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Chapter 2

Difference

Sarah de Leeuw, Audrey Kobayashi, and Emilie Cameron

Courtenay is a tiny town on Canada's southwest coast. It has a population of less than 25,000 and an economy reliant on fishing, logging, tourism, and the military base located a few kilometers up the local highway. In early July 2009, on a bright, sunshiny afternoon in a downtown parking lot, three white men violently assaulted Jay Phillips, a black man, who had moved to town six years earlier. In what police call an unprovoked "apparent hate crime" (CBC News 2009), the three men approached Phillips, began hurling racial slurs at him, and then attacked him. According to Phillips, and corroborated by video recording of the incident, after throwing Phillips onto the pavement, and as they delivered kick after kick, punch after punch, the three men screamed that Courtenay was "a white town" and Phillips should "get the fuck out" (Hui and Lavioe 2009).

Courtenay is one of many places around the world that few geographers have heard of, and one of many places where conceptions of "difference" have underpinned violent actions. Violence was meted out to Jay Phillips based upon an (il) logic that some people have rights to, and power or privilege within, certain geographies, while others have neither the right to be there nor the most basic human right of safety. The vicious brutality of this event, and the ongoing scars that it will leave upon Phillips, his family, and the diverse communities of people who feel the direct or vicarious impact of race-based violence, makes one thing abundantly clear: difference matters. It matters because for the most part difference is linked with power and powerful categorizations that result in social hierarchies with the potential to materialize in just the kind of violence that unfolded in Courtenay's downtown.

With the deep hope that in some not-too-distant time and place the idea of difference will no longer spark hatred in the minds of some, we explore in this chapter why and how difference matters. We discuss how scholars across the

A Companion to Social Geography, First Edition. Edited by Vincent J. Del Casino Jr., Mary E. Thomas, Paul Cloke, and Ruth Panelli.
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humanities and social sciences have theorized difference, how social geographers in particular have engaged with difference and its material effects, and how social geographers might think *differently* about difference. Social geographers have mainly considered difference as it relates to class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and questions of power as expressed spatially. Geographers have made important contributions to a spatial understanding of how particular subjects are produced as different. They have paid relatively little attention, though, to the relationships *between* subjects who are conceptualized as different in reference to powerful ideas about what constitutes social norms. In other words, until recently, geographers have tended to work with a dualistic and antagonistic understanding of difference wherein subjects produced as "different" are understood as opposite and other than a social norm, rather than consider the ways in which multiply-othered subjects engage with one another and in relation to such norms. Recently, however, geographers have begun to explore alternative ways of conceptualizing difference. We welcome this shift, and suggest that geography – with its realization that spatiality and place are dynamic and thus potentially libratory forces of social change – is well positioned to reconceptualize difference as part of efforts to move toward social justice.

Theorizing Difference

To understand the construction of difference in Western and particularly geographic thought requires an adjustable lens that can take a wide angle on the historical processes that have systematically sorted the world's people according to differential categories that fit with imperial, colonial, and capitalist expansion at a global scale, as well as zoom in on the everyday practices through which difference is constituted among people in direct contact with one another. We can find many precedents in early European history, from the "Crusades," which set Europe apart particularly from the "oriental" world, through the period of European exploration and expansion from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, during which a Manichean order of things was firmly established in colonial discourse.

Theories of difference began to crystallize during the eighteenth-century "Enlightenment" when scientific methods and practices were directed toward the classification of all manner of living entities, including human beings, according to their most obvious physical properties: sexuality and the phenotypical characteristics that became known as "race." The "geometer of race," to use Gould's (1994) phrase, was legitimized by Linneaus as a geographical division of the world's people into four broad categories. His student, Hans Blumenbach, established the five categories – Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and (the additional category) Malay – that became the basis of both scientific and popular discourse. It was not until well into the twentieth century that this classification, or some variant of it, received significant challenge in either realm (see UNESCO 1956).

Immanuel Kant, the first recognized university chair holder in geography, ascribed to the four-category Linnean model, expanding on his theories of natural division, hereditary difference, and environmental determinism as the engine of evolution. Kant's geography of human difference, propounded in *Physical Geography* (Kant 1997), links everything from phenotypical charactistics such as hair and skin color

to morality, intelligence, civility, and the capacity to appreciate beauty, to the effects of climate on human adaptability. His public debate with Herder over climatic versus cultural explanations of human difference helped to elevate the search for theories of difference to the highest ranks of scientific endeavor, creating the most significant platform for geographical debate of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Livingstone 2002).

