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Interview: Cindi Katz. Creating Safe Space and the Materiality of the Margins

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Above Sign on empty lot, Lower East Side, New York City, demanding promised housing. [photo: Chris Huestis]

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interview: Cindi Katz

Creating Safe Space and the Materiality of the Margins

by Vincent DelCasino, Mike Dorn and Carole Gallaher • February 1996

Cindi Katz, associate professor and chair of the environmental psychology program at the Graduate School of the City University of New York, visited the University of Kentucky in February of 1996 to deliver the keynote address at the 5 1/2 Annual Geography Graduate Student Conference. In her address, entitled "Power, Space and Terror: Social Reproduction and the Public Environment," Professor Katz discussed how changes in urban built environments, particularly the privatization of urban public space, negatively affected New York City children. Privatization, she argued, not only serves a 'child hating' mentality prevalent in our society, but fosters, among other things, the sociospatial deskilling of children. We conducted an interview with Cindi Katz about this work as well as her long-standing research in Sudan regarding the effects of political-economic change on rural Sudanese children. Professor Katz has brought together over a decade of research, beginning with her dissertation research in the Sudan and including her work in New York City, in the forthcoming book, *Disintegrating Developments: Global Economic Restructuring and the Struggle for Social Reproduction*.

In addition to her more empirical writings on Sudan and New York City, Professor Katz has written extensively on methodological issues and the politics of research. She discusses with *disClosure* her approach to methodological questions in relation to both the practice and study of social justice movements. Since her dissertation research in the Sudan, Professor Katz has been concerned with issues of self-reflexivity in the research process, as well as the role for political activism

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for academics doing social science research. The *disClosure* collective broaches these long-standing concerns in relation to Professor Katz's early work, her perspectives on children's rights movements in the United States, and her own experiences with political activism concerning children's play spaces, and the lack thereof, in New York City.

In the final part of the *disClosure* interview, Professor Katz considers a recent article published in *Society and Space* (1996) on what she terms 'minor theory'. Katz draws on the theory of minor literature set forth by Deleuze and Guattari (1986). Deleuze and Guattari argue that writing in a language that is not an author's primary language, can give rise to a politics that plays off of the ways the author is 'not at home.' In particular, writing in a 'minor key' allows the perspective of the 'minor' to destabilize the 'major' language from within by questioning its apparent fixity and hegemony. For Katz, such an idea may be translated to social science research. She begins her argument by discussing how the dominant mode of theorizing in geography today, as well as in other social science disciplines, is still carried out in the major language of 'grand theory,' whether Marxist, neo-liberal, or postmodern. She believes that it is "within, between, as well as outside" the major theoretical discourses of 'grand theory' that we may begin to paint more nuanced pictures of social problems and concerns, and to give rise to alternative means of social science research. Such an approach may be called 'minor theory,' and the *disClosure* interview examines in detail how and why she initially started her work on minor theory, as well as where she sees her work going in the future.

Substantive and Methodological Issues: From Sudan to New York and Back Again

dC: You did much of your early work on the Sudan, and you have periodically returned there to do research. When you first went, how would you characterize your research?

CK: I was part of a group of people who looked at resistance in everyday life, such as those working in cultural studies, what has come to be called postcolonial studies, and development and underdevelopment literatures. When I first did this work, I did not see myself as alone. The way I constituted myself was as a Marxist against those Marxists who were really still only focusing on the point of production and on value theory. I was trying to understand social reproduction in order to show the possibility of change from a different quarter. Specifically, I used a Marxist-feminist framework to understand

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what happens to children's everyday lives under conditions of political-economic change. I wanted to show what imposed political-economic and political-ecological change does in terms of displacing, and I assumed, deskilling kids. I wanted to see what kids learned in different settings of their everyday lives, what they learned in the household, what they learned in schools, and what they learned in and amongst themselves and their peer group, and how they learned and used this knowledge. I looked at the content of kids' knowledge, their everyday practices, and what they were learning. I was looking for resistance. I wanted to see the way that everybody was rejecting this imposed change, but found that it was a lot more complicated than that. There was resistance. There was lots of resistance but it was usually from a different quarter than the realms of everyday life that concerned me. For instance, there was resistance on the part of the tenant farmers who let their goats graze on their cotton crop. The goats thrived and the cotton crop was sabotaged. The money for it went to the project rather than to themselves. On the other hand, they had a great deal of affection for their goats—one of the main means of saving. The cotton grazing was not necessarily constructed consciously as resistance, but it worked.

dC: And you returned?

