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## Theorizing sociospatial relations

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**Abstract.** This essay seeks to reframe recent debates on sociospatial theory through the introduction of an approach that can grasp the inherently polymorphic, multidimensional character of sociospatial relations. As previous advocates of a scalar turn, we now question the privileging, in any form, of a single dimension of sociospatial processes, scalar or otherwise. We consider several recent sophisticated ‘turns’ within critical social science; explore their methodological limitations; and highlight several important strands of sociospatial theory that seek to transcend the latter. On this basis, we argue for a more systematic recognition of polymorphy—the organization of sociospatial relations in multiple forms—within sociospatial theory. Specifically, we suggest that territories (T), places (P), scales (S), and networks (N) must be viewed as mutually constitutive and relationally intertwined dimensions of sociospatial relations. We present this proposition as an extension of recent contributions to the spatialization of the strategic-relational approach (SRA), and we explore some of its methodological implications. We conclude by briefly illustrating the applicability of the ‘TPSN framework’ to several realms of inquiry into sociospatial processes under contemporary capitalism.

Lively debates on the spatiality of social relations occur regularly in the social sciences. However, these debates often run their course without major impact on empirical inquiries into matters spatial, especially where they appear too abstract, abstruse, or one-dimensional to bear on concrete research. This essay seeks to reframe these debates. As previous advocates of a scalar turn, we now question the privileging, in any form, of a single dimension of sociospatial relations, scalar or otherwise.<sup>(1)</sup> We believe that this contributes to an unreflexive ‘churning’ of spatial turns, leading to short intellectual product life cycles for key sociospatial concepts, limiting opportunities for learning through theoretical debate, empirical analysis, and critical evaluation of such concepts. The limits of one-dimensionalism are also reflected in several methodological tendencies in contemporary sociospatial theory, including: theoretical amnesia and exaggerated claims to conceptual innovation; the use of chaotic concepts rather than rational abstractions; overextension of concepts and their imprecise application; concept refinement to the neglect of empirical evaluation; and an appeal to loosely defined metaphors over rigorously demarcated research strategies.<sup>(2)</sup> After sketching

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<sup>(1)</sup> This paper derives from many years of intermittent and frequently intense discussion among its authors beginning at the 2000 IBG/RGS conference in Brighton. From initial agreement on the need for a scalar turn and a new political economy of scale, we gradually recognized the limitations of too sharp a sociospatial turn (of any kind) and the need for a multidimensional account of sociospatial relations.

<sup>(2)</sup> On metaphors in general and on the scale debate in particular, see Howitt (1998).

these problems and their reflection in more or less one-sided analyses, we argue for a more systematic recognition of polymorphy—the organization of sociospatial relations in multiple forms and dimensions—in sociospatial theory.

### **Successive sociospatial ‘turns’ and their limitations**

Several explicit spatial turns have occurred during the last thirty years across various disciplines. Each has attempted to reveal the unstated, and often problematic, spatial assumptions underpinning social scientific inquiries, and to elaborate a more adequate account of sociospatial relations. In particular, four distinct spatial lexicons have been developed by social scientists over the last thirty years: territory, place, scale, and network (Dicken et al, 2001; Paasi, 2004; Sheppard, 2002). These are associated with specific spatial turns and, although they problematize different issues, they are actually closely intertwined theoretically and empirically. Whatever the substantive, methodological, and political differences among contemporary theorists of territory, place, scale, and networks, interest in these issues has been tightly linked to efforts to decipher large-scale transformations of sociospatial organization, particularly those associated with the crisis of North Atlantic Fordism, the intensification of ‘globalization’, and the concomitant restructuring of inherited geographies of capital accumulation, state regulation, urbanization, social reproduction, and sociopolitical struggle.<sup>(3)</sup>

Initially, in conjunction with studies of spatial divisions of labor and local and regional economic restructuring during the 1980s, inherited views of place as a fixed, areal, self-contained, and more or less unique unit of sociospatial organization were rejected. Instead, places were increasingly understood as relationally constituted, polyvalent processes embedded in broader sets of social relations (Cresswell, 2004; Hudson, 2002; Massey, 1984; 1994).