If earlier scientists had fixated upon classifications, the overwhelming preoccupation of the twentieth century was variability. The first half of the twentieth entury saw a major shift as geographers began to shed notions of environmental determinism, and the idea that "race" is a product of climate. In the period following World War II, at a time when the United Nations was putting in place the international human rights documents that sought to end violence and oppression based on global definitions of differences, geographers were seeking ways to systematize their science so that variables could explain geographical distributions on the basis of spatial pattern. Although such thinking rejected environmental determinism, geographers nonetheless continued to assume racial difference for some time. The debates that occurred during the rise of the so-called "quantitative revolution" were over how to explain such variables. It was not until the so-called "relevance debates," which began during the early 1970s that for the first time geographers began in large numbers to pay attention to the ways in which ascriptions of difference, including those of race, class, and gender, result in disadvantage and oppression (Kobayashi and Peake 1994).

In the twenty-first century, it is widely accepted among geographers that "difference" is a social construction, by which we mean that the differences between people are neither inherent nor inevitable but historically and spatially produced through human actions, which include social, cultural, and economic practices and relationships, in place. The turn to poststructuralist explanations is particularly important because it suggests that if differences are humanly produced, rather than determined by climate or any other external structure, then humans have the capacity to create new historical circumstances. To do so, however, would require that we overcome powerful social constructions that are the result of violent and oppressive actions, and particularly a history of colonialism.

Difference, like other slippery but important words in the humanities and social sciences, is a protean term denoting concepts that are equally contested and mutable. Across disciplines, and in various literatures including those in geography, definitions of difference tend to include words like dissimilarity, distinction, or unlikeness, that emphasize a comparison, but more often a contrast, between subjects, conditions, or qualities (OED Online 2nd edition 1989; see also Mayhew 2009). Sameness and occasionally equality are often offered as antonyms of difference. Most theories of difference ask questions about power as the ability to exercise control or authority over other persons or objects.

Many theories about differences focus on the way that difference is produced and then deployed as a means to categorize "other" subjects and entities in order to exert or maintain social, cultural, economic, or spatial control over them. By grouping entities and subjects together based on constructed ideas of sameness, categories of what constitutes normal are also produced. These categories, in turn, function to exclude subjects who do not adhere to the characteristics of sameness

or normalcy. Difference in turn becomes abnormal and deviant. As a number of scholars have documented, the production of difference as deviance has made people and practices categorized as "different" vulnerable to powers interested in enforcing normalcy and/or fixing, altering, subjugating, or erasing what is constructed as deviant (see Fabian 1983 and Foucault 1972, 1977).

The interconnectedness of power, difference, and deviance has especially interested scholars working in poststructuralist, postmodern, and feminist traditions. These scholars pay close attention to language and to cultural "texts" in an effort to tease out the ideological and cultural dimensions of representation. Jacques Derrida, for example, in efforts to destabilize and expose the structures of power embedded in text and speech, argued that many of society's inequities can be traced to the structure of languages. Concepts and words, he argued, are understood in relation to what they are not – or that which they are different from. In his work on "différance," he observed that understandings of the world are problematically premised – at least from an emancipatory perspective – on seeing and speaking of one thing in relation to its opposite. Those things which are the opposite, or the "not," tend to be subjugated or deferred. For example, yellow is understood in relation to not-yellow, with not-yellow deferential to the primacy of yellow; house is understood by that which it is not, such as a cabin or a hut. When conceptualizing yellow or house, all that is not house or not yellow is deferred or subjugated (Derrida 1982; see also Spivak 1994). Given that we understand ourselves, each other, and our world in great part through language that has developed over centuries of use, hierarchies of power premised on differences are maintained in the very way we speak or think about subjects.

Indeed, as Derrida and other theorists have recognized, difference is not a neutral category; it is socially meaningful and legible in relation to ideas of normalcy, deviance, and hierarchy. Michel Foucault (1972, 1977, 1991) argued that knowledge and associated belief systems or discourses (which form the subjects to which they refer) turn upon people accepting a common or universal knowledge against which something different is a deviation. Deviations come to be conceptualized as punishable, or to be actually punished, through violence or the threat of violence. Categories like sanity and heterosexuality become normalized by authorities (for example, by government figures or church and medical officials) and then taken up as normal, and thus acceptable, by those upon whom authorities act. Once normalized, nonauthorities then take up the multiple practices of maintaining striations and hierarchies of power, in part by circulating them as truth. Foucault was particularly interested in how we come to monitor ourselves and each other for signs of deviations from the normal we have internalized. We mete out violence or the threat of violence accordingly. For Foucault, power rests on the production of difference, on a differentiation between right and wrong, moral and immoral, normal and abnormal.

Although for Foucault there is an intentionality of power, power's trick is that it need not be consciously (or even always violently) reproduced nor actively made material. Instead, it can operate opaquely, as that which is assumed to be natural. Power also operates and maintains traction through that which it is not, namely, resistance to power. In this relationship, power is strengthened and reproduced

through the resistance mounted against it. In other words, power exists only because it is able to differentiate itself from something else; thus the inextricability of power from difference or from the production of something different. There is a circularity to Foucault's logic that has been critiqued as preemptively refusing the possibly of disrupting power, or of envisioning subjects as ever fully having agency to combat or refute power. It is important, however, to remember that power and difference are deeply interconnected, an idea not lost on postcolonial theorists upon whom geographers also draw (see Crampton and Elden 2007).