CK: I went back three years later, four years later, and then not until the summer of 1995.

dC: How have things changed?

CK: Sudan has changed dramatically with the fundamentalist right-wing government, which is quite repressive. The rural impoverishment is astonishing and it was poor before, but things did not happen exactly as I had thought. There has *not* been massive rural to urban migration even though it is very hard to survive in the village. What has happened is an expansion of the space of work—a time-space expansion. They have been able to maintain what they did, which is a mixture of farming and pastoralism and forestry, but they go further and further away from the village in order to survive doing it. They do this rather than become semi-skilled workers or day laborers in urban areas.

dC: In your writing on Sudan you discuss the methods you employed. Could you expand on your methodological approach and how that informs your understanding of children's knowledge and the gendered dynamics of space?

CK: In my work in the Sudan I used a variety of methods to learn

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about children's environmental knowledge. I wanted to discover what they knew about various places, how they would map the local environment, how extensive their knowledge was, and what they knew about land-use practices. Among other things, I asked the kids to tell me the names of all the trees and plants in the area, and to teach me how these were used by the local population. In effect, I learned what I know about the semi-arid environment in which the research was conducted from the children there. I should add that my knowledge of this environment is extensive; the children knew a formidable amount.

dC: But at the same time it was also a study of perception, right?

CK: Well, it was not so much about *perception* as it was about *knowledge*. I wanted to learn the content of the children's environmental knowledge and how they organized that knowledge. I also wanted to understand how this might change and how children's various life experiences, based on gender or class differences, affected their knowledge. You have to understand that some kids went to school and other didn't, some kids' parents were tenants in the farm project and others weren't. All of these factors affected what they knew and how they knew it.

I worked extensively with 17 children learning what they knew through models, discussions, interviews, and guided tours. For example, I asked each of them to make me a model of the village out of dirt, sticks, grass, and water. Very elemental. When they told me they were finished I would then give them little farm animals, tractors, and soldiers dressed as farmers. As a neurotic social scientist I clothed the toy soldiers in Sudanese dress. I then asked the children to demonstrate village life. While they were playing, I would record what they were doing and what I thought various articulations meant. I also asked every child to take me on a walk around the village. During these walking tours they were asked to identify plants and major environmental features. In addition, I completed detailed ethnosemantic interviews with some of the children. This is a linguistic technique that I carried out with five of the children in order to create various taxonomies of their knowledge. Again, these focused, for most of the children, on their botanical knowledges. For example, one boy who was a herder, described his vast knowledge of pastures. It was obvious that shepherds knew fodder plants, as well as the quality of plants and local landscapes, in a much more textured and detailed way than children whose lives didn't depend on herding. It was quite apparent that their knowledge was contingent on what they did. What was really

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interesting, something that I didn't anticipate, is that the girls had an extensive spatial knowledge. They were constantly out of their houses and out of the village. They worked in the fields with their parents, gathered wild foods, collected fuelwood. Women harvest, except in prime child-bearing years, and almost all women worked outside of the home at various times. I write about this in more detail in *Full Circles* (Katz and Monk 1993).

dC: In your article 'Playing in the Field' (Katz 1994), and in *Full Circles*, the collection you edited with Jan Monk, you have talked about deterioration of the physical environment and disinvestment in children's lives. You have argued that there is a deskilling occurring in children's lives. When you returned to the Sudan this latest time did those arguments bear fruit?

CK: Yes, in many ways, but with stipulations. What has happened is the recognition that an agricultural life is increasingly not viable for many people. What has also happened is that a decreasing ratio of people have access to land, in many parts of rural Sudan, such as the area where I worked. For a growing number of rural Sudanese there's not a real serious future in farming. People in the village were responding in a way that recognized that their kids needed different skills to face the possible future, in a productive and empowering way. Africa has been redlined, and Sudan more than most parts of Africa. People are responding to those changed conditions in ways that recognize that the old rules don't hold anymore.

dC: You have also done work on children and deskilling in New York. How does this work relate to your work in Sudan?

