness, as well as the liberatory potential it offers for a whole host of new social movements (women, gays, blacks, ecologists, regional autonomists, etc.)'[!] he goes on to assert: 'Curiously, most movements of this sort, though they have definitely helped change "the structure of feeling", pay scant attention to postmodernist arguments, and some feminists (e.g. Hartsock, 1987) are hostile . . .' (p. 48). This is grossly to misrepresent a complex debate. Moreover dissatisfaction with the answers of postmodernism, as I indicated above, does not mean that we are happy to tag along behind an exclusively masculine modernism such as Harvey's.

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