Attention then turned to the implicit assumption that the territorialization of political power was established around national boundaries by national states and also served to define societies as nationally bounded. This was reflected in growing interest, from the late 1980s, in the now familiar claim that the Westphalian nexus between national territory and sovereignty has been subject to ‘unbundling’ (Agnew and Corbridge, 1994; Taylor, 1994). Contentious but productive discussions regarding the changing territorialities—and, more generally, the spatialities—of statehood followed (Brenner et al, 2003).

The 1990s saw a more controversial turn to scale, provoked through efforts to decipher how inherited global, national, regional, and local relations were being recalibrated through capitalist restructuring and state retrenchment. It addressed the (potentially tangled and nonconvergent) processes of scale-making and scale-jumping, and their impact on the hierarchical (re)differentiation among various intertwined forms of sociospatial organization such as capitalist economies, state institutions, citizenship regimes, and urban systems (Collinge, 1999; Smith, 1995; Swyngedouw, 1997). This helped to generate a new lexicon of geographical scale with which scholars could investigate diverse rescaling processes and scale-jumping practices in historical and contemporary perspective (Keil and Mahon, 2008; Sheppard and McMaster, 2004).

Most recently, scholars have focused on networks, stressing transversal, ‘rhizomatic’ forms of interspatial interconnectivity (Amin, 2002; Castells, 1996; Taylor, 2004). Research on the geographies of networks has become robust in various social-scientific fields, with specific reference to investigations, for example, of commodity chains, interfirm interdependencies, governance systems, interurban relations, and social

<sup>(3)</sup> For overviews of spatialized approaches to these issues since the early 1980s, see Cox (1997), Dear and Scott (1981), Gregory and Urry (1985), Lee and Wills (1997), Wolch and Dear (1989).

movements (Grabher, 2006). This has fed into broader theoretical debates regarding the conceptualization of emergent network geographies and their relation to inherited territorial, place-based, and scalar formations (Amin, 2004; Marston et al, 2005).

In part, the succession of relatively distinct debates on territory, place, scale, and networks reflects differences in research object, shifts in their relative importance in different research fields and historical contexts, and, to some extent, intellectual fashion cycles. While we recognize this, it is surprising, from our present perspective, how far work in sociospatial theory is concerned with fine-tuning and applying conceptual tools associated with one or another 'turn' rather than with exploring the mutually constitutive relations among those categories and their respective empirical objects. As noted, the four strands of sociospatial research have endeavored to question inherited, unreflexive geographical assumptions, to criticize earlier spatial turns, or to decipher major structural transformations and strategic reorientations of economic, political, and sociocultural geographies. Unfortunately, however, advocates of a given turn are often tempted to focus on one dimension of spatial relations, neglecting the role of other forms of sociospatial organization as presuppositions, arenas, and products of social action. Worse still, some scholars ontologically privilege a single dimension, presenting it as *the* essential feature of a (current or historical) sociospatial landscape. In most cases this overontologizes questions that are best resolved in more concrete-complex terms. Such attempts to establish the primacy of a given sociospatial dimension tend to expand its analytical and empirical scope to encompass an ever broadening range of phenomena. The carefully defined abstractions of territory, place, scale, and network are thus rendered increasingly imprecise, and may even be transformed into chaotic conceptions.<sup>(4)</sup>

One-dimensionalism is evident in all four sociospatial lexicons, albeit in different forms and to different degrees. Each falls into the trap of conflating a part (territory, place, scale, or networks) with the whole (the totality of sociospatial organization), whether due to conceptual imprecision, an overly narrow analytical focus, or the embrace of an untenable ontological (quasi-)reductionism. This trap is notoriously present in *methodological territorialism*, which subsumes all aspects of socio-spatial relations under the rubric of territoriality. This is manifested, for instance, in state-centric approaches to globalization studies and in narrowly territorialist understandings of cities, states, and the world economy (for critiques, see Brenner, 2004; Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). An equivalent fallacy is *place-centrism*, which treats places as discrete, more or less self-contained, more or less self-identical ensembles of social-ecological interactions and/or conceives sociospatial relations principally through the lexicon of place. It thereby fails to consider how processes of place production are constitutively intertwined with the territorial, scalar, and networked dimensions of sociospatial relations (see, critically, Massey, 1994). Concomitantly, *scale-centrism* treats scale as the primary basis around which other dimensions of sociospatial relations are organized, or, alternatively, focuses one-sidedly on scale, even in the context of analyses that seek to extend and complexify this particular concept (see, for example, Marston, 2000; Marston and Smith, 2001; for a critique see Brenner, 2001). Finally, *network-centrism* entails a one-sided focus on horizontal, rhizomatic, topological, and transversal interconnections of networks, frictionless spaces of flows, and accelerating mobilities (Castells, 1996; Sheller and Urry, 2006). Of course, networks, flows, and

