

THE 90'S SHOW: CULTURE LEAVES THE FARM AND HITS THE STREETS¹

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1. This paper benefited from the comments of David Ley and Wolfgang Zierhofer. I am very grateful to both of them.

Abstract: The tradition of American cultural geography was defined by studies of the rural, and in its more prosaic form focused on cataloguing and mapping artifacts such as fence posts, barn types, and gravestones in order to delimit culture areas. In contrast, the city was all but ignored, treated as a cultural vacuum, and conceived only as a site of work, production, and economic relations. Hence, the importance of urban spatial science that from the late 1950s formalized that economism as central place theory, or Alonso's map of bid-rent curves, or models of retail location. Even when urban geography began eschewing formal models and theory, turning towards some kind of Marxist approach during the 1970s, the focus on things economic remained, but couched now in a different vocabulary such as rent gap, urban gatekeepers, and uneven development. The economism of spatial science and Marxism could not be sustained, however. Culture had to be let in. From 1990 pressured by outside theoretical developments such as cultural studies, and post-modernism, and changes from inside the discipline such as the rise of the new cultural geography, urban geography finally cracked, explicitly allowing culture in first as a trickle, but by the end of that decade as a flood. Culture had finally left the farm and hit the streets.

INTRODUCTION

In the winter term of my first year as a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, I took a seminar in the “History of Geographical Thought” from a giant of a professor in every sense, Fred Lukermann. I barely understood anything that went on, but it was my most exhilarating intellectual experience even now twenty-five years later. Lukermann spoke for three hours without notes, and even his physical movements – the lumbering pacing, the gestures of his enormous hands, even the unwrapping of a toothpick – seemed as if they were scripted for the occasion. We joked as graduate students that there were probably cut out footprints pasted to his office floor so he could rehearse his movements, Arthur-Murray like. On the first evening we met, Lukermann told us what the class would be about. But just as he got to the crucial sentence, I was somehow distracted, or lost concentration, and didn’t catch what he said. He never repeated that sentence, and from that point he talked only about “the problem,” or “the issue” or “the central theme,” or just “it.”

Too shy and insecure to ask Lukermann what “it” was, the seminar became a series of weekly clues to a puzzle that I could never seem to solve. The clues were many and drawn from a dizzying range of sources: ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, nineteenth-century German historians such as Dilthey and Herder, late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American philosophers such as Pierce and Dewey, twentieth-century ethnographers such as Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Kroeber and Benedict, geographers from all ages from Strabo to von Humboldt to Sauer and Hartshorne, and, Lukermann’s favorite, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant who began the seminar and ended it.

The exam was a take-home, and required us to summarize in a blue book the main argument of the course. The exam topic could hardly have been worse, and I was completely

flummoxed. With some late nights, strong cups of tea, and muttered British cursing I managed to grind something out. A week later there was a message in my mail box asking if I would go to see Lukermann who was also Dean of Liberal Arts. I turned up at his enormous Dean's office on the East Bank of the University of Minnesota campus with much trepidation. But he was very kind, and handing back my exam said, "I think you knew better what was going on in the course than I did." Flabbergasted, I blurted, "But I never knew what "it" was about." "That's culture for you," he said, "you never get to the bottom of it."

So, that was what the course was about. No wonder I didn't get it. Culture was a dirty word for me as a politicized teenager living in 1970s England: it meant class privilege, the hoi polloi, Radio 3, the opera, braying critics, and inscrutable performing and visual arts. Furthermore, at university it meant nothing intellectually. Most of my undergraduate degree at UCL was in economics. Because "culture could not be put into an equation," as my microeconomics Professor professed, it was treated as a pseudo idea, as an epiphenomenon, as something that appeared real but was not. And in the geography courses I took my lecturers were hardly less scathing: "Aren't those American cultural geographers funny with their studies of barn types, fence posts, and gravestones?" But in the winter quarter of 1979 at the University of Minnesota, I had my Pauline experience. Leaving Lukermann's cavernous office, the scales fell from my eyes, and I saw the geographical world anew; I saw it in terms of culture. That perspective irrevocably stuck, informing all my subsequent work.

