Postmodernism in Human Geography

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The literatures on postmodernity and postmodernism have grown rapidly over the past decade. These have become fashionable topics and scholars from a wide range of disciplines within the social sciences and the humanities are boldly exploring the implications for their fields. The term postmodernism is often used rather loosely, some seeing it as an emerging phase of history or as a new cultural system, while others see it more narrowly as a scholarly discourse, a set of ideas that radically challenges modernism, an intellectual movement that itself has been defined in diverse ways. In order to retain this useful distinction, I call the former postmodernity, the latter postmodernism.

Of the former I ask: How might we distinguish it as an era from modernity and premodernity? Might these be seen as coexisting cultural systems? The relationships between the latter and poststructuralism, post-Marxism, and deconstruction are matters of contention. Is postmodernism as an intellectual movement reconservative, anarchic, nihilistic? Can it be assimilated into Western Marxism or other modern schools of thought often seen by postmodernists as master narratives?

The first two parts of this chapter provide overviews of the literature on postmodernity and postmodernism in the humanities and social sciences. I distinguish between postmodernity as an emerging cultural or societal condition that is seen as reflective of ongoing transformations in the world’s economic and sociopolitical systems and postmodernism as a set of strong epistemological and ontological claims.

The last part of this paper examines some examples from the growing geographic literature on postmodernity and postmodernism. While postmodernity...
and its relation to post-Fordism and postindustrial society are of major concern, especially for geographers interested in political economy, questions of postmodernity as an intellectual movement have also become prominent in the field. The conclusion suggests that whether or not there are any good grounds for posting the arrival of postmodernity, postmodernity is an increasingly influential intellectual position that, when taken in its strongest form, challenges many of the presuppositions of most contemporary academic practice. I end with some cautions about the epistemological, ontological, political, and ethical problems that attend an uncritical adoption of these postmodernist views.

**Postmodernity**

Fredric Jameson (1984) is perhaps the best known of the writers who have formulated a notion of postmodernity as a societal condition or era within which postmodernism and poststructuralism are sets of ideas and values constituting its dominant cultural component. He has had a noticeable influence on a number of geographers who are interested in drawing causal links between the political economy of multinational capitalism, space, and cultural change. Jameson sees postmodernism as a pervasive global cultural force that cannot be transcended by an individual. Within the era of postmodernity there is no possibility of achieving critical distance because we are all (critics, political activists, and moralists and their "Third World" Others alike) "immersed in or penetrated by postmodernist space" that the "history of old-fashioned ideological critique, the indignant moral denunciation of the other, becomes unavailable" (Jameson 1988: 80).

Jameson is particularly interested in the role of what he terms new experiences of space or "hyperspace" in which we become disoriented and lose our perspective and thus the ability to position ourselves cognitively in the "great global multinational and decentralized communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (Jameson 1984). It is this loss, Jameson claims, that leads to the obliteration of critical distance. Possibly because he always insists on historicizing, he has not foreclosed the future possibility of resisting the global penetration of capitalism and its cultural logic, which is postmodernism. Jameson sees postmodernity as a stage of cultural production produced by late capitalism—a "cultural dominant" controlled by the structures of multinational capitalism. Following Ernest Mandel, he sees postmodernism as the latest stage of capitalism. Accordingly, he argues that postmodernism represents a radical break from an earlier cultural episteme beginning in the late 1950s or early 1960s and crystallizing about 1973 (Jameson 1984: xx).

In this new economic era, cultural forms, signs, and representations are produced and consumed as in any other commodity. This commodification, according to Jameson, pervades all cultural forms of contemporary postmodern society: film, television, advertising, and other productions of postmodernity. Furthermore, according to Jameson, postmodernism is so pervasive and dominant that individuals cannot escape its logic—that the abolition of critical distance mentioned above.

"Reading off" culture—that is, understanding its meanings and roles—from the stages of capital requires specification of the causal relation if we are to avoid what Mike Davis (1988: 80) has called, with reference to Jameson, a "return to essentialism and reductionism with a vengeance." Doubtless Jameson's notion of the relationship between intellectual discourse and the mode of production is more subtle and complex than Davis implies; furthermore, Jameson does acknowledge the necessity of specifying the connections, and, as we shall see below, there are several geographers, David Harvey being a prime example, who have attempted to do precisely that. Jameson's main point, however, is that the disappearance of privileged viewpoints, the instability of meaning by which signifiers and their signifieds are only fleetingly related, the loss of a sense of history, the crisis of representation, and the fragmentation of human subjectivity are characteristics of late capitalist society.

Jameson, however, has been forced into some rather unconvincing verbal gymnastics to defend his attempts to assimilate postmodernism with Western Marxism, which is clearly a modernist philosophy. He has acknowledged that his concept of postmodernism is a totalizing one and, as we shall see below, postmodernism itself rejects what are referred to as metanarratives or grand totalizing theories. These, of course, include Marxism, as Jameson admits. Certain geographers as well fall equally uncomfortably into a similarly contradictory eclecticism.

**Postmodernism**

One way of describing postmodernism as an intellectual movement is to point out what it is not. Postmodernism is not concerned with the origins of the term itself, nor is it concerned with periodizing postmodernity. Origins and periods constitute a modernist problematic that is contrary to the spirit of postmodernism. Postmodernism regards the question of origins and its corollary (the author as a free, creative source) as dubious and the notion of a unified or coherent historical period as suspect. Postmodernism rejects definition by binary opposition, opposing totalizing or essentializing modes of thought; hence, the oppositions modernism and postmodernism, as well as modernity...
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and postmodernity, are themselves seen as problematic. Because postmodernism assumes the instability of meaning, it becomes difficult to define postmodernism from within the discourse itself.

Postmodernism’s dismissal of generic notwithstanding, most studies of this intellectual movement do try to locate its origins. Some say it started (event be h) with Hegel; others find its beginnings in the nihilism of Nietzsche. Habermas suggests that it has not yet begun, that the eighteenth-century Enlightenment project that launched modernism remains unfinished and that the abandonment of the project would be premature. Lyotard argues precisely the opposite, that postmodernism can be considered the nascent stage of modernism—and thus we have the celebrated Habermas-Lyotard debate.9

The dispute rages on. Is postmodernism a departure from modernism or merely one of its many manifestations? On this point, see Hyphen 1986, 206; Graf 1979, Lyotard 1984: 79; and Jencks 1986: 7). Because modernism is often defined principally by its valorization of new perspectives, its proponents continually seek out new ideas to replace currently held orthodoxies; postmodernism as a departure from modernism might then seem to be a redundant concept because it is merely the latest manifestation of modernism. Proponents of the philosophically stronger version of postmodernism would argue, however, that they do not intend to replace any current orthodoxy but instead wish to destabilize the modernist progression from one orthodoxy to another.