<sup>(4)</sup> Sayer (1992, page 138) defines the difference between rational abstractions and 'bad abstractions' or chaotic conceptions as follows: "A rational abstraction is one which isolates a significant element of the world which has some unity and autonomous force, such as a structure. A bad abstraction arbitrarily divides the indivisible and/or lumps together the unrelated and the inessential, thereby 'carving up' the object of study with little or no regard for its structure and form."

mobilities matter, and they may also have become more important during the last three decades of restructuring. But, where this is the case, it would not justify the adoption of a 'flat ontology' as the exclusive basis for sociospatial investigations (Jones et al, 2007; Marston et al, 2005).

For us, sociospatial theory is most powerful when it (a) refers to historically specific geographies of social relations; and (b) explores contextual and historical variation in the structural coupling, strategic coordination, and forms of interconnection among the different dimensions of the latter (Brenner, 2008; Jessop, 2008; Jones and MacLeod, 2004; MacLeod and Jones, 2007). Focusing on a single dimension may be justified as a *simple entry point* into a more *complex inquiry* but this requires reflexive attention to combining different dimensions of sociospatial analysis with other features of the research object in question. Indeed, as one moves towards increasingly 'thick description' and/or tries to provide spatially sensitive explanations of more concrete–complex phenomena, analyses should involve the dynamic articulation of at least two or more among the four dimensions.

Acknowledgment of this is reflected in two theoretical and methodological counter-trends that have emerged at the margins of recent sociospatial debates and have recently begun to acquire greater prominence. First, a number of scholars have begun actively and reflexively to investigate two or more dimensions of sociospatial relations. Examples of this trend include: Sheppard's (2002) analysis of positionality within places, scales, and networks under conditions of globalization; Dicken et al's (2001) demonstration that global commodity chains and interfirm networks are simultaneously scaled and territorialized; Paasi's (2002) account of how regional identities are institutionalized through interaction among place-making, scaling, and territorialization processes; and Bulkeley's (2005) investigation of environmental governance as an ensemble of scaling and networking strategies. Second, there is a growing use of neologisms that imply the mutual imbrication of two or more sociospatial dimensions. Examples include: glocalization, glurbanization, neomedievalism, territorial networks, scaled places, virtual regions, polynucleated cities, graduated sovereignty, network states, multilevel governance, global city hierarchies, "networked glocal enclaves" (Bunnell and Coe, 2005, page 834), and "a network-archipelago of grand poles" (Veltz 1996, page 6). These countertrends take up the challenge of developing complex-concrete analyses that are systematically, reflexively attuned to the polymorphy of sociospatial relations.

### The TPSN framework

Our own starting point for theorizing polymorphy in sociospatial relations is a heuristic perspective that, due to its focus on territory (T), place (P), scale (S), and networks (N), may be termed the TPSN framework. These are not the only four (or only important) spatial dimensions of social relations, but they are arguably the most salient in work on contemporary political-economic restructuring.<sup>(5)</sup> Adopting this perspective cannot, in itself, resolve the problems associated with one-dimensionalism—it is merely the first step in confronting them. Figure 1 presents the principles associated with each dimension of sociospatial relations and specifies their consequences for the patterning of those relations.

This figure mainly serves definitional and pedagogic purposes. Figure 2 indicates how one-dimensionalism arises from taking an abstract–simple entry point and then, through conflation, essentialism, or fetishism, remaining on this terrain.

<sup>(5)</sup> Two additional candidates for inclusion in this list might be environment/nature and, as argued by Sheppard (2002), 'positionality'.

Dimension of sociospatial relations	Principle of sociospatial structuration	Associated patterning of sociospatial relations
Territory	Bordering, bounding, parcelization, enclosure	Construction of inside/outside divides; constitutive role of the 'outside'
Place	Proximity, spatial embedding, areal differentiation	Construction of spatial divisions of labor; differentiation of social relations horizontally among 'core' versus 'peripheral' places
Scale	Hierarchization, vertical differentiation	Construction of scalar divisions of labor; differentiation of social relations vertically among 'dominant', 'nodal', and 'marginal' scales
Networks/reticulation	Interconnectivity, interdependence, transversal or 'rhizomatic' differentiation	Building networks of nodal connectivity; differentiation of social relations among nodal points within topological networks

Figure 1. Four key dimensions of sociospatial relations.