Orientalism, Edward Said's concept of a persistent and pervasive production of an eastern other for western domination and consumption, also rests on ideas of difference (Said 1978, 1994). Saidian postcolonial theory, including later work on imperialism as opposed to orientalism, turns upon the idea that cultural products – and consequent social systems and structures – have for thousands of years subtly produced the west/Europe as superior to the east/Asia. The west requires a homogenous subjugated other in order to understand itself. Other scholars have taken up the concept of orientalism to show that popular media and cultural products (movies, literatures, theatre, music) work to produce an oriental other category that is different from a similarly produced category of western normalcy, or non-otherness. The production of an other rests on reducing diverse times, spaces, and societies into an undifferentiated mass imbued with characteristics like barbarism and savagery against which the west understands itself as modern, cultured, and civilized. This dualistic relationship positions the west as entitled, if not required from a morally righteous perspective, to intervene into the lives and lands of those categorized as different or othered. Cultural production of difference, from a Saidian perspective, forms a legitimating foundation upon which rests social and geographic imperialism, including the dispossession of people from their ways of life, their homelands, and their resources. Said's greatest contribution has been to inspire geographers to think about how the world is spoken and written (and thus conceptualized) through differentiation and deferral of the different, and about how power is produced, enacted, and reliant upon categories of difference (see e.g., Gregory 1995, 2004). Difference matters. It is simultaneously constructed and eminently material. It is also the focus of many who want to destabilize the structures of power that rely upon it.

Categories of otherness have been consistently populated, historically and into the present day, with certain people and places. These include, to name some but by no means all: women; the poor; racialized peoples; Indigenous peoples; displaced peoples; nations and citizens of the global south; nations and citizens colonized by European countries or, more recently, invaded by the United States of America; gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered peoples, and those with restricted mobility or those who live with illness. Those who are (re)produced as different, as other, have always worked to destabilize power, or to resist the strictures of power that attempt to confine or direct them based on difference. How such resistance occurs, and the people who enact it, is the focus of many critical theorists, including feminists, anti-racist scholars, queer theorists, and anti-colonial theorists (e.g., Butler 1993; Fanon 2004 [1963]; Haraway 1989; Spivak 1988, 1999). At the core this scholarship is a problematization and unsettlement of the categories of difference, particularly as

those categories work to (re)produce unequal relations of power. These theories do not support an erasure or a disavowal of unique characteristics or the possibilities of variations and diversities: rather, and like this chapter, such approaches take issue with the way that social powers are (re)produced through the fixing of categories of difference. As we explore, places and spaces of difference, subjects marked as different, and the relationship of difference to power are of significant and growing interest to social geographers.

Putting Difference in Its Place: How Geographers Deal with Difference

Social geographers have been concerned with "difference" for decades, but the theoretical and empirical focus of their research has shifted over time. Perhaps the most notable shift characterizing social geography over the past several years has been its (sometimes tense) alignment with cultural geography, and particularly the use of theories of power, representation, and knowledge to understand processes of social differentiation and inequality. As Smith (2000: 25) notes, whereas in past years social geographic inquiry into questions of race and gender would have been "viewed through political economic lenses," beginning in the 1990s such questions became "increasingly subject to cultural deconstruction." Today, the intersection of social and cultural geographic inquiry appears to be on the move again, as social geographers seek to investigate social differentiation and inequality in specific contexts and to overcome some of the limitations of cultural geographic inquiry.

The impact of the so-called "cultural turn" on social geographic scholarship has been extensively documented and debated since the late 1980s (e.g., Gregson 2003; Pain and Bailey 2004; Smith 2000). Most commentators observe that prior to the 1990s social geographers working in a Marxian political-economic tradition primarily understood "difference" in relation to class (Jackson 2000). Although feminist and antiracist scholars have long insisted on the constitutive importance of race and gender in structuring geographies of difference (see Katz 1992; Pratt and Hanson 1994; Rose 1992), race and gender were often understood as subsets of political-economic differentiation rather than as axes of difference in their own right. With the advent of cultural theories, "difference," including class, came increasingly to be conceptualized as a social and cultural construction with material effects, rather than wholly as a result of political-economic stratification (see for instance Domosh 2005). Geographers became increasingly interested in the discursive production of difference, in difference as a form of identity, and in a multiplicity of differences, while interest in the manifestation of social inequalities in housing, education, health, or labor occupied less attention.