CK: The thing that I do consistently and insistentlly is to make these connections between these very different locales to show that these are global processes of capitalism. Deskilling is not homogenous nor is it experienced uniformly but there are clear connections between what happens to children in Sudan and children in Central and East Harlem in New York. Framing the issue this way gives a certain form and requires a particular kind of response to something that is glossed over in the literature as 'global economic restructuring' or 'globalization' or 'global capitalism.' We all toss those terms around without really thinking about them in terms of lived experiences. I think that we, critical geographers or Marxist political-economists, are very good at understanding how capital works, but I always try and understand how it malfunctions. This for me is what it means to study social reproduction in relation to production. By showing the intertwined

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transnational effects of capitalism in multiple, and very different, 'locales' I want to call forth a transnational but grounded politics. But also, in terms of my own politics and the politics of research, I don't ever want to encase anyplace where I work, particularly Sudan which in its distance from here could be exoticised, because these places are not outside of my, of our, everyday life. These settings are not outside the operations of global capitalism. Our issues are connected, and I want to keep that central in my work.

dC: What do you think about people who aren't in academia but who are now talking on the issue of children's rights, like Janet Reno in Florida or Hillary Rodham Clinton's work on children's civil rights? Do you find this a useful strategy for addressing the deskilling of children's spatial knowledge?

CK: I think that kind of discourse is nice but I don't think it goes anywhere. The United Nations is very involved with the convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF published the Convention on the rights of all children, and it was supposed to be mandate. Unfortunately, it is just like the rights of women or the environment, and all the others that the UN has produced in recent years. Everyone is very good at being eloquent and ethical and wonderful in words, but I feel that it often helps mystify and cloak the real antagonism, animosity, and destructiveness to kids. I appreciate the statistics and such that they publish, but I don't see that they do that much. I have a hard time with rights discourses. It is not to say that I am against having them, but I see that people assuage their guilt or feel that they are doing something when I think that there is something a lot more important to be done. I feel terrible taking this line because I know these documents are used to insist on minimal standards at the margins, but they seem to me to be rhetorical productions without obvious benefit to actually existing children.

dC: You have taken an active interest in the lives of New York City's children. You have also talked, and written, on the politics of renegotiating children's spaces in the City. Could you expand a bit on the situation in New York and how you see the current position of children in the urban environment?

CK: My work has focused on the urban public environment and the recent lack of investment in play spaces, in streets as play spaces, in spaces of social life, and in parks and other spaces. I have also focused on schools, and the disinvestment in social reproduction—housing, education, health care, and daycare, all of which have profoundly af-

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ected the lives of all children, and poor children in particular. I think the rapid deterioration in the physical and social infrastructure of so many urban areas expresses a kind of child-hate that exists in our society. There are crimes against children in the public environment, of course, but the larger crime is the crime of having no place to grow up. Society is, in effect, telling them that they're worthless right from the beginning. And I think many kids *are* worthless to society as it is presently constituted, and to capitalism. There are no jobs for working class and poor kids, and no real clear meaningful future that awaits them. This situation has been obscured for many years in a rhetoric of children as victims, but even this rhetoric is now being abandoned as entire populations of children are demonized and blamed for society's ills. The demonization enables and is propelled by the wholesale abandonment of certain parts of the city—particularly those areas populated by working class African Americans and Latino children.

On the other hand, while school construction languishes money is poured into prisons and detention centers—there's lots of money for 'juvenile justice.' They call this justice for kids? Children are viewed as a problem. Nothing is being done which is proactive. So, there is plenty of money to discipline or detain kids and to imprison them, but there is much less money to do things that might stop them from being criminals or, more accurately, from being criminalized.

Also, I think the marginalization of children in the urban environment and elsewhere is directly related to my own work's marginalization in the academy. I have often felt that some people trivialize my research because I work with children. It's 'worse' than working with women in terms of the way social science constitutes itself. Soft stuff. Surprisingly, these attitudes prevail in some quarters.

dC: Do you see parallels to working with the elderly as well?