Accordingly, however concrete the analysis may have become, it remains confined within a one-dimensional framework.

Such problems can be avoided through more systematic, reflexive investigations of the interconnections among the aforementioned spatial dimensions of social relations—that is, the mutually constitutive relations among their respective structuring principles and the specific practices associated with each of the latter. This would enable movement towards a multidimensional, polymorphous account based on (a) the elaboration of sufficiently rich concepts for each of the dimensions of sociospatial relations; and (b) their deployment in a manner that permits researchers to explore more precisely their differential weighting and articulation in a given spatiotemporal context. Failure to pursue this strategy can lead to two distinct but symmetrical types of quasi-reduction to one-dimensional analyses. Both types occur when the conceptual and theoretical framework for exploring one aspect of a complex phenomenon has greater precision, depth, and breadth than the frameworks developed for other aspects.

In the first type the relative descriptive and explanatory power of the more differentiated, comprehensive framework ‘crowds out’ a proper concern with details and mechanisms linked to other dimensions. In this situation, even when scholars recognize

Abstract – simple point of entry	Field of application			
	Territory	Place	Scale	Networks
Territory	Methodological territorialism			
Place		Place-centrism		
Scale			Scale-centrism	
Networks				Network-centrism

Figure 2. The sites of one-dimensionalism.

two or more spatial dimensions of social relations, they lack the theoretical and empirical tools required to examine their respective contributions to a given object of inquiry. The second type of error occurs when the one-dimensional character of a sociospatial analysis compromises understanding even of that aspect of sociospatial relations which is most differentiated and fully elaborated. In such cases the complexities of this latter dimension are reduced to mere details or mediations of one of the less well-specified dimensions.<sup>(6)</sup>

Both types of one-dimensionalism are theoretically questionable. While, as some contemporary sociospatial theorists have appropriately insisted, there can be no privileged God's eye perspective on social dynamics, this claim does not preclude, and, indeed, underscores the need for, the development of appropriately rich—and commensurable—vocabularies for *each* of the four dimensions of sociospatial relations. It also suggests the importance of developing more complex categories reflecting different types of articulation and disarticulation among these four dimensions, with the goal of producing thick descriptions and more concrete—complex explanations for given research objects.<sup>(7)</sup>

This is a counsel of perfection that requires a spiral movement as first one and then another moment of the spatiality of social relations is stressed. Investigators could thereby explore the social world from different entry points whilst still ending with complex—concrete analyses in which each moment finds its appropriate descriptive-cum-explanatory weight (for some methodological foundations see Bertramsen et al, 1991, pages 122–141; Jessop, 2007, pages 225–233; Sayer, 2000, pages 86–96, 108–130). This spiral movement from the abstract—simple to the concrete—complex would also need to consider the logic and dynamics of historically feasible TPSN combinations, understood with reference to (a) the landscapes of territory, place, scale, and networks inherited from earlier sociospatial relations, and (b) emergent strategies oriented towards the transformation of such landscapes—whether through new forms of territorialization, place-making, scaling, and networking, or through new combinations thereof. In short, the actualization of specific sociospatial possibilities, in any TPSN combination, involves material interactions among different structures and strategies that draw upon these principles of sociospatial organization in differential, historically, and geographically specific ways. This structuration process imposes determinate limits on the form, shape, and trajectory of present and future TPSN combinations and on the sociospatial relations through which they are mediated, produced, and transformed. Our approach also rejects any premature harmonization of contradictions and conflicts through the postulation of a well-ordered, eternally reproducible configuration of sociospatial relations. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of contradictions, conflicts, dilemmas, marginalization, exclusion, and volatility, at once within and among each of these sociospatial forms.

<sup>(6)</sup> Harvey's (2003) analysis of imperialism illustrates this problem. Because his analysis of the territorial logic of statehood is insufficiently rich conceptually, the spatial logic of capitalism provides far stronger explanations. This is countered by a crude geo-political explanation of imperialism in terms of political motives or the expansionism of states or state managers *qua* subjects (Jessop, 2006).