That work, though, has been exclusively in the field of economic geography. In this sense, I am a most unlikely contributor to this special issue, an interloper, if not an impostor. I've never written on urban geography, nor taken an urban geography class. Although in the strange-but-true world of university appointments, I was hired as an urban geographer, and have

taught an urban geography course for 20 years. What most strikes me as an interested outsider about urban geography is its similar intellectual trajectory to economic geography that over the 1990s has also emphasized culture after years of neglect and even hostility (Ley, 1996a, p. 475; Thrift, 2000a, p. 692; Barnes, 2003). That is, in the last decade both disciplines appear to be moving toward Lukermann, becoming ever more cultural. I'm not saying that Lukermann engineered this result – there are forces that even as great a man as Fred Lukermann cannot control. Nonetheless, his 1979 graduate seminar brilliantly caught what was in the air, persuading me of culture's importance, and introducing a theme that is now central to urban geography, and the topic of this paper.

Specifically, my intention is to examine the processes by which culture came into urban geography, and the particular forms it has taken. The paper is divided into three short sections. First, I present brief histories of urban and cultural geography, and their relationship. Constituted in different periods, with different foci, methodologies, and internal sociological imperatives, American traditional pre-war cultural geography and post-war urban geography were never going to be a successful union. There was too much “interference” to use the sociologist of science John Law's (2000) term. Furthermore, even when urban geography began to change from its spatial science to its political economy incarnation during the 1970s, those interferences were only reconstituted in a different register and not removed. Second, I will examine the subsequent process of reconciliation between urban and cultural geography that stems from external debates in political economy and cultural studies, and an internal one around the re-conceptualization of cultural geography. Finally, I discuss some of the specific forms that the “cultural turn” in urban geography now takes. Following my own interests, I focus on especially the changing theoretical relation between culture and economy neglecting the specific

issues of gender, race, and sexuality, and which are clearly just as central, if not more so, to urban geography's recent emphasis on culture.

TWO SOLITUDES: CULTURAL AND URBAN GEOGRAPHY

Historically there has been a strained relationship between American cultural and urban geography. Cultural geography, the older of the two, dominated US geography during the first part of the twentieth century (Cosgrove 2000, p. 135). Its most famous exponent, Carl Sauer (1963), presented the methodological template in his 1925 essay, "The morphology of landscape." While later expressing regrets about its publication – Lukermann told us in his seminar that Sauer would refer to it as "That thing" – the essay fundamentally molded cultural geographical practices. Those practices turned on examining how traditional culture as an agent modified the natural environment (the medium) to produce a specific cultural landscape.

As a form of inquiry, Sauerian cultural geography was defined by a number of features. First, it focused on rural areas at the expense of urban ones (Wheeler, 1998, p. 586). A well-known urban-phobe, Sauer thought modernization had run amok in the city destroying established folk cultures and the natural environment. It was only in the countryside, on the farm, that the cultural landscape was visible. Hence, those later studies by Berkeley School apostles on barn types, fence posts, and country gravestones. This was a view of culture, according to two of those apostles, Marvin Mikesell and Philip Wagner, defined by "verifiable characteristics" that then provided the "means for classifying areas according to the character of the human groups that occupy them" (Wagner and Mikesell, 1962, p. 2). Second, to achieve such an objective, Sauer demanded detailed field inquiry involving learning foreign languages, prolonged talk with the natives, protracted periods of field study, and knowledge of both natural and human sciences. There were no quick and dirty short cuts, no ready-made protocols to