CK: Yes, probably, but work with and on children is even more isolating. When I published my *Annals* article (1991) I didn't want the word 'children' in the title because I wanted people to read it. That doesn't mean people would read it anyway, but I believed there were more than a few who would not give it a chance if the title referred specifically to children. Today, I am less concerned about being constructed as somebody who works with children. I now try to argue that there is a metaphorical politics in working with kids, and it demands that you think about the future. That is what makes working with children so powerful. I mean, if you work with kids, or do re-

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search on children and issues related to children, you have to think about what this will mean in a different time and space. You don't necessarily have to think about that when you work with elderly, middle-aged people, or young adults.

In some ways, the space of childhood, and I mean this as a metaphorical space, is one that, in every place where I have worked and discussed childhood with people, is understood in the best of all possible worlds as a time without limits. The fact that in anyone's childhood there are real and huge limits on what is possible is irrelevant to the possibilities that are present in what I'm constructing as the space of childhood, which is distinct analytically and substantively from the time of being a child. The space of childhood calls forth a politics that says, how do you get through childhood, and life more generally, and how do you carry these possibilities out and deliver something on the other side. What really struck me among the kids in Harlem was that all the kids I interviewed indicated that they were going to college. They had dreams about what they wanted to be and where their lives were going. They were optimistic, and so were their parents.

Now you could look at the statistics and see how few students in public schools in the United States graduate in 4 years and that even fewer go on to college. It was clear some of them were not going to make it, and I know that. But if I only used the statistics I would think that the situation was almost hopeless. The children, however, live in that shadow but haven't given up. They construct themselves and their futures as if all things were possible. They don't see themselves hurtling towards that wall. The larger question is, how do you take that structure of feeling, if you will, and turn it into a meaningful politics. I'm staging this space of politics, then, as a rhetorical strategy of my own. I want to construct the space of childhood as a metaphorical site of politics that makes clear our shared responsibility for producing the future.

I also have a very concrete politics in New York City. In fact, it is literally made of concrete, in that I try to turn concrete spaces into positive, supportive places for children. Unfortunately, I don't do enough of this and often what I do leaves me quite frustrated. But I have worked on this issue with two schools in central Harlem. The project was inspired by parents and the school staff and developed with community participation. Everyone in the school—students, teachers, administrators, and custodial staff—was involved in reorganizing the space so that children and others had gardens and play spaces as well as seating areas, walkways, and lighting. We tried to juggle multiple

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and sometimes contradictory demands on the space. But there was tension because various groups in the neighborhood, where the physical spaces are already limited, had different goals. For the most part everyone agreed that children needed a space to play, but there were competing interests. Everyone wanted to address their fear of crime and some wanted to discourage the use of the space by homeless people, drug dealers and users, and others whom they thought would be destructive or threatening to the children and other neighborhood residents. The ways of dealing with these issues were social and spatial. We decided that the basketball court should be lit, for example, so that kids could play at night and feel safe. At the same time, people living in the building next to the play area wanted it to be quiet by 10 o'clock yet wanted the space lit for safety reasons. Just trying to work out all these multiple beliefs and competing demands upon a patch of the city, in a city as dense as New York, involved everyone from janitors to the school kids to the local tenants organizations and businesses, as well as teenagers and others who use the schoolyard as a gathering spot. It was exhausting at times.

Then, even after a lot of the groundwork had been laid, the Board of Education did not even deliver the needed money, much of which had been placed in escrow for the schoolyard project. At the same time that they were de-funding our project they were funding playgrounds in other parts of the school district that were whiter and richer. The Board's School Facilities Office then took our ideas for participatory design and turned it into a cookie-cutter version of participation. They got a huge grant from the organization that had funded us initially. Their grant, for what they called "Project Oasis," took the idea of participation and turned it into the thinnest, most tokenistic form of participation. Through this project, the Board of Education handed out little bits of money to schools for schoolyard improvements, but the level of funding was tokenistic and insufficient to accomplish much that was lasting. To witness them taking our ideas for participatory design and change, and turn it into an ineffective and expensive project was incredibly frustrating, especially because at the same time they were ignoring our schools.