Ihab Hassan, who along with Charles Jencks is largely responsible for the popularity of the term in the 1970s, claims that it has been a subterranean current since the eighteenth century and has resurfaced in the twentieth, and furthermore, “we have created in our mind a model of postmodernism, a particular typology of culture and imagination, and have proceeded to ‘reinvent’ the affinities of various authors and different moments with that model” (Hassan 1990: 121). He describes this as “reinventing” our ancestors.

The various versions of postmodernism owe their differences, in part, to the many different modernisms in opposition to which they are defined. Modernism is sometimes viewed as a temporal category referring to that which is contemporary. Other times, the modern is regarded more generally as an oppositional attitude. Irving Howe (1970–7), for example, distinguished the modern from the merely contemporary, characterizing modernity as “an onrushing stage against the official order.” The dilemma of modernism, he argues, is that it must “always struggle but never quite triumph, and then after a time, must struggle in order not to triumph” (1963: 4). Hal Foster (1983: 15) says that modernism has triumphed but that “its victory is a Pyrrhic one—no different than defeat, for modernism is now largely absorbed.”

Marshall Berman (1988: 17) suggests that history has rendered modernism inert, that is to say that the modernist rage has been co-opted. The nineteenth century, he argues, represented modernism’s most creative and revolutionary period, “when a modern public can remember what it is like to live, materially and spiritually, in worlds that are not modern at all” (1988: 17). The capacity for self-critique and self-renewal, for a postapartheid age, remains a possibility, however. Berman says that “postmodernist social thought pears scorn on all the collective hopes for moral and social progress, for personal freedom and public happiness, that are bequeathed to us by the modernists of the eighteenth century Enlightenment” (1988: 9). For Berman “the book is far from closed on the ‘good narrative(s)’ of modernism, however” (1988: 12); he believes that modernism is as self-critical and ironic as postmodernism is thought to be, and he holds out hope for a reapropriation of its revolutionary potential.

Postmodernism is sometimes seen as a jaded, albeit sophisticated, declaration of resignation and political impotence, an exhaustion of the Enlighten-ment’s boundless optimism. Postmodernism, some argue, opposes not modernism itself, but its institutionalization and canonization as well as the ensuing loss of its critical, oppositional edge (e.g., Newman 1985: 27–35).

Charles Jencks (1975, 1986), who first wrote about postmodernism in 1975, devoted a monograph to the movement with particular reference to architecture. He defines postmodernism more narrowly than most. After distinguishing between late, ultra-, and neomodernisms, he points out that what passes for postmodernism is in fact an exaggerated or “aggressive” modernism. Unlike some who regard postmodernism as heir to the progressive impulse of the modern avant-garde, Jencks rejects a critical role for postmodernism. According to Jencks, postmodernism as defined by writers such as Foster, Jameson, Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Hassan is committed to novelty and is unconcerned with the past, tradition, continuity, or pluralism. He thus claims that what they refer to as postmodern is actually modern or, more precisely, late modern. Jencks redefine postmodernism as merely a style of cultural production associated with tradition, ornament, and pluralism, with “semantics, convention, historical memory, metaphor, symbolism, and respect for existing cultures” (Jencks 1986: 34–35).

Jencks’s architectural version of postmodernism has been regarded by some as reconservative or, as Foster (1985: 28) puts it, at historical in its “pop-historical imagery.” Some have dismissed postmodernist architecture as an ecclectic appropriation and rebuffing of cultural and historical imagery torn from its contexts (Foster 1985: 28).

Nevertheless, in art and architecture many of postmodernism’s proponents have seen it as a critical of modernist works. Modernist architecture is viewed as elitist, cold glass and steel monuments to capitalism, while postmodernist architecture is seen as a more populist alternative. By “learning from Las Vegas” (Venturi, Brown, and Izenour 1977) postmodernist architects are ex-
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pected to be more sensitive to the needs and tastes of ordinary people. However, although some have suggested that postmodernist architecture with its parodic references to historical styles is critical, Hal Foster disagrees, suggesting that in fact "culture is treated as so many styles" and that postmodern architecture "plays upon responses that are already programmed" (Foster 1985: 28). He argues that the historical references incorporated into architecture are curiosities, souvenirs, so many commodities to be consumed, and as such lead not to a "sharpened awareness of difference (social, sexual, artistic, etc.) but to a stagnant condition of indiscrimination not to resistence but to refrenchment" (Foster 1985: 31).

According to Foster, postmodernism is not necessarily populist at all. He suggests that through the use of superficial historical references or "cliques," postmodern architecture "strategies as it juxtaposes, and conceals as it panders (some will get this, it says, some that)." Though it wishes to paper over social differences, it only pronounces them along with the privileges that underlie them" (Foster 1985: 29).

In anthropology postmodernism is quite different. It largely concerns the crisis of representation as it is faced by some of those who are currently engaged in ethnographic writing. In this literature postmodernism tends to be seen as an ethical and political problem of speaking on behalf of others who are assumed to be unable to represent themselves. Only a few such as Tjaler (1986, 1987) have paid more than fleeting attention to the difficult issues and implications of the impossibility of representing reality with any degree of certainty. Instead, authors such as James Clifford, George Marcus, Michael Fisher, and others debate the problem of the ethnographer’s right and ability to represent cultural Others. They argue for texts that provoke other voices and avoid strong authorial control. These anthropologists also criticize most Western writings about other cultures to show how power relations between societies are reinforced through these representations and how polyvocality may be a step in the direction of solving the problem of representation as they define it.

Adding to the confusion over postmodernism is the fact that, while there is a clear break between postmodernism and modernism in architecture, it is somewhat less clear in literary and social theory, and much more difficult to discern in literature. Each field tends toward its own dominant version of postmodernism, which may be only tenuously related to other versions.