follow. Researchers needed to earn their knowledge through their own talent, the dirt of their boots, and the toil of individual study. Cosgrove (1993, p. 516) labels such a mentality “the backpack entry ticket to ... cultural geography.” Third, Sauer’s broader scheme was holistic. A cultural landscape was more than the sum of its parts involving the integration and mutual modification of culture and nature. As he said in “Morphology,” “one has not fully understood the nature of an area until ‘one has learned to see it as an organic unit’” (Sauer, 1963, p. 322). The corollary is skepticism of analytical separation, and which for Sauer produced in geography’s past a morally and intellectually repugnant environmental determinism. Finally, and most broadly, he was an intellectual conservative, an anti-modernist, appealing to history rather than to progress, to cultural tradition rather than to universal reason, and to organic complexity rather than to reductionist simplification (Mathewson, 1987; Speth, 1987). That’s why his work was historical and set against the forces of a gung-ho modernity, why he emphasized local culture and was a skeptic of metropolitan power, and why he focused on the detailed holistic arrangement of cultural landscapes and eschewed analytical modeling and abstract theorization. As Sauer wrote in a letter to Campbell Pennington: “I am saddened by model builders and system builders and piddlers with formulas for imaginary universals” (letter to Campbell Pennington, February, 4, 1967, quoted in Martin, 1987, p. xv).

Given the methods and goals of Sauerian cultural geography, it was no wonder that when North American urban geography systematically emerged in the mid-to-late 1950s there would be at best a frosty relation to it, if no relation at all. For urban geography defined itself from the beginning in terms of everything Sauerian cultural geography was not. It celebrated contemporary urbanism, it believed in general not individual rules of inquiry, it held up analysis,

and preached the virtues of modernism including model and system building, and universals that were thought neither piddling nor imaginary, but large and real.

While there were individual PhD's completed on urban geographical topics from the turn of the 20th century (Harris, 1990, p. 403, says the first at Chicago was in 1907), urban geography courses such as Charles Colby's at Chicago, and even urban geographical texts such as Robert Dickinson's (1947) City, Region and Regionalism (Johnston, 2001), urban geography was not systematized until the mid-1950s, if not later (Yeates, 2001, p. 516). Harold Mayer (1990, pp. 419-20), Director of Research of the Chicago Plan Commission, and later appointed at the Geography Department at the University of Chicago, chaired the committee that wrote the key urban chapter in the influential volume, American Geography: Inventory and Prospect (Mayer, 1954). And perhaps even more influential was Mayer's edited volume with Clyde Kohn published five years later, Readings in Urban Geography (Mayer and Kohn, 1959). Consisting of 54 chapters divided into 18 sections, the book served as a blueprint for the new discipline (see remarks by Taaffe, 1990, p. 423; Yeates, 2001, p. 516; and Clark, 2001, pp. 542-43).

Establishing the city as a legitimate objective of social scientific inquiry, contributors pressed the merits of abstract theorizing, rigorous quantitative empirical methods, and instrumental reasoning, and in so doing effortlessly folded into geography's quantitative and theoretical revolution occurring at the same time. Urban geography was spatial science (Wheeler, 2001a & b).

More specifically, unlike Sauer, urban geographers were vitally concerned to record and analyze the effects of modernization in the city, not to retreat from it. The pace and changing form of urban growth in post-war America was transformative, demanding scholarly attention. Central was the urban economy, and reflected in the Mayer and Kohn reader: five chapters were

on economic base, four on central place theory, six on commercial structure, six on transportation, and two on industry. The main action was not in the cultural folkways of the Louisiana Bayou, or around the peculiar fence notching on East Nebraskan ranches, but in and between cities: in the Fordist factories of the manufacturing belt, in the commercial strips and malls of the emerging automobile suburbs, and in the metropolitan downtown centers of command and control. Second, while urban geographers did fieldwork, it was not a fetish, nor did it require years of scholarly preparation. Moreover, the most important work was not done outside in the field, but inside the university: in the computer center initially patch wiring early machines, and later punching FORTRAN cards; in the statistics lab pressing keys on electric Friden calculating machines, and later on expensive hand-held calculators; or in the office compiling data, calculating chi-square coefficients, and drawing regression lines (Wheeler, 2001b, p. 551). Third, a key term and activity for urban geographers was analysis, the breaking down of a problem into smaller elements that could be logically related using a formal vocabulary: hence chi square coefficients, regression lines, and theories like economic-base, rank-size, or central place models. In contrast, Sauerian holistic talk was anathema: it was mystical, obfuscatory, and unscientific. Finally, in every way urban geography upheld the ideal of modernity. Modern knowledge was instrumental in achieving progress in the human condition itself. By implementing rational theories, models, and techniques cities would become better places, cumulatively enriching the everyday lives of people living within them (Adams 2001, p. 530; Clark, 2001, p. 542; Yeates, 2001, p. 522). Hence, the Center for Urban Studies, University of Chicago, or the Bartlett School, University College London, where rational theories were translated into policy prescriptions for a new and improved urban reality.