<sup>(7)</sup> This suggestion does not require an equal number of concepts for each dimension—this would entail a numeric conceptual fetishism. It is, rather, a call for a broad array of concepts, of different degrees of abstraction—concreteness and simplicity—complexity, which can decipher the polymorphy of sociospatial relations.

**A strategic-relational approach to TPSN configurations**

These considerations are grounded upon, and also extend, the strategic-relational approach (or SRA) that has underpinned much of our previous work (on which see Jessop, 2001; 2007). In its regulation-theoretical and state-theoretical guises, the SRA: highlights (a) the contradictions, dilemmas, and conflicts that characterize capitalist social formations in specific periods, stages, and conjunctures; and (b) attempts to resolve or, at least, displace the latter, and thus to regularize and govern capital accumulation and political domination (Jessop and Sum, 2006). During the last decade the SRA has been applied to the analysis of various forms of sociospatial restructuring, and some of its foundational categories—such as strategic selectivity, accumulation strategies, state projects, state strategies, and hegemonic projects—have in turn been spatialized (Brenner, 2004; Jessop, 2001; Jones, 1997; MacLeod, 2001; MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999). From this point of view, sociospatial relations must be considered in terms of a path-dependent, path-shaping dialectic of strategically selective structural constraints and structurally attuned strategic action. A key concept here is ‘spatiotemporal fix’ (Jessop, 2006), which builds on earlier work on spatial fixes and scalar fixes (Harvey, 1982; Smith, 1995). The preceding discussion takes further efforts to spatialize the SRA by underscoring the importance of (a) including all four structuring principles and their associated strategies and practices in the analysis of such fixes, and (b) exploring their historically and geographically specific combinations—with some being more important than others in securing the fix (for instance, by displacing or deferring contradictions and crisis tendencies). We also want to encourage a more systematic investigation of how sociospatial relations, understood as strategically selective TPSN ensembles, interact in specific historical–geographical contexts to produce distinctive orderings and reorderings of the sociospatial landscape, including new geographies of accumulation, state power, and hegemony.

Structuring principles	Fields of operation			
	Territory	Place	Scale	Networks
Territory	Past, present, and emergent frontiers borders, boundaries	Distinct places in a given territory	Multilevel government	Interstate system, state alliances, multi-area government
Place	Core–periphery, borderlands, empires, neomedievalism	Locales, milieux, cities, sites, regions, localities, globalities	Division of labor linked to differently scaled places	Local/urban governance, partnerships
Scale	Scalar division of political power (unitary state, federal state, etc)	Scale as area rather than level (local through to global), spatial division of labor (Russian doll)	Vertical ontology based on nested or tangled hierarchies	Parallel power networks, nongovernmental international regimes
Networks	Origin–edge, ripple effects (radiation), stretching and folding, crossborder region, interstate system	Global city networks, polynucleated cities, intermeshed sites	Flat ontology with multiple, ascalar entry points	Networks of networks, spaces of flows, rhizome

**Figure 3.** Beyond one-dimensionalism: conceptual orientations.

Figure 3 provides an initial conceptual orientation for such an investigation; it presents some coordinates of analysis associated with the TPSN framework rather than concrete applications of the latter. Sixteen cells have been generated by cross-tabulating each sociospatial dimension considered as a structuring principle with all four sociospatial dimensions considered as fields of operation of that structuring principle. This matrix indicates that structuring principles do not just apply to themselves—the route to mutually isolated forms of one-dimensionalism—and that more complex concepts can be developed by considering how different structuring principles impact other fields of sociospatial relations. This figure should not be seen as the product of taxonomic folly or as a formalistic exercise in populating cells—it has a definite heuristic purpose. Specifically, each sociospatial concept can be deployed in three ways within this matrix. For example, territory can be explored:

- *in itself* as a product of bordering strategies (territory → territory);
- as a *structuring principle* (or causal mechanism) that impacts other fields of sociospatial relations (reading the matrix horizontally, hence: territory → place; territory → scale; territory → network); and
- as a *structured field*, produced in part through the impact of other sociospatial structuring principles on territorial dynamics (now reading the matrix vertically, focusing on the territory column and considering linkages between: place → territory; scale → territory; and network → territory).