Postmodernism in literature is often associated with a constellation of ideas that includes deconstruction. It emphasizes certain ideas that challenge modernism, but, unlike modernism, it does not break with ideas of the past in order to replace them with the new. It is neither progressive nor authoritative; progress is denied, as is the author as an active agent. It is critical but in a particular, deconstructive way, working through readings of the texts of modernism. As Hugh Silverman (1990: 1) asserts, it explores the limits that modernist works set on their own projects. "Its significance is to marginalize, delineate, disseminate, and decolonize the primary (and often secondary) works of modernist and premodernist cultural inscriptions." By this he means that postmodernism is not the latest period within intellectual history, but an attitude that arises out of modernism and that challenges some of the dominant metanarratives of modernism—ideologies such as those of humanism, progress, and rationality that underlie the Enlightenment project. Silverman says that postmodernism is "fragmented, discontinuous, multiple, and dispersed. Where modernism asserts centering, focusing, continuity—once the break with tradition has already occurred—postmodernism decenters, undecides, discontinues, and fragments the prevalence of modernist ideals" (Silverman 1990: 5).

Is postmodernism the "cultural logic of late capitalism" (Jameson 1984)? Is it the cultural policies of the Other? Is it the decline of western imperialist metanarratives? Or is it, as I am tempted to suggest, an extreme philosophical position that may trouble some by its logical elegance but few in their practical everyday experience?

The arguments and counterarguments about postmodernism are confusing because of the diversity of definitions and interpretations of both postmodernism and modernism. The debates over whether postmodernism is a continuation of the modernist avant-garde or, as Habermas argues, the abandonment of modernism’s emancipatory project are not merely a matter of commentators talking past one another or the results of definitional difference. The divergent points of view reflect fundamental differences on many issues, the most important of which is antifoundationalism; the key proposition underlying definitions of postmodernism.

Although some have argued that the prefix suggests continuity with modernism, this is a contentious issue. I would argue on the contrary that postmodernism implies the rather grand chain of a break between discourses. It is difficult to imagine a clear break from the highly fluid and progressive intellectual position that modernism represents. In fact, radical antifoundationalism is the only criterion in any of the definitions of postmodernism that has impressed me as providing a sufficiently dramatic departure from modernism to warrant the prefix.

Postmodernism in the sense of radical antifoundationalism is a relativist thesis that in its very strongest form involves ontological claims concerning the nature of human phenomena or, in some formulations, reality in general. It can be contrasted with foundationalism defined as an epistemological and ontological perspective enrolling a bipolar truth value—truth and falsity.
usually assumes that guarantees of truth about a reality existing independently of our knowing are worth pursuing; in other words, that there can be foundations upon which we can base judgments concerning truth and falsity where truth and falsity are logically independent of culture, power, or paradigms (see Pfl: 1989: 342; Bernstein 1983: 8–12). The latter, however, can be seen within modernism as epistemological constraints that inevitably influence our understandings and interventions in the world. There are thus versions of foundationalism that assume the possibility of discovering truth while acknowledging the likelihood of fallibility. As I discuss below in reference to a paper by Andrew Sayer (1992), much of modernist thought is foundational only in this weaker sense.

Strong claims for antifoundationalism entail some form of either epistemological relativism or ontological relativism or both. In the case of epistemological relativism there is no possibility of grounding judgments about better or some interpretations or explanations. This form of relativism is not widely held, and it should be said that this form makes a much stronger claim than that of cultural relativism, which is generally seen as reasonable in contemporary liberal societies. In the case of ontological relativism it is assumed that phenomena are inherently undetermined by our theories. In fact, it is sometimes thought that they are also inherently alterable by interpretation alone. The signifier-signified relation is seen as ontologically unstable rather than merely epistemologically undeterminable. Contradiction, incoherence, and indeterminacy are seen as actual characteristics of the world, rather than merely a matter of our human perceptual limitations; there is no notion of objective truth even as an ideal, if unobtainable, standard.

As we have seen above, however, many postmodernists in architecture and anthropology subscribe to the somewhat less rigorous formulation of antifoundationalism as implied in Lyotard’s famous “incredulity toward metanarratives.” By this they mean to oppose the idea of universal, timeless truths. According to postmodernists, this is an impossible claim. Instead, the Other, untranslatable languages, incommensurability of world views, incongruent paradigms, radical historicism, and the impossibility of progress. This tends to be a strong ontological as well as an epistemological thesis.

Because all versions of antifoundationalism deny the possibility of escaping from our discourse in order to directly study the real world, the conclusion is often drawn that we must abandon the notions of truth, rationality, science, and reality. Antifoundationalism is most threatening, however, when it entails a rejection of any criteria on which to judge human actions. This is seen to undermine the foundations of any progressive form of politics. It is thus feared that arguments against such evils as Nazism must be forfeited in the absence of a privileged position from which to launch a critique.

Habermas, who has devoted his career to establishing a foundation for critical theory, believes that postmodernism cannot be assimilated to any progressive political program because of its antifoundationalism. The form of foundationalism he wishes to retain assumes rationality as the bedrock on which to found recuperation from oppression, and, thus, he cannot accept postmodernism.

As we have seen, the many postmodernists include some that are strong and some that are weak (in the sense of being less philosophically rigorous). Some are merely passing styles, such as postmodernism in architecture, which is fast being eclipsed by deconstructivism. Other postmodernists, however, such as those in the realm of social and political thought are not as easily naturalized as part of a seemingly inevitable process of one fashion replacing another. Instead, these offer less commodified, more fundamental challenges to modernism.

Consequently, we may ask whether postmodernism as an epistemology is wholly dependent. Is there no positive project? Where modernism creates anew, does postmodernism only deconstruct? Does the fragmentation of cultural texts assume prior wholesness? Does the decentering presuppose a once-centered subject? In its parasitic relationship with modernism, postmodernism has no ground of its own to stand on; it is in its strongest formulations radically antifoundational, and, philosophically speaking, is in its most important characteristic, one that some geographers tend to lose sight of.

Postmodernism and Postmodernity in Geography

Geographers who have taken up the postmodern challenge generally believe, as I do, that the discipline should not be isolated from the debates that rage all around us in the social sciences and the humanities. Although most geographers who have considered postmodernism closely are skeptical of many of its claims, some may not have been cautious enough in their attempts to assimilate it to Marxism or other types of modernist thought. These attempts "recuperate" the theory in ways that ignore the logic of postmodernism; and it is recuperation, as many postmodernists see it, that is to be avoided above all other sins.