Sometime during the 1970s, however, the waxing of urban spatial science of the 1960s turned to waning as radical political economy emerged as an increasingly important alternative. Crucial for this paper, however, is that culture continued to remain off the agenda, with the gap with conservative Sauerian cultural geography if anything widening.

So, radical political economists, like Harvey (1973) and Castells (1977), continued to insist on the centrality of the city. Indeed, urbanization was for them the pulsing heart of capitalism itself. In contrast, Marx and Engels (Laski 1948, p. 125) famously spoke about the “idiocy of rural life,” putting the cultural study of pastoral folkways outside the radical urban theoretical pale.

Radical urban geographers were also not much inclined towards Sauerian fieldwork. It was not that fieldwork itself was abhorred, only its lack of connection to a wider political project. After all, Engels (1847) in The Condition of the Working Class in England was one of the first, if not the first, to engage in modern urban geographical fieldwork in his study of the appalling conditions of the Ur-gritty city of the British industrial revolution, Manchester. He “gained intimacy” of that city, as Steven Marcus (1974, p. 98) writes, “by taking to the streets, at all hours of the day and night, on weekends and holidays.” The point, though, was that Engel’s fieldwork – his learning a new language, his talking and interacting with the natives, his meticulous field notes – had political purpose, and revealed with apocalyptic clarity four years later in The Communist Manifesto.

While some critics charge Marxism with the holism (Elster, 1985) that also informs Sauer’s work, radical urban geographers for the most part practiced a sometimes-compulsive theoretical analysis. Most brilliantly represented by Harvey (1982), The Limits to Capital especially provides a toolbox of concepts with which to take apart and scrutinize individual

components of urban capitalism, and to see them in their larger logical relation. But that analysis, as is well known, provides little place for culture. Even the working class, supposedly the beneficiaries of the analysis, is often silent (Katz, 1986). The stuff of culture – meaning, symbols, signification – are treated by Harvey in his book as flotsam and jetsam, surficial and superstructural, and not part of the all-important economic base that undergirds and directs metropolitan capitalism.

Finally, modernity's ideals of progress, reason, and reductionist simplification are all represented in radical urban geography. Smith's rent-gap thesis is trumpeted as an improvement over Alonso's bid-rent model. The logic and associated diagrams of Harvey's theory of urban capital are just as hard-edged, flinty, and unyielding as Ullman's earlier logic and diagrams in his theory of location for cities. And radical urban geography was equally economically reductionist as orthodox urban geography: the former reduces urban places to the logic of capital, the latter to the logic of consumer and producer behavior. As a result, spatial science urbanism and political economic urbanism ostracized culture, leaving it back at the farm, while the economy was given pride of place within the city.

CULTURAL STUDIES AND THE NEW CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

The problem, of course, is that you can't keep culture ostracized, separated, and cordoned off. Lewis Mumford wrote about The Culture of the City in 1938, a good decade before urban geography formally existed. And Fred Lukermann in a series of articles from the late 1950s conducted a guerrilla campaign in a set of admittedly eccentrically chosen journals insisting that urban culture be recognized along with its economy (Barnes, 1996, ch. 9). In addition, the Chicago School of urban sociology, and on which urban geographers were to draw heavily especially during the 1960s, made issues of culture and cultural interpretation central from

William Thomas's (1918) formative early twentieth-century study on the Polish peasant through to the classic urban ethnographies of the 1930s such as Frederic Thrasher's (1936) The Gang, or Paul Cressey's (1932) The Taxi-Dance Hall. Robert Park (1952, p. 15), who along with Earnest Burgess and Robert McKenzie founded the school with publication of the The City in 1925, was very explicit about their links with anthropology and the study of culture. "The same patient methods of observation which anthropologists like Boas and Lowie have expended on the study of life and manners of the North American Indian might be even more fruitfully employed in the investigation of the customs, beliefs, social practices, and general conceptions of life prevalent in Little Italy on the Lower North Side in Chicago, or in recording the more sophisticated folkways of the inhabitants of Greenwich Village and the neighborhood of Washington Square."