So, our project was stalled by the Board of Education's corrupt system of making building choices. While at the same time, two blocks away is the Central Park Conservatory, another massive bureaucracy, incredibly well-funded, that doesn't have any means of dealing with play spaces or open spaces outside of Central Park. And so the children were left out in the cold for quite some time while all around them it

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seemed things were happening for other children. As it turns out the school principal lobbied the Community District Representative and got money—at least half the money we needed—and the work is underway now, but that project started in 1989.

dC: It must be difficult to negotiate this level of involvement with local community groups and your work as a researcher and academic.

CK: I think at a certain level my own commitment is irrelevant. I've tried my best, with my colleagues and students in the Children's Environment Research Group at CUNY, to make this participatory design reflect the diverse needs of the community, but as someone who tries to be politically active, I feel pretty bad about it, because I only sporadically get involved. I can't sustain the energy and the fight. I'll write my letters and I'll call the Board of Education, and I'll do the parts that perhaps somebody with a Ph.D. could do better than a community person (which are not very many). When they need a 'professional' voice with some official clout I throw myself into the arena. So, I am there as support and I go to meetings, but then I might get involved in teaching, or traveling, or writing and I may not be attentive to the schoolyard's project for months at a time. I mean, in recent years I have tried to make it happen, but the research part of my work is done while the rest languishes, and that feels rotten. You know, I just read an article about this amazing priest in Newark, New Jersey who was part of this huge community organization that built housing and daycare and clinics since the riots in Newark in 1967. He's very good at not being made the hero of these endeavors. He presents himself simply as a person who stayed with it, but reading about him and his work made me feel like I have done nothing. Even what little bit I do, I don't always sustain my energy to fight and fight and fight. And you just have to fight so much to get anything done. But being an activist is even more important, and I would like myself to be more active. I've been trying to think about ways to deal with this, in terms of debates around open and public spaces in this time of massive privatization.

dC: There is obviously a tension between your research and your activism and between your academic perspective when working with and writing about children and the day to day interactions you have with them. How have these tensions enhanced or perhaps been a detriment to your work?

CK: I think what's happened, the biggest change, is that I'm much more pessimistic than I used to be. Even though I continue to say that

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I work with children because they turn our attention to the future, my experience in New York and my experience in returning to Sudan is that things continue to deteriorate. I used to work through my writing to explore the creative tensions that exist. But I also think they are a liability. I paint a very clear picture of how things are falling apart and how the chances for kids to excel are declining and the economy is in shambles, and then I say, "but there's always this possibility, this resilience." And I liked that tension, because what drives me as a political actor, is the possibility that you can change things, and that's why I work on questions about social reproduction. Of course, we can have structural changes, but when you are just changing structural things, you don't necessarily actually have social change. So, I do this work that's very tiny and focused because I think it's an arena to locate and promote real social change. But it has become harder, and at times it has taken its toll on me to actually say that there's something possible in this when things are so desperate and bleak for so many.

The Spaces In-Between And Other Ruminations on the Possibility of 'Minor Theory'

dC: On a slightly different note, do you see potential for working with Gillian Rose's (1994) notion of 'paradoxical space' and 'the politics of the everyday,' and this idea of 'multiple subject positions'—being at the center and at the margin at the same time—that one also finds in the work of bell hooks (1984)?

CK: Yes, I like that part of Rose's book. I like the idea of paradoxical space, but we need to figure out where to take it, how it translates to different domains. I think by now we are pretty good at working with notions of oscillating, of multiple subject positions, of moving in this space or in-betweenness, constituting our subjectivities in a kind of mobile and multiple way. But we are less good at answering the question, "What does this mean in the world?" and making the translation between material and metaphorical spaces, making the translation between different scales. If you can situate yourself there—in that space of betweenness—that is fine, but then what does that mean for your practice? And if you are speaking from those positions, what are you saying? And what are you doing?

dC: Do you find problematic the new focus in some critical theory and feminist discourses on 'nomadism' as a form of political/personal activism (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Braidotti 1994)? In particular, we are thinking of those who see 'nomadism' as a means of disowning

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the urban realm and striking out on a presumed featureless terrain, pitching a tent for the evening and moving from place to place without occupying a position long enough to be held accountable for it over the long-term.