Recognizing the several ways in which the four dimensions of sociospatial relations can be analyzed, in self-referential terms and in terms of their interactions, is crucial to avoiding one-sided, reductionist analyses. In addition, consistent with a spatialized SRA, the various interactions among the dimensions depicted in figure 3 may be understood as expressions of diverse attempts at strategic coordination and structural coupling within specific spatiotemporal contexts (Jessop, 2001). To argue otherwise—by treating the dimensions as existing outside of their production in and through social agency—would risk falling into new forms of structuralism, functionalism, or sociospatial fetishism.<sup>(8)</sup>

The concepts included in each cell are merely illustrative and by no means exhaustive. We invite readers to add other examples and to criticize those already included. A major heuristic purpose behind figure 3 is to encourage debate on what methodological strategies might be appropriate for investigating the polymorphy of sociospatial relations.

Transcending one-dimensionalism is no more than a first step towards the development of a genuinely polymorphic mode of sociospatial analysis. Figures 2 and 3 remain stubbornly two-dimensional, and a genuinely polymorphic approach must overcome this limitation. It would also need to specify more explicitly the historically and geographically specific, strategically selective modes of territorialization, place-making, scaling, and networking that underpin the concrete—complex geographical landscapes within which particular TPSN combinations emerge. Thus, the three figures

<sup>(8)</sup> Sayer cautions against abstracting spatial relations from their substantive relata and thereby attributing causal powers to space (or certain of its features like geometry, distance, location, movement) regardless of the causal powers of the substantive relata characterized by these features. Such procedures, Sayer suggests, lead to spatial fetishism (2000, pages 109–121). Indeed, it is due to our concern to avoid spatial fetishism that we have, throughout this paper, generally eschewed the standard terminology of ‘spatiality’ and ‘sociospatiality’, which imply fixity and stasis, in favor of the more explicitly processual, fluid notion of ‘sociospatial relations’. Theoretical foundations for this relational conceptualization are elaborated in several important strands of sociospatial analysis, including Sayer’s (2000) critical realist account, Massey’s (2005) analysis of space as a form of ‘emergence’, and Lefebvre’s (1991 [1974]) investigation of the ‘production’ of space.



above serve mainly to indicate the general direction of our thinking rather than to present a fully polymorphic account of the concepts and methods in question. As indicated, three dimensional concepts already exist, and major work on sociospatial relations is now being undertaken using three-dimensional perspectives. Four-dimensional concepts and methods could also be developed, although their diagrammatic representation and practical operationalization remain serious challenges.

### **Towards a TPSN research agenda**

Our arguments are primarily concerned with conceptual clarification. While initially triggered by recent disputes over the 'scalar turn', they are intended to intervene in broader debates on sociospatial relations. At a minimum, we hope to have established that (a) one-dimensional analyses are misleading and unproductive; and (b) thinking in multidimensional terms can help to clarify contemporary debates within sociospatial theory (for instance, on the possibilities and limits of 'scale' or 'network' as geographic concepts) as well as disclose the heuristic power of polymorphic modes of analysis. But we also believe, on the basis of our own previous and ongoing work, that the TPSN framework can be used to generate more precise, substantial, and substantive analyses of some of the 'big questions' within geographical political economy.

For example, we would argue that the TPSN approach has significant implications for analyzing and, especially, for periodizing, the historical geographies of capitalist development. It suggests: (a) that the relative significance of territory, place, scale, and networks as structuring principles for sociospatial relations varies with different types of spatiotemporal fix (in other words, their relative roles in securing the overall coherence of spatiotemporal relations in capitalist, and other, social formations may vary historically and contextually); (b) that crises of accumulation and regulation can be explored in terms of the growing disjunction among historically specific institutional manifestations of these four sociospatial dimensions as a basis for the structured coherence of capitalism; (c) that strategies of crisis-resolution entail attempts to reorder the relative importance of the four dimensions and their associated institutional expressions in relation to circuits of capital and modes of regulation; and (d) that crises, attempts at crisis resolution, and the emergence of new spatiotemporal fixes may be associated with shifts in the most effective sociospatial basing points, organizational structures, and strategies for counterhegemonic projects.

From this viewpoint, much of our own previous individual and collaborative work, as well as many other writings on geographical political economy, could be reinterpreted as showing how territory, place, scale, and networks were sutured in historically and geographically specific configurations to forge the Fordist–Keynesian spatiotemporal fix, and that, after a period of trial-and-error searching, experimentation, and contestation, new TPSN combinations seem to be emerging that are more suited to a postnational, unevenly developing global economy. Whether or not these newly emergent TPSN combinations can or will be consolidated to the same extent as the dominant spatiotemporal fix associated with Atlantic Fordism and whether or not they will encounter more effective forms of resistance are matters for future theoretical interrogation and concrete inquiry.