The point is that there were resources available to urban geographers either of the spatial science or radical stripe to deal with culture if they were inclined to do so. But they weren't. Because of historical connotations about the meaning and practice of traditional cultural geography (and bound to the forceful personality and intellect of Sauer), and a tendency toward economism, that is, the belief that the economy is determinant and central in social life, urban culture was sidelined, or at best treated as supplemental and marginal, an extra one could do without. However, during the 1990s things begin to change. Culture became increasingly basic and core, a theoretical necessity rather than a luxury. Propelling such a transformation are two related literatures outside of urban geography: first, cultural studies and postmodernism that re-theorizes the relation between culture and economy, thereby undermining the economism of both spatial science and radical urbanism; and second, the new cultural geography that both critiques and begins to replace the Sauerian tradition. Together they revamp urban geography. Culture leaves the farm and hits the streets.

Cultural studies emerged in post-war Britain from debates inside political economy about the relationship of culture to economy. Marx in his Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859) asserted that ‘the mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness’ (Marx 1904: preface). In this view, “the mode of production,” the economy, determines, and consciousness, culture, is determined. From its beginning in the 1950s, cultural studies played down that economism, substituting a softer view that provided some autonomy and determining role to culture. Early statements were made by Raymond Williams (“the structure of feeling”), Richard Hoggart (“the felt quality of life”), and Stuart Hall (“Marxism without guarantees”). Their importance was in showing that one could hang on to class analysis and the economy, yet also recognize values, ways of life, and emotional and political commitments that lay outside. Hence, for example, William’s phrase the “structure of feeling” that connotes the “doubleness of culture ... [as both] material reality and lived experience” (Eagleton, 2000, p. 36).

The same issue of the relation between economy and culture is one of the key themes in the sometimes-allied postmodernist literature, and which becomes important from the 1970s. I say one of the themes because the postmodernist literature is vast and sprawling, spanning disciplines, substantive topics and foci, and philosophical positions. One corner of it, though, is concerned with moving away from a determinant relation between the economy and culture, sometimes disassociating the two altogether, and in some cases representing both as “no more than a free play of texts, representations and discourses” (Bradley and Fenton, 1999, p. 114). As within the cultural studies literature, though, there is a wide range of positions. In geography it

varies from Harvey's (1989) "postmodernism," that remains within shouting distance of his earlier classical Marxism of The Limits, to Michael Dear's "postmodernism" of *Keno Capitalism, cyburbia, and privatopia* (Dear and Flusty, 1998), to J. K. Gibson-Graham's (1996) "postmodernism" in which the economy is conceived as a discursive construction that will disappear if enough of us believe in that possibility and act accordingly in our everyday lives.

It is easy to get lost in the details of these positions, and the sometimes-antagonistic debates among people who you think should be friendlier. The broad point is that cultural studies and postmodernism undermined economism, and which was found in urban geography from its inception. The infusion of cultural studies and postmodernism into urban geography, then, began to dislodge the centrality accorded to the economy, and in doing so put the focus on what Gibson-Graham (2000) call economy's "other," culture.

The other literature making the difference is the new cultural geography. There already exist a number of reviews, assessments, dictionary entries, and even retrospectives (Philo, 2000). For the purpose of this paper, the new cultural geography made two signal contributions. First, it provided a set of compelling and persuasive criticisms of Sauerian cultural geography beginning with James Duncan's (1980) superorganic paper. The upshot was that by the 1990s, the Sauerian stamp no longer marked cultural geography. The change wasn't always smooth – Duncan (1994) speaks of "civil war" – and once the heat of debate cooled, it was possible to see a number of continuities and overlaps between old and new cultural geographies. The important point, though, was that Sauerian cultural geography, and its antipathy to urbanism both in word and in deed, was no longer obstructive. One could practice cultural geography in the city without "the old man" wagging a disapproving finger. Second, the new cultural geography insisted that culture was found everywhere from the most mundane to the most spectacular, and

was not a miscellaneous category for ill-fitting, awkward and otherwise lost elements of social life. As Cosgrove and Jackson (1987, p. 99) wrote in their manifesto: “Culture is not a residual category, the surface variation left unaccounted for by more powerful economic analyses; it is the very medium through which change is experienced, contested and constituted.” And where that change is most often experienced, contested, and constituted is in the city.