CK: Yes, I think that metaphors of nomadism are suspect. They make a romance of mobility when a lot of people in the world are mobile, but not by choice. While there are many people who now constitute their mobile subjectivity in responsible ways, there is also a way of constituting one's multiple subjectivity that fails to account for positions taken at any point along a trajectory. There is a concern with the multiple locations of one's subjectivity, the profundity of one's own movement and oscillation between these locations, and the breathtaking vantage-point that it affords. But what are you seeing? Your navel? Where are you? It's useful to remember we are not alone in these positions. In our glorious movement from one spot to another, everything else can become a blur. After all that 'travel' we are back to a featureless plain. That plain has to be recognized as fully featured, populated by people who need and want things. This space and its people exert pressures on our motion. That produces a tension that gets (provisionally) resolved through political choices and actions.

dC: You have also written (Smith and Katz 1993) about the problems of resorting to terms that connote a fixed, absolute notion of space and a form of mapping that is taken-for-granted as representative of a 'reality' but is not cognizant of the arduousness of movement across some surfaces (i.e. the way that the environment both enables and constrains the types of positions you can take).

CK: Yes, people in literary theory more than other places, but even some of the more discursively-minded geographers are not connecting the spatial metaphors they use to any of the material entailments of those metaphors. I had some interesting engagements on this with literary theorists at a conference organized at the University of Arizona called "Making Words, Making Worlds." In the book to be published from the conference, I exchange a series of letters with literary theorists in which we discuss the deployment of spatial metaphors (Bammer et al. 1997). I went back and forth with them and at times felt quite concerned, like they were teaching me Literature 101: "don't you understand, metaphors *are* material?." But at another level I was saying, "don't *you* understand the implications of what you are saying?" It was a very interesting process.

dC: What are those implications?

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CK: Take any metaphor, like 'mapping.' Neil and I use this metaphor in our article (Smith and Katz 1993). People tend to think 'mapping' is straightforward when in actuality it is as loaded as any other form of representation. The works of critical geographers like J. Brian Harley (1989, 1990), Denis Wood (1992), and John Pickles (1995), along with many other critical theorists who are not geographers, have made clear the problematic assumptions embedded in mapping—questions of positionality, scale, framing and the like—that are effaced if not altogether ignored by most cartographers and GIS (Geographic Information Systems) specialists. These effacements and slippages make it easy for the lay public to assume that maps are straightforward, 'objective' representations of 'reality.' It also leaves spatial metaphors 'out there' for theorists like Michel Foucault, who at one time said that he privileged 'space' in order to let everything else go—as if you could unhinge everything else once you took space to be unproblematic. Likewise, literary theorists have used numerous spatial metaphors in the last decade in ways that suggest that these metaphors are clear and unproblematic. But if you make mapping (and other spatial metaphors) just as suspect as any other kind of positioned practice, it actually becomes a much more interesting metaphor. Understanding 'cognitive mapping' in an historical and more complicated way, you can go someplace further than Fredric Jameson (1988) or Foucault went with it. And I would *like* to see that happen. As Neil and I argued in our chapter on spatial metaphors, talking about space with awareness of its complicated and problematic entailments would be much more productive and interesting than current practice, which in its unawareness may redeploy our problematic notions as absolute space or an idea of maps as transparent.

In the end, the interchange that we had at this conference in Arizona was less about the metaphors and more about the difficulty of transdisciplinary work: how defensive and ignorant and problematic we all are even when we try to do things in a more complicated way; and how invested people are in appropriating various domains of knowledge.

dC: Don't metaphors always have to be raided from another domain, another discipline? Economists and economic geographers look to physics. Literary critics turn to geography. Isn't the larger problem that many theorists are unwilling to recognize that the metaphors they borrow are often contested and problematized within the discipline from which they borrow them?

CK: Yes, the nature of metaphors is such that people want to use

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them to illuminate some relationship that is obscure, or multi-layered. If you borrow or 'raid' them from another discipline, then they do not seem so complicated because you are not borrowing all of the complications that go with them. So it is easy to, say, use the physics metaphor simplistically, but actually if you use it in a complicated way, it becomes more interesting. You can say, "Well, I have illuminated this, but actually now that I turn it around one more time, it even undoes *these* things, and calls into question *those* things." You can actually move further with the use of metaphors when you acknowledge that they are problematic and have particular historical geographies of use. But I am not spending my life on a 'policing metaphor' campaign.

dC: We would like to turn now to your recent work "Toward Minor Theory" (1996). Could you give us a definition of what you mean by 'minor theory'?