The impact of cultural geographic understandings of difference on social geographic scholarship is perhaps most marked in studies of the colonial and postcolonial, where the theoretical insights of Foucault, Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, among others, have exerted significant influence. The ways in which colonial processes produce, inscribe, and maintain "difference" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples has been a rich focus of study in geography, including considering the production of colonizing discourses and the specific interventions made into Indigenous peoples' bodies, lands, and lives (e.g., Anderson 2007, 2001; Blunt and Rose 1994;

Braun 2002; Cameron 2008; Clayton 2000, 2003; de Leeuw 2007; Gregory 2004; Harris 1997, 2002; Lester 2003; McKittrick 2006; Nash 2002). While this line of scholarship has enabled critical engagement with the geographical dimensions of colonial knowledge, representation, and power, a number of scholars have recently identified a worrisome lack of engagement with the colonial *present* (Gregory 2004) in these studies, and a tendency to attend to the representational at the expense of the more pressing material dimensions of colonial injustice (Cameron et al. 2009; Gilmartin and Berg 2007; Noxolo et al. 2008).

Indeed, while exploration of the cultural dimensions of difference has yielded important new insights into difference and its production, cultural approaches to difference are also marked by distinct limitations. These include a reinforcement of dualistic understandings of difference and power, a relative over-emphasis on the textual and representational (as opposed to the lived, specific, and material), and a tendency to focus on the distant and the past rather than the proximal and the present. Social geographers have aimed to redress some of these limitations over the past several years, and to reinvigorate social geographic understandings of difference by attending to the relational, material, specific, and contemporary geographies of difference.

Although recent work in social geography can be partly understood as an effort to redress some of the limitations of more explicitly "cultural" approaches to difference, it is important not to overstate the supposed differences between the social and the cultural, or to shore up a dangerous and untenable division between the "real world" (understood as the domain of social geographic inquiry) and the imagined or constructed world (understood as a the focus of cultural geographic scholarship). Some have indeed cast research into the representational dimensions of social and cultural processes as an abandonment of "the social," understood not just as class but by attention to the lived materiality of difference (see Smith 2000). Others insist that what was at work was an expansion of the "social" to include a broader and more complex set of social experiences and a much broader and more complex understanding of the ways in which social life is constructed. Many of these debates have rested on a false dichotomization of the "real" or material and the imagined or constructed. Geographers are just beginning to redress this dichotomization, particularly as they seek to recuperate social geographic inquiry as a site of engaged, political scholarship. Cultural geographic inquiry has indeed led to an interest in social and cultural construction, but many geographers have mistakenly understood such a focus to involve something that is not material. A more helpful approach is to break down the distinctions, or the perceived differences, between the social and the cultural and to recognize that it is not "rematerialization" that is needed but rather a critical geography that attends to a more comprehensive materiality (Castree 2000, 2004).

The concept of spatiality (as opposed to "space") has been promoted by some social geographers as a useful tool for accommodating this more comprehensive materiality, and for avoiding the tendency to differentiate cleanly between that which is socially constructed and produced from that which is "real," ontological, or material. Particularly in reference to categories of difference that separate people by citizenship, race, or sexuality, we agree with the wide consensus that typologies of difference are deeply imaginary, a product of social construction. We suggest too,

and strongly, that these imaginaries bear down upon and materialize in violent and terrifying ways, affecting the ways knowledge is produced and altering people's bodies, lives, and the places in which we live. Thus, as we have written elsewhere, our discussions about difference are anchored in ongoing attempts to disrupt even basic differentiations between the "material" and the "immaterial" (Boyle and Kobayashi forthcoming; Cameron 2009, forthcoming) and to insist that discourses over difference, no matter how many degrees of separation they may involve between particular bodies and their representations, always occur in material landscapes and always occur through concrete spatialities. Indeed, one of the most significant and fruitful areas of geographic investigation is to understand how the construction of difference involves a complex set of spatial relations created through varying degrees of spatial separation from the site of the colonized body to the global system of capitalist reproduction.

Some interpret a more vigorously "material" social geography to include explicit focus on lived, human experiences of differentiation. For instance, the study and documentation of immigration laws and policies in Canada, Australia, and the United States demonstrate that the histories of each nation relied upon – and to some degree continue to rely upon – the idea that some people are more deserving than others of entry into the countries (Kobayashi 1995). Generally, those thought to be less deserving are neither white, of European decent, nor Christian. The relegation of "different" citizens to marginal places – whether urban "ghettos," rural internment camps, or, more recently, specially modified prisons constructed in remote Canadian and Australian landscapes for "illegal" migrants – has been well documented as a geographically specific materialization of difference. Furthermore, and of growing importance since 11 September 2001, migrants to Europe or North American who are seen – to the exclusion of other characteristics – as Muslim, or as coming from places conceptualized as Muslim landscapes, face heightened immigration scrutiny, are categorized as deviant, and are understood as having the potential to do harm to normalized (i.e., white, Anglo-Saxon Christian) social structures. These migrants face threats of being deported, tortured, imprisoned without reason, or – in more opaque fashions – simply living under a constant social gaze that views and constructs them as violent extremists who must be feared. In some cases, and as consequence of being cast as different, these citizens do not just face an idea of violence and deportation: for instance, as a direct outcome of state-endorsed ideas about Muslim men being dangerous deviants, Canadian citizen Maher Arar was illegally and secretly flown to Syria after traveling abroad on business. In Syria he was detained and tortured for over a year, all with the knowledge, sanction, and even – some suggest – the support of the Canadian government (Pither 2008; see also Hyndman and Mountz 2007). Ideas of difference, coupled with the power of entities like states and law-enforcement agencies, have material and embodied outcomes that play out across various global spaces. Indeed, geographic interest in examining the connections between discursive productions of difference and the lived dimensions of difference have been particularly rich in studies of citizenship, territoriality, and war (e.g., Cowen and Gilbert 2008; Gregory and Pred 2007).