URBAN CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

The consequence was that urban geography during the 1990s became increasingly urban cultural geography. A casual inspection of the journal Urban Geography, illustrates the change over the decade. For the first time in the 1990s, it included special issues (e.g., Vol. 17, number 6), progress reports (e.g., Mitchell, 1999), and editorials (e.g., Wheeler, 1998) in favor of cultural urban geography. In addition, in 2000 Bridge and Watson published their edited A Companion to the City, a volume in size and intent to rival Readings in Urban Geography, with 52 separate essays, and divided into five sections. The difference is that only one of the Companion's sections is on the economy, but three on culture: “Imagining cities,” “Cities of division and difference,” and “Public cultures and everyday spaces.” The cultural turn clearly has turned urban.

Understanding culture is not easy, however. Raymond Williams (1976, p. 76) famously said that culture is “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.” And once joined with the urban, the combination is dense and tangled. Perhaps the way forward is less the single road of grand theoretical statement, but paths that are more piece-meal, less-defined and limited, and which join bits of empirical study with pieces of different cultural theories. I would argue that it is precisely this kind of “promiscuous mingling,” to use Dick

Walker's (1997, p. 173) term, that characterizes much of substantive writings within recent urban cultural geography, and which accounts for its vibrancy and success.

For reasons of brevity, I cannot provide a comprehensive review of that literature. Instead, I will mention five current substantive urban research areas in which culture now figures large. In each case, there is an attempt to recognize, and to varying degrees to integrate culture with the economy. I say varying degrees because different researchers bring to these topics their own past intellectual baggage, and in which some cases has been economic. In such cases, the past can still weigh heavy. That said, in each of the five examples, it is never pure economism (or pure culture), but always an attempt to have both urban culture and urban economy: it is both/and and not either/or.

The first literature is on public space, and which shades into discussions of consumption. Found initially in Harvey's (1989) Condition of Postmodernity, and clearly different from Limits in its recognition of culture, the argument is that the urban public space has become increasingly commodified, hybridizing dollar signs of profit with cultural signs of meaning. Certainly, one can still detect strains of economism in the argument. But it is not the all-powerful capital logic of Harvey's earlier works. The subtitle of The Condition of Postmodernity is An inquiry into the origins of cultural change, and evident in his concern to identify changing sources of cultural meaning in everyday lives as people move about and use the city including its public spaces. In a similar vein, is Zukin's (1995) work on the Cultures of Cities. Softening her earlier Marxism, Zukin makes a concerted attempt in the book to deal with a suite of cultural issues including urban symbolism, identity, and the meaning of urban public space. "Culture is, arguably, what cities 'do' best," Zukin (1995, p. 264) writes. But it is not an innocent culture. It is marked by the hieroglyph of the commodity. She writes, "since the 1970s ... collective space – public

space – has been represented as a consumer good” (Zukin, 1995, p. 260). In this view, public urban spaces like Baltimore’s inner harbor or Sony Plaza in Manhattan or the French Quarter in New Orleans are utterly entangled in both culture and economy.

The second is on urban cultural industries, and associated especially with Scott’s (1996, 1997) work. Originally coming from a political economy perspective, Scott extends his earlier regulationist-inspired idea of post-Fordist industrial agglomerations, and resulting synergies within particular urban places, to cultural industries, and their location within the world’s most powerful metropolitan centers such as Los Angeles, New York, London, and Paris. His argument is that cultural products, that is, goods and services “infused ... with broadly aesthetic or semiotic attributes” (Scott, 1997, p. 323) are “one of the critical pulses of the economy and cultural conditions of twentieth-century capitalism” (Scott, 1996, p. 306). In this view, “culture and economy are highly symbiotic” (Scott, 1997, p. 325), meaning that they are mutually constitutive: the economy increasingly is defined by the generation of cultural products, and cultural products emerge because they are defined as economic commodities. As a result, the dividing line between culture and economy is blurred, with the necessity of dealing with both.