This review considers three influential books and a number of articles by geographers who have given explicit attention to the issues of postmodernism. In reviewing each of these, I point out where the authors have clearly separated these issues, where they have conflated them, and where they have
adopted the stronger or weaker claims of postmodernism. I begin with David Harvey’s *Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), which analyzes postmodernity as a societal condition; I then consider several books and papers that, in attempting to look at both postmodernity and postmodernism, often confl ate the two. Finally, I consider other geographers who apply postmodernist thought in their writings. Some of these geographers subscribe to looser definitions than others. As might be anticipated from comments above, I find myself in agreement with the perspective of many of these geographers, while maintaining that they recuperate postmodernism in ways that make it no longer defensible as a position clearly differentiated from modernism. While respectful of the strong claims of some few such as Ulf Strohmayer and Matthew Harrah who take a more clearly postmodern position defined as antifoundationalism (I concede that they best deserve the label), I find myself uncomfortable with the radicalism of their position. Lastly, I review a paper by Andrew Sayer that effectively argues that realism is able to retain the important insights of postmodernism without falling into the trap of radical antifoundationalism defined as relativism.

I devote the most attention to David Harvey’s (1989) text because his is the most significant contribution to the larger literature on postmodernity as an era; similarly, I give close attention to Strohmayer and Harrah’s (1992) paper because it best exemplifies a clear defense of postmodernism in its strong sense.

I present Harvey’s argument in some detail in order to show that the cultural aspects of postmodernity have not simply been “read off” from economic transformations; he has instead attempted to elucidate the linkages and, to some degree, provide causal explanations. Harvey offers a cautionary assessment of the significance and political-economic causes of recent cultural changes, arguing that these changes are superficial and do not represent a new form of postcapitalist society. He traces the history of modernism as originating in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment project—a highly complex cultural movement characterized by a tension between progressive or revolutionary values and an optimistic search for universal truths under which to subsume the notions of moral progress, justice, equality, and human emancipation. Harvey observes that modernist optimism has been shattered in the twentieth century with its two world wars, Hitler’s Germany, Stalin’s Russia, the experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the threat of nuclear annihilation (1989: 13). The modernist quest for human emancipation is undermined by the modernist scientific urge to dominate nature and optimize the bureaucracy and the workplace. He claims that this urge entails a logic that leads to the oppression of human beings.

Harvey describes the modernist movement as complex and full of tension arising from the complicated reactions and countereactions to conditions of production, circulation, and consumption as they have intensified over the years since the revolutions of 1848. His sophisticated and plausible arguments for the links between culture and economy set the scene for the causal analysis of the transition to postmodernism and changes in the world economy. Harvey’s fairly linear account of the transition to postmodernism may be explained by the fact that he relates it to such specific, datable events as the recession of 1973, the oil crisis of the early 1970s, and the breakdown of the Bretton Woods Agreement. There were manifestations of the decline of the Fordist regime of accumulation, its associated mode of social and political regulation, and the rise of a new regime of flexible accumulation and its network of regulation.

Fordism was the regime of accumulation associated with modernism. Fordism, as the application of a scientific system for increasing labor productivity, entailed an entirely new concept of the economy in which mass consumption was linked to mass production, a new politics of labor control, and a new aesthetics and psychology of a rationalized, modernist, and populist democratic society (1989: 126). The Fordist worker was a new type of person having more income and more leisure time for consuming the mass-produced goods of this system.

World War II helped to rationalize industry and technology, while postwar industrial production, suburbanization, state investment in postwar reconstruction, and expansion of transportation and communication infrastructures all served to stimulate the economic boom that created an increasingly homogeneous mass market (1989: 132). Organized labor, large corporate capital, and the nation-state achieved a balance of power in class relations during the postwar period that, as Harvey puts it, provided a “tense” but fairly stable basis for Fordism and economic growth (1989: 133).

As the Fordist regime broke down in the late 1960s and early 1970s and as the hegemony of the United States in the world financial system began to decline, the rigidities inherent in the infrastructure and labor commitments of mass-production systems began to surface as growth in consumer markets declined. Monetary policy was employed to salvage the system but at the cost of dangerous inflation, which would eventually sink the post-war boom.

A new flexibility has since been introduced into production and consumption processes. Service-sector employment has increased dramatically in the United States while new industrial regions have arisen in such places as the “Third Italy,” the NICs (newly industrializing countries), and various silicon valleys. Among the most important characteristics of this new regime of flexible accumulation is a significantly higher degree of "time-space compression," which allows employers much more flexibility and mobility and
hier greater power in relation to labor. Trade-union power has been signifi-
cantly reduced with increasing levels of unemployment and the emergence
of segmented labor markets. Flexible patterns of work have been established
that are characterized by more part-time, temporary, subcontracted, and
female unskilled workers. Workers are forced to become more mobile and
adaptable. Just-in-time delivery systems, small-batch production, a return to
sweetshops and working at home, and growth in the underground economy
characterize the flexible mode of accumulation. Women who are employed
on a part-time basis are prime targets for exploitation and are often used to
replace full-time male workers.

With changing production structures and the need for what Harvey calls
accelerated turnover time in consumption have come new concerns on the
creation of and the immediate response to rapidly changing fashions, the com-
modification of information, the production of spectacles, and more cus-
tomized products.

Harvey argues that "the more flexible notion of capital emphasizes the new,
the fleeting, the ephemeral, the fugitive, and the contingent in modern life,
rather than the more solid values implanted under Fordism" (1989: 171). He
also talks of a "general shift from more collective norms and values that were
hegemonic at least in working-class organizations and other social movements
of the 1950s and 1960s, towards a much more competitive individualism as
the central value in an entrepreneurial culture that has penetrated many walks

New, highly sophisticated financial systems operating on a global scale have
facilitated, even initiated, a new regime of flexible accumulation. Harvey
argues that with this more global perspective comes a new, postmodernist ex-
perience of time and space. Here we can see clearly the working out of the
prophecy that there are material links between political economic and cul-

During the period that Harvey associates with postmodernism thought and
flexible accumulation there has been what he calls "an intense phase of time-
space compression that has had a distorting and disruptive impact on poli-
tical-economic practices, the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural
and social life" (1989: 201). One of the most prominent of the new organiza-
tional forms of production associated with this new phase of capitalism is the
acceleration of turnover time. These new forms require a concomitant accu-
eration in exchange and consumption of commodities and services.

The manipulation of fashions for mass markets, once limited to clothing,
but now extended to children's games, music styles, and videos, has resulted
in commodities with increasingly shortened lifespans. Similarly ephemeral
are such services as various forms of entertainment: rock concerts, spectacles,
happenings, and visits to museums or health clubs. All have very short con-
sumption life spans as compared to durable goods.