Other compelling examples of the spatialized and embodied outcomes of difference have also been documented by geographers, including those studying the lives

of Indigenous peoples. Around the world, from Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the United States to countries like Bolivia and Guatemala in Central and South America, or in Russia or countries with significant circumpolar Indigenous populations, the social differentiation of Indigenous from settler colonial peoples was the historical impetus for territorial divisions that have extant embodied outcomes (Anderson 2007; Harris 2002, 2004; Gregory 2004). Premised upon typologies that cast them as different, dying, deviant, or undeserving, Indigenous peoples were forcibly relocated to segregated territories that undermined their ways of life and any opportunities for healthy sovereign existences (Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Raibmon 2005). The result is that, globally and when compared with non-Indigenous peoples, Indigenous peoples experience disproportionately higher levels of unemployment, loss of language and culture, lack of education, and disease. These collude and result in high rates of poverty, community violence, and overall ill health (Adelson 2005; de Leeuw et al. 2009). Differentiation, then, has had spatial ramifications and continuing social consequences and individually embodied outcomes.

While these studies of differentiation and categorization add much to discussions about difference in social geography, they also highlight the concept's deep complexity, namely, the impossibility of understanding it within or through dualisms. Thus, in studies about neo- or postcolonial landscapes, it would be a vast oversimplification to theorize social relationships as solely between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Such a conceptualization risks homogenizing both categories that, when looked at carefully, are actually comprised of vastly varied peoples. To think in nuanced and complex ways about the social geographies of difference in these landscapes means conceptualizing differences and power relationships between differently othered peoples – for instance between racialized (im)migrant peoples and Indigenous peoples, or between Indigenous men and women, or between all the people who hail from different geographies or territories (Kobayashi and de Leeuw 2010).

In response to the limitations of dualistic understandings of difference, some social geographers have turned to "new materialist" theoretical resources in an effort to attend to the constitutive importance of both human and nonhuman "things" in social life and, crucially, to rethink dualistic understandings of race, gender, class, and other locations of difference (Panelli 2010). Arun Saldanha, for example, has been exploring the ontological and material dimensions of race in an effort to move beyond some of the limits of past work emphasizing race as a social product (e.g., Saldanha 2006). Catherine Nash's investigations into the material dimensions of national belonging and relatedness cover similar ground, insofar as they aim to revisit traditional geographic interest in social differentiation through investigations of the embodied, fleshy aspects of human relations. Her study of blood (Nash 2005), for example, investigates traditional social geographic themes such as citizenship and national belonging through a study of the materiality and relational effects of blood. Joyce Davidson's interest in the relational and experiential dimensions of autism spectrum disorder also offers important perspectives on issues of social exclusion (Davidson 2010). These works and others have in common their insistence on understanding difference as a fundamentally spatial relationship, one that is inadequately accounted for through antagonistic and dualistic understandings of power and difference.

Social geographers have not only been concerned with the material effects of difference upon the lives of others, but also with the material ramifications of the ways in which we produce knowledge, the ways we (re)produce the geographies we have chosen for study, and the types of scholarship and research we have produced about those geographies (Kwan 2004). Although significant shifts have occurred in the discipline, including the infusion of critical anti-hegemonic philosophies such as Marxism and feminism, the cultural turn and more recently a plethora of other "turns" such as the ontological and emotional turns, there remains a realization that research foci and methodologies run the risk of (re)entrenching ideas of normal versus different, acceptable versus unacceptable, or interesting versus uninteresting. These categories, in the realm of producing knowledge and writing or researching geography, are infused with questions of power that hold the potential of rendering some subjects legitimate and others not. In more recent decades, these questions of subjects' legitimacy has resulted in questions about the pervasive whiteness of geographical inquiry, the preponderance of studies about public as opposed to private spheres, or the enduring Anglicized nature of the discipline (e.g., Delaney 2002; Desbiens and Ruddick 2006). These, among other focuses that produce certain categories of legibility and legitimacy, are situated within a growing body of inquiry arguing, first, that bounded or categorized ways of conceiving subjects, spaces, and societies are themselves social productions; and, second, that the categories that rely on difference are proving virtually impossible to justify or maintain.