CK: What I was trying to get at there, and it is borrowing heavily from Deleuze's and Guattari's (1986) theory of minor literature, is that many authors do not feel 'at home' when they work in a 'major' (or dominant form of) language or theory. Deleuze's and Guattari's key example is Kafka who was a Czech Jew writing in German. They argue that German was a world language of literature in which he, whose 'mother tongue' was Yiddish and whose everyday life was conducted in Czech, was (consciously) not at home. An author can work the tension between his or her subject position and the major language to push it limits, and expose ways of rupturing its apparent fixity and dominance. This idea connects to Gillian Rose's (1994) notion of 'paradoxical space' in a way; in that it can be understood as a space in which one is moving back and forth between a discourse or other material social practices that is not one's own—a dominant material social practice—and a space that is more comfortable. As one moves between the two, he or she takes hold of the space that is not 'home' and tries to make it his or her own, thus redefining that space temporarily. At the same time, she or he is trying to break apart the dominant space by showing the ways that it can't carry her or his message.

I tried to graft these ideas to a notion of theorizing that might force us to question the kind of theorizing we do. We theorize at different scales of abstraction and we theorize at different geographic scales, and we theorize about different sorts of objects of knowledge, and some theorizations have more currency at various times than others. There are always contestations over knowledge and the way it is pro-

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duced. As in any historical geography there is a predominant way of theorizing in contemporary geography, and I wanted to point to that and call it into question.

This all began when I read and reviewed Derek Gregory's (1994) *Geographical Imaginations* (see Katz 1995). I thought his work put a certain mode of theorizing on a pedestal. Gregory constantly recognized, addressed, and interrogated a form of grand theory, that was abstract and dealt with abstract social relations. I don't want to turn the discussion into a debate between 'abstract and empirical' or 'material and discursive,' however. It is really about a dominant way of talking, what I have sometimes facetiously (but seriously) called 'Big Boy' theory. You know what I mean, this way of categorizing, it strikes a resonant chord for some people and makes others want to kick me. That's okay. I am glad for the many great responses I've had from people who see themselves marginalized by this way of working. They see what I'm doing in trying to challenge the dominance of certain ways of theorizing as part of a shared project to change what counts as important in producing knowledge.

This response comes from people who are trying to theorize at different scales, trying to enact that oscillation between two or more places or discursive practices. These are people who are not comfortable in any one of these positions, but who continue to try and write and talk within the prevailing dominant academic discourses. In the end of "All the World is Staged" (1992), I talked about using a decoder ring so that I can "talk the talk" while at the same time recognizing the ways that I am outside of that language. It was a way to expose and make productive various contestations over how knowledge is produced. This is where I dealt with the 'space of betweenness' for the first time, I think. But I don't want to put the onus of decoding on any one person because that onus is always on the 'outsider.' I want to unhinge those who are more comfortable—major theorists, if you will—and say, "Hey you! You see me." Of course I don't mean me personally, I mean they should see and recognize these other ways of working. Books like Gregory's are blind to these other domains of theory making and reinforce our validation of 'major' theories such as certain forms of Marxism or poststructuralism as the only ones that matter. My concern is not just the theory itself, but how it is deployed.

I want to be clear that in developing the idea of minor theory I was not trying to pose feminism against Marxism—I don't think *that* is what is going on—nor is it empirical versus abstract. I am talking

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about a way of working (and theorizing) that attempts to move both between abstract large theory and a concern with global political-economic processes, for example, *and* small scale local lived experiences gotten at ethnographically, for instance. I don't see a way of talking about one without the other. And I think, if nothing else, *that* does come through in my work. I may not do it well, but I do it. I don't let go. I am determined to get to where I hold the two in tension and make neither float away.