The increased velocity of fashions has been accompanied by capitalist pen-
netration of many sectors of cultural production. Ideas and ideologies have
been commodified, distinctions between advertising and other cultural pro-
ductions have been blurred (art as advertising and advertising as art), and pol-
ities has been "aesthetized"—by which Harvey means that political issues
are reduced to images, subjects for cultural producers to package and com-
modify, and cultural values and place-bound identity are accentuated while
local issues have been relatively de-emphasized. All of this Harvey associates
with the new regime of flexible accumulation without, however, claiming any
simple causal links between the cultural and the economic.

Promotional images of products or political agendas (localism, nationalism,
separation, national or cultural heritage, etc.) have become integrated into the
practices of cultural production to a greater extent than ever before. Af-
firming the analyses of postmodern society by Baudrillard and Jameson, Har-
vey (1989: 289) suggests that the images (usually based on money, sex, and
power) themselves are ephemeral commodities. Their utility comes from the
way in which they accelerate turnover time. The premium placed on dispos-
ability and novelty and the use of electronic banking and "plastic money" have
further hastened the rate of turnover in production and consumption.

The "annihilation of space through time" as an important characteristic of
postmodern times is evident in the dizzying variety of commodities now avail-
able worldwide, creating a veritable pastiche of the global geographic diver-
sity that can be experienced as a simulacrum (1989: 300). Harvey (1989: 301),
paraphrasing Lain Chambers, observes that "a strong sense of the 'Other' is re-
placed by a weak sense of the 'others'."

The irony of postmodernism, in Harvey's view, is the creation of place-
bound identities through the commodification and marketing of local or
national traditions, the escape from contemporary ephemeral culture to tradi-
tional values, and the celebration of local histories through the packaging of
images, the creation of simulacra or pastiches of historical places. Local his-
ory is museumified, transformed into a spectacle for public consumption,
and romanticized by the creation of all "traces of oppressive class relations"

Harvey thus regards postmodernity and the effects of time-space com-
pression as the historical-geographical condition of contemporary society. He
even applauds certain aspects of postmodern social scientific practice; these in-
clude a renewed concern for difference and otherness (of race, gender, and
religion) and the recognition that image production and aesthetic practices are
important objects of study. Furthermore, he suggests that some of his views are
consistent with postmodernism—that a concern with space and the geography of power should be an important aspect of historical materialism and that historical-geographical materialism is not a set of universal truths (1989: 357).

He rejects, however, what he considers to be postmodernism's privileging of aesthetics over ethics, of the politics of place and localism over the realities of the internationalism of capitalism, and its rejection of Marxism as a modernist metatheory. He believes that insofar as metatheory is open-ended and dialectical, it can be appropriated for politically and intellectually responsible practice.

Harvey discerns from postmodernism's strongest and most philosophically rigorous claim, the epistemology of antifoundationalism. He contributes instead an analysis of the postmodern condition, that is, postmodernity as an era. Whereas his rather general statements about some of the cultural characteristics of late capitalism may ring true, especially in the Anglo-American context with which he is most familiar, any causal connections drawn from the economy to the very specific philosophical propositions of antifoundationalism in postmodern thought would of course be much less convincing. I do not think he intends to make any such claims, but, of course, given the often very loose interpretations of postmodernism and the condition of its many definitions that exist in the literature, Harvey's book could be read in this way by less careful followers. Too easy a dismissal of these philosophical claims as complex with capitalism might follow, and Harvey does little to caution against this.

Edward Soja's Postmodern Geographies (1989) makes the case for "the reassertion of space in critical theory." His aims are twofold: to analyze the condition of postmodern society with particular reference to the post-Fordist landscapes of Los Angeles and to experiment with postmodern styles of exposition. He begins, for example, with a postscript that is intended by its placement before the text to "shake up the normal flow of linear text to allow other more lateral connections to be made" (1989: 1). He ends the book with two experimental chapters on Los Angeles in which the style of writing is intended to capture the "synchronal" and "heterotopic" of a highly spatialized postmodern city through lateral mappings that make it possible to read in a nonlinear fashion.

For Soja the key to postmodern geographies is the superior informativeness of spatial understanding over historiographic forms of explanation. Quoting John Berger, Soja writes that "it is space more than time that hides consequences from us" (Soja 1989: 23). He continues: "[R]elations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life" (1989: 8). One of Soja's aims in the book is to show how the temporal prison house of language and similarly categorical hierarchies of conventional critical theory" to the freedom of "an interpretative human geography, a spatial hermeneutics" (1989: 12). He.

characteristics contemporary society after Foucault, as an "epoch of simulacra" (quoted in Soja 1989: 10). Insofar as these diagnoses are correct, then geography as the spatial science is now more central than ever to the study of contemporary society. Unfortunately, it is not made entirely clear why spatiality is a peculiarly postmodern problematic.

Several of the distinguishing features of postmodernism are missing from Soja's book, the most important of which, philosophically, is antifoundationalism. Although Soja (1989: 23) conveys the ambiguous and seemingly contradictory nature of a city such as Los Angeles, whose "splendidly rhythmic and enticingly generalizable features" are depicted from various levels of abstraction in a "freed association of reflective and interpretive field notes," he nevertheless portrays the city as an objective reality about which there may be more or less accurate descriptions and explanations. His descriptions would be perfectly commendable were they a realist geography admitting of the ambiguous and contradictory nature of its subject matter. They are some distance, however, from the radical relativism and antifoundationalism of postmodern thought.

Similarly, Soja's appeals for the supremacy of one perspective, the spatial, are characteristically unpostmodern. His words give him away. Phrases such as "pulling away deceptive ideological veils" and "a postmodern politics of demystification" (1989: 5) are anathema to postmodernism. To be sure, the possibility of a postmodern politics is hotly debated, but the concept of de-mythification is clearly foundational in that it presupposes an objective reality that has been mystified and that can be unveiled. These are modernist terms that originate in Marxism, a metaconscious by any meaningful definition of either of the terms. Metadiscourses or metatheories, of course, are rejected by postmodernists. Soja clearly retains his commitment to Western Marxism and hopes to assimilate it to postmodernism, a task that, I would argue, is impossible. This is not to suggest that Marxists cannot benefit from taking up certain postmodern challenges, such as the deconstruction of their own taken-for-granted assumptions; however, I would argue that it is unlikely that any strong postmodern position could also be called Marxist. Marxist thought utilizing postmodern insights would ultimately have to recuperate these in order to remain Marxist in any sense of that term as it is now known.