If knowledge has material effects, some social geographers argue that we should engage in research and writing that is more "participatory," "public," "relevant," and "political" (for various interventions into this issue, see DeLyser and Pawson 2005; Dempsey and Rowe 2004; Fuller 2008; Massey 2004; Mitchell 2004; Pain 2004; 2006; Smith 2009). While many argue that, like the division between the "real" and the "imagined," appeals to be more public and political rest on dubious and untenable dichotomies, there is nevertheless a longstanding interest in social geography to *participate* in processes of differentiation and facilitate social transformation. For some, this has involved efforts to study the alternatives we wish to see in the world (see Gibson-Graham 1996, 2008), rather than build on existing work emphasizing marginalization, exclusion, and violence. Indeed, Valentine (2008) documents a shift away from emphasizing social exclusion and conflict, particularly in urban studies, and toward interest in geographies of conviviality, cosmopolitanism, and new forms of belonging. This shift in focus has yielded an important re-examination of previous assumptions about social life, but as Valentine observes, seems to have been "too quick to celebrate everyday encounters and their power to achieve cultural destabilization and social transformation" (p. 334). Moving away from studies of how difference manifests itself as social inequality and exclusion, in other words, runs the risk of abandoning attention to the persistence of difference as a locus of social power.

In sum, if social geographers experienced a lag in the subdicipline when preoccupation with the cultural gained significant disciplinary traction, today they are theorizing difference in new and intriguing ways as part of a process of reinventing social geographic inquiry. If, as Stuart Hall (1993) observed people's capacity to live with difference is the prescient question of the twenty-first century, then recent

interest among social geographers in understanding the theoretical, political, and ethical dimensions of difference represents an important development. While we welcome these new developments, we suggest that there might be still other ways of conceptualizing difference in geography, and in the following section we consider these alternatives.

Toward a Different Difference

As discussed, geographers are increasingly destabilizing divisions between subjects, dualisms, and divisions that are the basis of and result in categories of difference (Pile and Keith 1997; Rose 2002; Sharpe et al. 2000; Sparke 2008). These efforts demonstrate the insufficiency of thinking about difference simply in terms of dichotomies or dualisms, particularly in relation to the categories that so much scholarship on otherness has addressed (see also Li 2007; Mawani 2009). To date, however, much geographic research has focused precisely upon such relationships, on the differences of those with power or without power and between those classically conceived as different from each other, including men and women, the rich and the poor, European and other, hetero- and homosexual, white and not-white. Focusing on the relationships between subjects defined appositionally (against that which they are not) has three risks. First, it can miss the complexities of difference *within* (as opposed to *between*) various categories or variously othered subjects. Second, it risks overlooking the ways that subjects might embody various types of characteristics, all of which mark them as different in various times and spaces. Third, there is risk that by remaining with theoretical frameworks reliant on more straightforward categories of difference, or in continuing with modes of thinking that are reliant on dualisms and oppositions, we entrench the very categories and social powers our critiques are trying to destabilize.

Social dynamics tend not to unfold in clean or clear polarities. Subjects change, in relation to others or even in the ways they self-identify, depending on their social and spatial contexts. For example, a first generation Indo-American woman, fighting for her right to marry her same-sex partner in the state of California, might in the context of an interview with Fox Television News choose to highlight her sexual orientation as opposed to her family lineage and connections with an Indo-American community. Furthermore, the same woman may reside on contested land claimed by the Cahuilla Indian Tribe. Add to this complexity, for instance, opposition to her efforts for same-sex marriage by members of the Korean Pentecostal community who are simultaneously, and within the same landscape, fighting a battle against racism that has resulted in members of their community having businesses vandalized. A picture emerges of the complex geographies and relationships between differently positioned subjects who are each uniquely and individually marked as different within a broader white and heteronormative society. If difference simultaneously relies upon and engenders categories that perpetuate social power imbalances, it follows that to undo or destabilize those imbalances requires the dismantling of ideas about difference and of the categories upon which the concept and its outcomes rest and rely. Given the traction that difference has in the ways that societies and places are conceptualized and subsequently organized, and given the depth

and longevity of difference as a means of understanding ourselves and each other, it would be overly optimistic to suggest any quick ways of simply doing away with difference. There may be, however, some new ways of thinking about difference, particularly as it unfolds spatially, which trouble its fixity or its taken-for-grantedness as a necessary means of thinking about and organizing the world in which we live.

How might social geographers think differently about difference? Here we consider a series of artistic interventions into the question of difference, and ponder what they might offer social geographers as they seek to carry out politically engaged and theoretically rich investigations into the geographies of difference. It may seem that in so doing we are flying in the face of recent criticisms that "re-materialized" geographies need to rely on "more than representation." To the contrary, however, we argue, following Foucault, that representation is a profoundly material practice, and insofar as representations assist in demarcating the discursive frames within which social and political change might be possible, representation continues to demand our attention.