The third is on gentrification, and interesting theoretically because at least initially there were two competing interpretations: one associated with Smith’s (1984) political economic approach, and another associated with Ley (1980; 1987) that focused not on the economy but on cultural meaning and the everyday. Smith’s “rent gap thesis” was the economic interpretation, with gentrifying neighborhoods the precipitate of the “see-saw” of capital. In contrast, Ley emphasized gentrification as part of a wider lifestyle and consumption choice stemming from the emergence of a post-industrial new middle class, and who took their pro-urban cultural values in part from the critical youth movements of the 1960s. Over the 1990s, however, there has been

give on both side, as each author sought to accommodate both culture and economy. Smith now says there “an intimate connection between economic change and socio-cultural expression in the explanation of gentrification” (Smith and Defilippis, 1999, p. 639; Smith, 1996), and Ley (1996b, ch. 4) is much more explicit about the role of the economy, and couched in terms of the central city labor markets. Clearly, there are still differences between the two, but the important point is that both have moved to rehearse both culture and economy.

The fourth focuses on economic services and innovation and associated with Amin and Thrift (2002; Thrift, 2000b; Amin and Graham, 1997). Drawing upon an eclectic range of theoretical sources – institutional economics, performativity, and actor network – they argue that the urban economy increasingly operates as a discursive construction blending economy and culture. As Thrift (1997, p. 136) says, “capitalism seems to be undergoing its own cultural turn as increasingly ... business is about the creation, fostering, and distribution of knowledge.” Where this happens primarily is in the city. Its peculiar set of institutional assets enable cultural performance to be inextricably bound to economic performance. As a result, “the easy separation between the ‘social,’ ‘political,’ ‘cultural,’ and ‘economic’ becomes more and more problematic” (Amin and Graham, 1997, p. 419) as the city itself becomes “variegated and multiplex (Amin and Graham, 1987, p. 418).

The final literature is on international urban migration and transnationalism. In urban geography it is associated especially with work on the Chinese diaspora and cities of the Pacific Rim (Mitchell, 1993; Olds, 2000; Ley, forthcoming). Katharyne Mitchell (1999, p. 671) writes about this work in her review essay for Urban Geography, “What’s culture got to do with it?,” saying that “the main body of this research incorporates both economic and cultural factors in explaining the types and changes occurring in the urban environment, the patterns of resistance

to those changes, and the general outcome of struggles based on varying intersections of class, ethnicity and gender.” To answer Mitchell’s question: culture has everything to do with it. From rhizomatic Chinese business networks, to socially embedded patterns of entrepreneurship and migration, to symbolic meanings of house form and urban landscape, culture is everywhere, intermingling, and inseparable from the economic.

CONCLUSION

Mae West once said, “I used to be Snow White but I drifted.” So too has urban geography over the 1990s, and me as well. Urban geography used to study the pure and unsullied – wholesome patterns of mid-western central places, decent Toronto bid-rent curves, upright Chicago population density gradients, unadulterated Baltimore class-conflict, and a proper Philadelphia rent gap. But no more. Things now seem less straightforward, messier, mixed up, and contaminated. Reaching for pure economic entities as an urban explanation seems less satisfactory. There are various reasons for such a change, but one, as I argued here, is because of the increasing recognition of the cultural, and an attempt to theories its relation especially to the economy. Urban geography has drifted.

I don’t think this should be bemoaned, morally impugned, or haughtily ignored. Why it took me so long to figure out the point of Lukermann’s seminar, and in the end had to be told, was precisely because I was operating with a Snow-White purity. My Road-to-Damascus experience in Lukermann’s office was the start of my own drifting, the recognition that purity should be soiled, and the realization that Snow White is too good to be true. I hope in its “cultural turn,” urban geography like Mae West becomes too true to be good. As Martin Luther said, if one is going to sin one should sin boldly.

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