Soja's goal of reconstructing geography along postmodernist lines (1989: 74) belies the fact that Soja is not really a postmodernist. This, as I have indicated above, is because postmodernism, at least in its strongest, more distinctive sense, is not a positive project.

Soja's postmodernism invokes a curious cast of authorities as "pioneers of postmodern geography." (Note that the appeal to authority is another of postmodernism's casualties.) Most of them in fact explicitly reject postmodernism
Despite his abstract arguments for space as causative, which occasionally sound too much like the “spatial sequitur” he himself criticizes, his actual use of spatial concepts (regions, places, and locales) in his empirical analyses is unobjectionable. In other words, Soja’s book is valuable and interesting as an experiment in a spatialized writing style and as a more conventional political economy of postmodernity.

Philip Cooke in his book *Back to the Future: Modernity, Postmodernity, and Locality* (1990) provides an excellent and easily accessible overview of modernity and postmodernity. Like Harvey, he appears well versed in the ideas of postmodernism as they pertain to various fields including postmodern literature and architecture. He recognizes, more clearly than Soja and many other geographers, that postmodernism can have a subversive purpose, mainly in the form of deconstruction, but no positive or progressive program, (1990: 96).

Like Harvey, he applauds the attention to the cultural, racial, and female Other, but again recognizes that this is manifested less in a progressive program than in “the interrogation of tests, seeking their hidden modes of domination, looking, for example, for their local exclusions on questions of gender, ethnicity, geography and so on” (1990: 96).

One of the useful distinctions that Cooke is keen to make is that between reactionary antimodernism and postmodernism. He says that the coincidental rise of neoconservatism, especially in Britain and the United States, and postmodernism has encouraged certain writers such as Jameson, Terry Eagleton, and Mike Davis to posit reactionary, causal connections between the two (1990: 113).

Cooke distinguishes between reactionary antimodernism and postmodernism. On the one hand, he cites the critique of modern architecture by the Prince of Wales as pure revivalism (1990: 104-5) and thus an example of antimodernism; on the other hand, he regards postmodernism as an internal critique of modernism that “leaves the main edifice intact” (1990: 198). He does, however, warn of the danger of postmodernism “slipping over into reactionary anti-modernism,” in which postmodernist architecture forgets its parole, critical function and becomes merely populist and reactionary in its attempts to recreate the human scale of traditional architectural forms.

Cooke further distinguishes neoconservatism as a political stance from antimodernism. By emphasizing the rights of the individual and supporting a preeconomic ideology, the neoconservative critique of twentieth-century modernism draws on an early-modern conception of citizenship rights. If calls for a return to the “minimalist, night-watchman state securing the legal and institutional rules which enable competitive exchange to function in the markets of labour, products, and services” (1990: 135). Proponents then attempt to reverse the history of twentieth-century struggles for a definition of citizenship.
that goes beyond mere property rights to include social, welfare, and civil rights.

While this type of reconservative politics is based on competitive individualism, an earlier modernism, the reactionary antimodernism of Prince Charles and his fellow critics, such as Quinlan Terry, is based on nostalgia for feudal, paternalistic links between the nobility and a peasantry (1990: 134), a form of noblesse oblige in architecture and planning. This antimodernism thus differs significantly from the reconservative politics of both Reagan and Thatcher as well as from the postmodern critique.

One of the attractions of postmodernism in Cooke’s view is its emphasis on the local dimension of thought and practice. He sees themes such as locality, difference, local discourses, a recognition of the Other, and a critique of universalistic values as relevant to a geography that emphasizes place specificity. He points to the influence of Foucault’s notion of local discourses on postmodern social theory and Lyotard’s notion of local as opposed to grand or universalizing narratives. While these are often associated with postmodernism in its philosophically weaker sense, I question whether they cannot also be seen as modernist. Postmodernist architecture, Cooke points out, draws its inspiration from local and marginalized cultures and in this way differs from the “austere universalism of modernist aesthetics” (1990: 114). As noted above, modernism and postmodernism in architecture refer to different styles, and I do not object to these terms. I caution, however, against the easy leaps of thought that can accompany wide-ranging discussions of many different types of postmodernism, even when the author understands the differences, the reader may be less certain, especially given the many confusing discussions in the literature.

Post-Fordist flexibility in production and the failures of centralized bureaucracy draw attention to the idea of locality. Cooke suggests that “the postmodern critique of modernity points in one very clear direction, towards a decentralist continuation of the project of modernity” (1990: 179). Accordingly, he argues that the notions of postmodernism as a set of ideas challenging modernism on the one hand and postmodernism as a societal condition on the other need to be taken very seriously by geographers. Ultimately, however, Cooke sees postmodernism merely as a critique of modernism’s temporal structure and essentially valueless and salvageable negative project.

It might be added that while Harvey and Cooke refuse to accept modernism’s demise, the differences in their views are often striking. While Cooke welcomes the revival of localities research in geography, David Harvey is uncomfortable with this prospect.11

Although Michael Dear has expressed reservations about postmodernism in social science, he has associated himself with the movement by writing prominent agenda-setting articles on the subject (1986, 1988). In these he neither wholeheartedly endorses nor rejects any particular version of postmodernism. Like Soja, he seems anxious to attach it to a politically progressive agenda. While acknowledging the relativism of postmodernism as an intellectual position, he fails to take this most important aspect as seriously as I have suggested it should be taken. The very title of one of his articles, “The Postmodern Challenge: Reconstructing Human Geography” (1988), would suggest a failure to acknowledge the radically antifoundational and deconstructive character of the (non)perspective.

Dear rejects what he calls the “anything goes” school of tolerant eclecticism. He also appears distressed at the lack of consensus in the field, but the value that he places on consensus and unity in a field of study suggests a very modernist attitude. Although he applauds the “incredulity towards metanarratives” characteristic of postmodernism, like many other geographers he fails to confront the radical nature of claims made by Lyotard. While it is reasonable to modernists and postmodernists alike to reject grand universalizing theories, it is by that which is meant that there are no social theories that apply everywhere at all times, the claim is actually far more controversial than that. The notion of postmodern reconstruction (1988: 267) is, I suggest, a contradiction in terms, and in fact Dear’s own characterization of postmodernism suggests this as well. Symptomatic of his confusion over whether to accept or reject postmodernism is Dear’s observation that “a postmodern social theory deliberately maintains the creative tensions between all theories in its search for better interpretations of human behavior” (emphasis added; 1988: 271). This idea, that a postmodern social theory searches for better (as in closer to the truth) explanations, directly contradicts the postmodernist rejection of privileging any one explanation over any other. Conversely, Dear aptly observes that “one is not obliged to become a postmodernist in order to accept the challenge of postmodernism” (1988: 272). His attraction to phenomenology and structuration theory is quite reasonable, provided that these are not subsumed to postmodernism.