In 1966, in London's Indica Gallery, a still relatively unknown artist named Yoko Ono mounted her *Ceiling Painting (YES Painting)*, an installation comprised of paper, glass, a metal frame, metal chain, and a painting ladder. Viewers were invited to climb the ladder and, through a magnifying glass hanging from the ceiling, read the tiny text printed on the gallery's ceiling. Now famous, it was the word "YES" stenciled on the ceiling that purportedly moved John Lennon to fall almost instantly in love with Yoko Ono. "YES" unhinged a series a sociospatial divides. It was printed on the ceiling, eschewing expectations that letters be spatially confined to texts. It hovered above readers, demanding that they climb, and then lean backwards to read it. "YES" thus subverted the generally differentiated relationships between reader/onlooker and word/represented subject wherein the former (a viewer) maintains some power over the latter (a word) by looming over it. And, perhaps somewhat in the realm of cultural myth, "YES" also quickly and effectively obliterated the divides between Yoko Ono and John Lennon, spurring a set of relations and creative collaborations that throughout the 1960s and 1970s worked toward social justices and the dismantling of categories infused with power. As an art object and creative expression, *Ceiling Painting (YES Painting)* is not unique in subverting or undermining generally accepted categories of difference as means of orienting to the world. Unsettling divides and shaking categories that differentiate subjects from one another is the work of many artists and the works they produce.

Two other artists, both from Canada, provide more interesting ways to think about and see the world beyond established or well-honed categories of difference. Shelley Niro, an Aboriginal artist, produces works aimed expressly at destabilizing viewers' assumptions and taken-for-granted categories about Aboriginal identity. Her photograph series *Mohawks in Beehives* features close-up portraits of her mother and aunties, staring frankly and amusedly at a more than likely not-Mohawk viewer, fresh from a beauty salon and festooned with carefully set "up-do" hair, glittery accessories, and intricately applied makeup. Niro's purpose is to disrupt normative assumptions about Indigenous women's identity and to establish the intractability of categories that differentiate Indigenous from non-Indigenous.

Viewers of Niro's work are shown modern, urban, happy resilient Aboriginal women who clearly enjoy beauty spas and shopping at the mall. The images refute categorizations of Indigenous peoples as pre-modern, suffering, anti-capitalist or intrinsically and spiritually close to nature, tropes that, from Niro's perspective, have served falsely to differentiate, and thus other, Indigenous people from non-Indigenous Canadians. In her efforts to destabilize categorical assumptions about Indigenous women, Niro works toward new and more socially just geographies in Canada. Her photographs self-consciously return the gaze of a colonial country invested in maintaining the power structures that accompany categorical differentiations between various citizens and, from Niro's perspective, serve to perpetuate the longstanding marginalization of Indigenous women. About her work, Niro observes that "some people think that to be Indian, you have to do certain things, but I'm just saying that you're Indian no matter what you do ... I'm always thinking about that" (Shelly Niro quoted in Abbot 1994/6). In other words, what Niro offers is a lesson in refuting differences or binaries as the means to construct identities about self or others, by depicting them as "out of place" according to established norms. She offers a lesson in side-stepping dichotomous categories that perpetuate difference, and in doing so undermines techniques of power that rely on people and subjects being conceptualized as different and divided. She does not in the process erase difference, but challenges the history of making it and the necessity of inhabiting it on others' terms.

In a very different way, but still destabilizing binaries and dualisms as means of categorizing the world, sound and installation artists Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller work with the concepts of antiphonality and binaurality. In their installation *The Forty Part Motet*, in which forty speakers are arranged in a large circle with each speaker projecting a single unique voice, listeners/viewers can either stand close by one speaker to hear a single voice or they can choose to stand in the center of the circle and listen to the voices sing collectively. The project reveals the falsity of categorizations, separations, and oppositionalities: we perceive sound with two ears, but not by categorizing sounds as distinct and different per se. Instead, and even if they are transmitted from two sources, which could suggest or engender dualisms and privileging of one element over another, we actually understand sounds as behaving stereophonically together. As Cardiff and Miller's installation renders tangible, sound and the act of listening to sound are only possible because two (or multiple) elements work together, responsively, alternating in turns, resulting in an antiphon. Difference, then, is unhinged from privileging and, by extension, from categorizations of power.

Each of the three artists provides an example of conceptualizing the world beyond categories of difference, beyond divisions that fix one thing as over, or under, or as different from something else, the result of which are relationships infused with power imbalances. What might these works offer to geographers as we re-examine our understandings of difference? Recent interest in theories of intersectionality offers some intriguing possibilities. As alluded to earlier in the chapter, geographers concerned with questions about social operations and techniques of power have most often turned their attention toward "othered" subjects. What has been missing from some of these studies of difference and power, however, is a way to understand power and difference as variegated and multidimensional forces that ebb and flow