Similarly, we would suggest that the TPSN schema can fruitfully inform the field of 'contentious politics', which examines different forms of contestation, resistance, mobilization, and struggle 'from below', regardless of their social bases, identities, interests, or objectives. Interest in the geographies of contention has intensified in recent years as spatialized categories and methods have been integrated more systematically into studies of social mobilization (Leitner et al, 2008; Miller, 2000;

Routledge, 2003; Sewell, 2001; Tilly, 2000). In this emerging research field, the TPSN schema could have at least three types of applications.

First, it could be deployed to classify different social-scientific accounts of contentious politics. If the matrix presented in figures 2 and 3 above was used, this would emphasize the limits of various types of one-dimensional analysis that have been advanced in this field. Examples include: (a) the celebration of nomadism (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) as the quintessential form of deterritorialized resistance to the territorializing and reterritorializing power of the state (territory → territory); (b) the conception of 'Multitude' (Hardt and Negri, 2000) as a networked oppositional force to the flat ontological space allegedly formed by Empire (network → network); (c) the reduction of contentious politics to strategies of scale-jumping in a hierarchical scalar order (criticized by Marston, 2000) without regard to the sociospatial polymorphy that such politics generally entail (scale → scale); and (d) observers' accounts of social struggles in exclusively localist terms (place → place) (criticized by Escobar, 2001; Purcell, 2006). This analytical strategy could then be extended to cover other accounts of sociospatial sites, strategies, or objectives that involve two or more dimensions of sociospatial relations, eventually leading to still more sophisticated, three-dimensional or even four-dimensional analyses, such as that recently presented by Leitner et al (2008) to analyze the Immigrant Workers' Freedom Ride. In this manner, the TPSN schema could provide methodological orientation to those seeking to develop more adequate geographical categories for the investigation of contentious politics.

A second application of the TPSN schema in this field would entail using it to decipher the strategies and tactics of individual and collective agents, organizations, and institutions that are engaged in contentious politics, as they perceive them as participants. In this manner, the TPSN schema could provide a basis for deciphering the variegated, polymorphic spaces of contention that have been produced through different types of social mobilization in different historical–geographical contexts. Third, this schema can be deployed to pose new questions regarding the interplay between the spaces of contentious politics and the geohistorical periodization of capital accumulation and state power. For, given the emphasis on the dialectic of path-dependency and path-shaping within the spatialized SRA, we would expect the relative importance and effectiveness of different geographies of contentious politics to be systemically intertwined with evolving TPSN configurations associated with the changing historical geographies of capitalism and the state, their crisis tendencies and their contradictions. We present these ideas as stimuli to future research agendas in geographical political economy rather than as fully elaborated hypotheses or as polished conclusions.

## Conclusion

Almost two decades ago, Soja (1989) famously declared the "reassertion of space in critical social theory". Our current reflections suggest a reinterpretation of his declaration. First, we have argued that spatial assumptions have always been present in the social sciences, but that recent decades have witnessed a more critical and reflexive engagement with such assumptions and their methodological implications. Second, we have suggested that this engagement has not focused on sociospatial relations as such, but, rather, on a succession of related yet distinct dimensions, including territory, place, scale, and networks, each of which has in turn been embraced as a focal point for sociospatial theory. Third, while we have acknowledged the significant contributions of such analyses, we argue that many have often been too narrowly focused and have neglected to explore the interconnections among the various dimensions of sociospatial relations, leading in turn to a variety of theoretical deficits, methodological hazards,

and empirical blind spots. Finally, we have proposed several concepts and analytical procedures through which a polymorphous, strategic-relational analysis of sociospatial processes might be pursued.

In the present context we have not attempted to concretize our framework, let alone to legislate for one specific research program. But we do believe that the TPSN schema may prove fruitful not only for the further refinement of sociospatial theory, but also, most importantly, for the analysis of both historical and contemporary transformations of sociospatial relations. In our own future work, for example, we will be using this framework to reconceptualize issues such as the urban question; the regional question; uneven spatial development; state spatial restructuring; spatiotemporal fixes; the sociospatial specificities of the European Union; and multiscale metagovernance.

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