Derek Gregory (1988, 1989) takes up the postmodern challenge by exploring the questions postmodernism poses for the field. Like Soja, Dear, and Cooke, he discusses some exciting prospects for geography’s central role in an interdisciplinary postmodernist debate because of the concern that both sides have with space, place, and landscape. Gregory offers a diluted version of postmodernism when he speaks of a “sensitivity” to cultural and place differences, whose “integrality” must be retained (1988). From a postmodern perspective concepts such as integrity and unity are suspect. Gregory’s weak definition of postmodernism affords opportunities for the recovery of areal differentiation through the recognition of the unique qualities of human action in particular places. These sensitivities would satisfy the requirements of a postmodern
suggests that a similar but more ambiguous ideology is represented in this somewhat later version of a postmodern landscape. She finds a resistance to the corporate vision of the environment and a promotion of cultural diversity and livability as strongly manifested values. Her analysis of this landscape, however, conforms more closely to other analyses of postmodernity (e.g., Jameson, Baudrillard, Harvey, and Soja) in its emphasis on the highly commodified urban culture and skillfully packaged historical styles offered by the promoters of this landscape. She draws the link between strategies of capital accumulation and geotextics as product differentiation (1988). We see here the aestheticization of politics through the cooptation of oppositional ideologies in the advertising and selling of a cultural product.

In the case of Ley and Mills postmodernism is analyzed as a landscape and architectural style that is generated within a particular stage of capitalism rather than adopted as an intellectual position (although this style clearly has political connotations with which they might or might not choose to identify). In this, of course, Ley and Mills also adopt one of the weaker definitions of postmodernism, thus avoiding the confusion of those who are not clear about whether they espouse postmodernism and, if so, whether they accept the philosophically stronger or weaker version.

Ulf Strohmayer and Matthew Hannah provide us with one of the best examples of postmodernism as antifoundationalism. Their article “Domesticating Postmodernism” (1992) warns of the intellectual dishonesty of recupe- rating postmodernism back into modernism. They honestly confront the impossibility of representing reality in language—that is, the radical undecidability in the relation between signifieds and signifiers. Citing Wittgenstein, they see this relation as merely a matter of assumption based in repetition: “with ‘repetition’ preceding ‘identity’ any claim about reality is as much an outcome of conceptual labour as it is a re-creating of a taken-for-granted connectiveness. And into the silences of these acceptances the most effective of all sources of power becomes inscribed: rule following, methodological common sense or tradition” (1992: 35). Strohmayer and Hannah then go on to say that deconstruction is the analysis of this common sense: “a reading of conceptual language against the grain of representational trust, deconstruction radically negates any possibility of extratextual stable references” (1992: 36). Examining the link between language and reality, they observe that “de- scriptive language no matter how precise and exhaustive, can never succeed in anchoring itself to a reality; it can only move ‘sideways’ through the realm of words . . . this does not imply that there is no truth, but rather that if there is, we are incapable ofpinning it down” (1992: 36). The postmodern challenge, then, as they see it, is a matter of justification. How do we justify our representations? On what grounds do we claim our expertise?
Strohmayer and Hannah show that the various tactics used by those who take up the postmodern challenge are largely unsuccessful—unsuccessful principally because they fail to take up the challenge with the seriousness that it requires. The most common stances are dismissive. The laziest and all too common response is to reject postmodernism outright as a fad. Others restate the claims of postmodernism in absurdly simplistic terms, for example, “there is no truth.” “The straw figure phrases are made to appear inexplicable: how could somebody have said that? How ridiculous! There must be some larger context which explains such claims. The larger context which then ‘presents itself’ is the historical evolution of relations of production and reproduction under capitalism.” (1992: 39). Strohmayer and Hannah then counters with a more defensible restatement of postmodernism as a belief in the idea that “if there is truth, we are incapable of recognizing it as such with any certainty” (1992: 39).

Another tactic cited by the authors is a somewhat more sophisticated sociology of knowledge approach such as Harvey’s. Seeing postmodernism as a product of late capitalism, it is assumed to be conservative and is dismissed on the basis of this rather tenuous causal connection. Strohmayer and Hannah counter that “terms such as ‘pastiche,’ ‘difference,’ and ‘the sliding of the signifier’ emerged from debates within philosophy whose particular features have been anything but exhaustively determined by the ‘metaphilosophical context’” (1992: 40–41). This rejection of a sociology of knowledge (social context as relevant to the truth of propositions) is a standard position in Anglo-American analytic philosophy—one that stands in opposition to continuous power/knowledge formulations of the problem such as Foucault’s, yet, in the absence of a convincing portrayal of the causal links between the fine details of postmodern thought and late capitalism, I am tempted to agree with their point.

Strohmayer and Hannah identify other tactics as anamalization. By this they mean that attempts to deal with the relativism of postmodernism are followed by attempts to reconstruct critical social science. As examples they point to Derrida (1988), Soja (1988: 1–2), and Gregory (1988: 88). By allowing the possibility of local truth and legitimacy of place-specific studies, geographers believe not only that they can escape the sins of universalizing, which they understand postmodernism as rejecting, but also that they can legitimate geography as a more prestigious discipline. Strohmayer and Hannah argue, however, that even “local truths” do not escape the problem of representation, because, being linguistic, they cannot demonstrate their own truthfulness. “The problem of representation hounds communication at every scale... every consensus, even at a local scale conceals the problem only through an exercise of power” (1992: 51). This potentially devastating thesis cannot be avoided without, as Strohmayer and Hannah say, drawing an arbitrary line beyond which relativism is prohibited from crossing (1992: 51). If I understand them correctly, the problem of postmodernism’s antifoundationalism cannot be resolved within language.