It seems to me that those of us who do this kind of work—and there are many of us who do—support and comfort one another. We find ourselves saying: “Don't we do something like what everyone is saying we need to do in geography? Why do we not get attention for it?” I wanted to not be bitter about it, despite all the championing of the margins that is going around these days. I wanted to not feel marginalized. There is always a danger of—what do I want? Do I just want to be a ‘Big Boy’? Well, I don't. I want to be doing what I am doing in the community of people who do similar types of work. At the same time, I want our ‘minor’ practices to change ‘major’ theory and the terrain of what is considered important.

dC: Doesn't major theory, regardless of how ‘major’ it might be, always hold minor theory within it? Can't it then be destabilized by that tension?

CK: Yes, that is what I *like* about it. There is a notion of the two being embedded in one another. But as you can imagine, with relationships where something is dominant and something is subordinate—which actually is not subordinate, but is somehow constituted as marginal—there is much more recognition of ‘position’ when one is at the margins, at a disadvantage in the discourse or in the theory, than not. From the ‘center’ it's easier to ignore other positions. The metaphor that I used in response to Gregory was that he didn't see what was on the horizon. He saw the horizon, but he didn't see what I called the ‘spectral figures’ that were out there. His wide-angle gaze was resolutely focused on the distant plain, were it fastened onto ‘major theory’ as we know it, but missed what was going on in the interstices.

dC: So, do you see minor theory as entailing a different way of *seeing*?

CK: I think so. I don't want to say that it is only a visual thing, that it is only about seeing. I think it is a way of being embodied differently. It is a way of taking seriously this oscillation, or really engaging, being ‘mobile,’ of producing theory between multiple positions. And I think that those critical geographers who still work within the domain

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of major theory can talk about being multiply-positioned, but they actually don't do the work of moving between the domains of discourse. Critical geographers who ‘do’ minor theory are generally not recognized for the kind of hard work it takes to write from the margins. Minor theory makes you less able to make grand proclamations, but more able to actually work through, or cut through, or undermine, or pick away at some of the ways that knowledge is constituted. Minor theory suggests a different way of being materially constituted as a theorist. Again, it is not simply about *seeing*; it is really about *moving* between the various domains of discourse.

dC: You mentioned in your writing on Gregory that you see his work, and we are quoting you here, as “primarily concerned with the politics of representation” and then you go on to say that “his politics of space seem to stop at the production of the spatial imaginary, which however important, is not enough” (1995: xx). So, what is “not enough?”

CK: I think that he looks at the way that spaces are represented in *the* literature, the major canons of geographic thought and *in theory*. Certainly this is crucial. I have no argument with the importance of examining the representations that arise in and from theory, but we can't stop there. We also have to look at how these representations play out in built form; how they play out in the world. People actually *live* someplace and representations are not the only thing that ‘structures’ space. In fact, spaces are not simply produced by representations (nor by the structuring forces of society), but also by these people who move through those spaces, who ‘produce’ space in the course of their everyday lives. On the one hand, it's crucial to look at how representations affect productions of space, including movement through the space, or access to it. That's one part of the politics of representation. On the other hand, it's important to recognize that the movement and actions of people change the representations again, and both practices constitute the spatial. I don't want this to be *about* Gregory, but I was arguing that he does not actually look at the ‘world’ in *Geographical Imaginations*. Unlike Said (1979), Gregory's work stops short of asking, “Well, what does it mean in the world if you have this *visioning* of Egypt, or this Orientalism?.”¹ I want to encourage us to move past questions of representation as such, so that we can understand their material effects, the constestations they engender and resolve, and the constant modifications that are at the heart of the relationship between material space and its representations.

dC: So it is to get to the messy politics from the angelic, the neat, the clean package so to speak.

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CK: Yes!

dC: As you say, from the *flaneur* to messy politics.

CK: Yes, it is about getting messy and letting your theory be messy as well. It leads us again to what it means to be embodied. That sense of minor theory *making* is part of what I was trying to get at in the minor theory piece. I tried to illustrate what this means for me, but it is very difficult. When I first presented it people said, "Yeah I get it, but what does this mean for a geographer?" I hope I've made that a little clearer here and in the article.

Notes

1 For another example of theoretically-informed work that explores the connection between Orientalism as discursive framework and the changing material conditions in Northeast Africa, see Timothy Mitchell's *Colonizing Egypt* (1988) and more recent article 'America' Egypt' (1991). *disClosure* 5 features an interview with Timothy Mitchell (1996).

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