depending on who is enacting or embodying them. It is no longer sufficient, as is increasingly being documented particularly by multiply othered subjects, to straightforwardly suggest that one subject has power while another does not, or that power (or lack of power) is one-dimensional or fixed. Put another way, one subject's power does not always come at the expense of another's and differences differ depending on a great number of factors. One way to capture and address these conceptual conundrums is to understand social geographies through a lens of intersectionality (Valentine 2007). An intersectionality-type approach to theorizing social geographies encourages power to be theorized as reliant on systems and matrices, and difference to be conceptualized as an unfixed, relational, and complex categorization. Intersectionality is a relatively recent theory that has yet to be fully explored either across geography writ large or within social geography. Intersectionality is a theory that wrestles with, and attempts to explain, how socioculturally constructed categories (predominantly but not exclusively categories such as gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) interact with and impact upon one another to produce differentially lived social inequalities among peoples (Buitelaar 2006; Cole 2008; Collins 2000; Davis 2008; Hancock 2007; see also Anthias 1998, 2001). It makes effort to destabilize fixed categories of difference and to understand instead that one mode of difference does not necessarily hold sway over another. Instead, identities and spaces are comprised of multiple, interlocking axes of power that are best understood by their overlaps as opposed to their divides.

The theory of intersectionality arose as a means to examine, in nuanced and complex ways, how varied forms of otherness interact to produce differently striated realities of social marginalization and social exclusion (Collins 2000). The theory arose in response to enduring understandings of power relationships and inequalities that focused predominantly on gendered otherness as opposed to other categories that equally result in social marginalization. This focus, some critics leveled, led to gender and sex as more broadly understood to be mutable categories, subject to change, whereas typologies of race, ethnicity, or states of wellness and illness remained biological and thus not subject to critiques about power (see also Moore et al. 2003). Intersectionality, then, might best be broadly understood as a theory that accounts for the relationships between categories of otherness and the ensuing marginalization resulting from those relationships (McCall 2005). Theories of intersectionality offer the potential to understand otherness, including the othered social geographies of so many people, as complex aggregates comprised of shifting and always relational parts that are always being constituted in particular times and places.

There are a number of reasons why intersectionality-type research fits well with geographic inquiry. In its conceptualization of power not as static or fixed with reference to difference, but as a malleable and shifting process of differentiation, as a force that operates in and through specific sites, scales, historical contexts, and times, an intersectionality approach to social geographies can assist in illuminating the spatial specificities of social hierarchies or power imbalances. Although it might seem easier to understand social geographies through categorizations or cohorts – based for instance on population census or distinct neighborhoods or specific typologies such as race or sexual orientation – what such an analysis elides is the complexities of peoples' spatial relationships, with each other in different locations, and with the variable ways that people shape and are shaped by the places in which

they live. Intersectionality embraces complexities and complexifies difference, all the while realizing that geography is an integral component of questions about categories, power, and difference. As a theoretical lens, this approach to power and categories of difference has potential for topics increasingly being taken up by social geographers, including questions about (im)migration, nation-states, political violence, relationships in settler-colonial landscapes, or life in global cities.[1] In the case of settler-colonial countries, for instance, there must be recognition about the arrays of differently racialized peoples, many of whose lineages can be traced to forced migration, who now co-exist on territories claimed by Indigenous peoples. Moreover, with both (im)migrant and Indigenous peoples, there are ranges of education and income levels, assortments of sexual orientations, and multiple other states of being. Landscapes of overlapping differences and intersecting categories of otherness are a reality in globalized cities around the world. So are the distances that difference creates and sustains. Movement and intersection are hallmarks of these spatialities, and identities and relationships between multiple subjects are in constant states of flux, their power dynamics never fully fixed. Intersectionality recognizes and validates the vast power imbalances that exist across various geographies and between multiple subjects. What the theory avoids, though, is approaching such gaps and disparities in simple or categorical ways, and this is what makes intersectionality a "different" approach to difference.

Concluding Differences

We began this chapter with the supposition that difference matters. Difference is the historical condition of human relationship. How difference is understood, how it is produced, and how it manifests also matter. The power to differentiate runs the gamut from personal relations to colonizing powers, and includes the power of the scholar, from Linneaus with his compulsion to categorize to contemporary thinkers who wish to study the process of differentiation itself. One of the most compelling reasons difference has been studied is its collusive relationship with power. Categorizations, and the differences that categories engender, produce power relations that ultimately result in social hierarchies across vast times and distances, at the expense of a great many others. By theorizing ways to destabilize categories of difference and by examining new ways of understanding difference that are not reliant on firm or fixed categories, we make effort to sort through possible ways of examining social relationships that do not perpetuate power imbalances. We cannot erase difference. We suggest that social geography, specifically a social geography concerned with social justice, holds the potential of theorizing spatialities and human relations in ways that might move us away from difference as a dominant means of organizing and understanding the world in which we live.

Note

1 Intersectionality is not the only theoretical lens through which social geographers might re-examine the social geographies of difference. We note, for example, the growing

interest in "care" as a framework for making sense of social relations (e.g., Conradson 2003; Lawson 2007; Pratt 2009; Raghuram et al. 2009).

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