If we geographers are to remain content with our profession and continue to approach our political lives with any degree of confidence, how then are we to take up the postmodern challenge with the seriousness it demands? Strohmayer and Hannah’s solution seems curious. In order to retain intellectual honesty in regard to the postmodern problematic (and it seems to me they do this better than most other geographers whose work I have reviewed), they seem to adopt what Andrew Sayer calls a disjunct and a nocturnal philosophy. They acknowledge quite sensibly that political activity continues regardless of the angst of intellectuals grappling with the problems of philosophy. They imply that they too have lives outside of their writings and they too engage in politics. I can agree that this is in fact what happens and, furthermore, that nonaction is as political as action and, hence, that politics is inescapable—but how can they retain intellectual honesty when they cannot justify their politics, when they admit that judgments of right and wrong are ungroundable and that imposing one’s political convictions on others is fascist (1992: 48)? How can they talk of a radical responsibility that does not even attempt to justify itself in political theory or any external guidance? Is this radical individualism? And is it possible to achieve? Can we act outside of language and socially constituted discursive structures? They say that we have to make choices and that these will be at some level arbitrary; this is not akin to drawing a line beyond which relativism may not cross—the line in this case dividing academic from other kinds of practice.

Strohmayer and Hannah point out that critical academics spend more time and effort than most people “trying to match language to reality,” but that this effort “fails utterly to move us beyond the inherent limitations of language” (1992: 53). As they imply, if ideas of rigor and cumulative accuracy are illegitimate, these will fail to distinguish us from less disciplined folk. They argue that “prior to any interpretative effort, our sensibilities drive us to disgust, offense and objection” (1992: 53). Does this mean that they subscribe to some form of phenomenological prereflective political intuition? Or, as Sayer has suggested, simply a pragmatic disjunct philosophy? I assume that their great concern with intellectual honesty would lead them toward formulating some sophisticated version of the former rather than the latter. I, for one, am sceptical of how they will achieve this.

Andrew Sayer in his “Postmodern Thought in Geography: A Realist View” (1992) makes a very convincing argument that there is a type of antifoundationalism that is not relativist in its premises. We can conclude from
Prominent in Human Geography

Nancy Danon

Chapter 4: The Conceptual Foundation of Geography

Introduction

The development of geography as a discipline has been shaped by various conceptual frameworks. This chapter aims to explore the foundational ideas that underpin the field of geography.

The Conceptual Framework of Geography

Geography can be understood as the study of the spatial distribution of physical and cultural elements on the Earth's surface. This field encompasses a wide range of topics, including the study of human-environment interactions, economic and social processes, and the distribution of natural resources.

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on itself. In addition to being more sensitive to difference (cultural or intel-
lectual), we would use difference to undermine our own interpretive com-
plexity, and we might employ postmodernist tools such as deconstruction
to replicate the critical energy of postmodernism. If, however, this makes us
postmodernists (and I submit that it does not), it would be a weak form of post-
modernism.

As geographers, we will continue with our analyses of postmodernity, and
doubtless these will assume political, methodological, and theoretical view-
points other than those of postmodernism. In the end the study of post-
modernity is a very broadly defined project, and having been influenced by
some of postmodernism’s concerns, we may wish to remain skeptical about
the use of such totalitarian descriptive categories as postmodernism itself.

Notes

1. Lyotard uses the term postmodernism to mean a societal condition or era; I prefer
the term postmodernity.

2. In fact, he sees the relationship as being so close that “every possible position on
postmodernism in culture whether apologetic or stigmatising, is an implicitly or
explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today” (Jameson

3. On this, see Young (1990: 111).

4. In his analysis Jameson is indebted to Auden’s (1938) analysis of the political
economy of the sign and the writings of Coy Debdou (1977).

5. This is not to reverse the chronological order implied in the term postmodernism
but rather to question the assumptions of progress in chronological time. Lyotard (1984:
79) says that postmodernism is a part of modernism and that to become modern is a work
that must first be postmodern. He says that postmodernism is modernism in its correct
state. In this he seems to be saying not only that modernism happens to have lost its
critical edge, but that it has by definition—to be modern is to have domesticated or in-
stitutionalized the revolutionary impulse. According to Lyotard, it is postmodernism
that is unstable and transgressive. In this sense Lyotard’s postmodernism could be con-
sidered similar to avant-garde or revolutionary modernism. In contrast to Lyotard,
Fredric Jameson argues that, although the radical break between modernism and post-
modernism does not involve a complete change of content (thus we find many ele-
ments of postmodernism in the earlier modernist period), it involves a restructuring of
its elements such that the men that were subordinate become dominant, and some of
the oppositional elements of modernism, those that subordinated the moderns, have be-
come normalized and “emptied of their subversive power” (Jameson 1983: 124).


7. Jenkins (1986) states that Tessa Tam, Jane Jacobs, Robert Venturi, and the
Advocacy Planners attacked “orthodox modern architecture” for its elitism. His view
of populism, however, seems quite limited as evidenced by his quotations of John Barth
that the ideal postmodernist author “may not hope to reach and move the devotees of
James Michener and Living Wallace—not to mention the lobotomized mass-media
illiterates,” but may hope to reach beyond the professional devotees of high art
(1986:6).

8. Many of those whose names are most closely associated with the “new anthro-
pology” are represented in the volumes by Clifford and Marcus (1986) and (1988).

9. Cultural relativism here refers to the liberal notion of tolerance and pluralism.
It is the idea that the many cultures of the world are equally valid in their own terms.
Ethnocentrism is thus a common change against those who criticize other cultures.

10. Although such arrogant language may not always be used, it can be shown that
many modernist truth claims, in fact, assume universalism and ahistoricity, although
rarely infallibility.

11. Again, see Sayer (1992) for an argument that ecocriticism offers a middle way
between radical postmodern anticonfessionalism and naive empiricism.

12. The term temporal is used to mean postmodern in a negative sense to mean
the appropriateness or (often unintentional) reification of a theory or concept
in such a way as to reduce its critical edge or philosophical rigor. Often, this repre-
sentation involves the reification back into “common sense” or taken-for-granted terms
within a discourse that is allegedly being rejected.

13. Harvey is not as vulnerable as Jameson to a charge of inconsistency when he
employs a conventional narrative style or appeals to a mainstream excuse. This is because
Harvey, unlike Jameson, explicitly rejects a postmodern position. Instead, he claims to
analyze postmodernity as a societal condition.

14. See, for example, the debates in Antipode in 1986 and Society and Space in 1987
between Harvey, Cooke, Neil Smith, Nigel Thrift, Andrew Sayer, and others over local
versus global, which tends to get conflated with other divisions such as necessary/con-
tingent, abstract/actual, and empirical/theoretical. It could be argued that there are
no fundamental differences between these authors that could not be solved with clearer
definitions and a little less passion, but there is no space here to pursue that debate.

15. For two interesting analyses of the possibility of postmodern politics, see Amin

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