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Postmodern Spacings

By: **Mark Nunes**, Coordinator

Abstract

In February of 1997, a dozen individuals began working on a collaborative on-line project entitled "Postmodern Spacings." We came from various academic and professional fields in North America, Europe, and Australia. Our only initial "guiding principle" was that we were to discuss a variety of understandings of postmodern space. The seminar as a whole would be responsible for drawing up a syllabus and setting the focus. Together, we set up our reading list, held real-time discussions in an on-line meeting space called 1k+1 MOO (hero.village.virginia.edu:7777), carried on conversations via a list-serv, and constructed collaborative, interwoven texts. The hypermedia work we present here is the culmination of that effort.

Postmodern Spacings

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1. In February of 1997, a dozen individuals began working on a collaborative on-line project entitled "Postmodern Spacings." We came from various academic and professional fields in North America, Europe, and Australia. Our only initial "guiding principle" was that we were to discuss a variety of understandings of postmodern space. The seminar as a whole would be responsible for drawing up a syllabus and setting the focus. Together, we set up our reading list, held real-time discussions in an on-line meeting space called 1k+1 MOO (hero.village.virginia.edu:7777), carried on conversations via a list-serv, and constructed collaborative, interwoven texts. The hypermedia work we present here is the culmination of that effort.

2. Postmodern Spacings attempts to address the significance of "space" in contemporary cultural discourse. It looks at manifestations of bodily space, the space of the text, and social spaces, and it attempts to question the current relevance of a philosophy of space. The project also considers the intersection of these domains and the various hybrid spaces produced by these crossings.

3. Our readings and conversations served as a series of openings to various questions about space and spacing. In our discussions of "postmodern space," we assume that "space" has a history, and that it is more than a passive container of events. In acknowledging that space can be other than as it is, we were working from the assumption that "space" is something produced by social, cultural, and cognitive arrangements, while at the same time productive of experiential relations.

4. Our project grew from a general question posed toward contemporary culture: what are the conditions of possibility present in various spacings of the everyday? As early as 1857, Marx described the historical transformation of everyday life in industrial modernity as "the annihilation of space by time." We find that "space" increasingly appears as a term of interrogation in contemporary discourse.

5. We discussed the production of sex and gender in relation to that spatial locus called "the body." We looked toward the concepts of "production" and "poiesis" to explore the experience of "determined" subjectivity. We attempted to rethink urban space, sub-urban spaces, and the varied heterotopias and "non-spaces" of malls, highways, homeless encampments, and college classrooms. We considered the multilinearity of new textual spaces and the production of mediated spaces in on-line environments. Often we found our discussions heading in multiple directions. The weaving of our words into a hypermedia project allowed us to pursue connections that at times seemed aberrant, eccentric, or even monstrous.

6. We drew from our various technical, academic, and professional backgrounds and attempted to produce a collaborative, coalitional space of our own in which to explore these topographies. Since discussions took place on-line, "the virtual" and "the real" occurred as a

motif in various postings and conversations, but by no means was it a limiting topic. We did come to understand that the Postmodern Spacings project itself was an experiment in spaces, making use of several networked environments to encourage collaborative effort between participants. Thus, the project provided a space of sorts for a discussion of the benefits and shortcomings of on-line collaborative work. The Internet did indeed provide us with a profoundly open "supplemental" site of contact for the exchange of ideas and information. But this chaotic space, while wonderful for creating new openings, makes an attempt at "closure" seem somewhat artificial or forced.

7. Postmodern Spacings is, therefore, a project in the truest sense, opening outward, forward, toward a positive expression. It provides a series of experiments on spatial issues according to various social, cultural, and economic discourses. The material presented "here" is not intended to serve as a finished work, but rather as a set of headings onto the various theoretical and practical issues relating to figurations and configurations of space in the post-industrial late 20th century. Perhaps it is best, then, to consider Postmodern Spacings (both the seminar itself and the work we produced) as a network of experiments and trials— essays—that point in the direction of further collaborative work.

Postmodern Spacings: A collaborative project involving networked research scholars in North America, Europe, and Australia.

The Postmodern Spacings project is an ongoing seminar involving a dozen individuals of various technical and academic backgrounds. The purpose of the project is to discuss the role of "space" in contemporary life. Once Marxists spoke of "the annihilation of space by time" in the modern world. At present, however, we find that "space" increasingly appears as a term of interrogation in contemporary social, cultural, and philosophicaldiscourse. In response to this critical return of space, the seminar focused on attempts to refigure space "beyond" the cultural inheritance of Descartes and Kant. The seminar has approached space from a number of headings including the social, the corporeal, and the textual.

The Postmodern Spacings project is processual.

The material presented "here" is not intended to serve as a finished "work," but rather as a set of openings onto the various theoretical and practical issues relating to figurations and configurations of space in the post-industrial late 20th century. The hypermedia project involves text, visual images, and auditory clips. It will also provide links to other networked resources. The Postmodern Spacings project is itself an experiment in spaces. It makes use of several networked environments to encourage collaborative effort between the participants. Realtime discussions occur weekly, and a list-serv functions as an ongoing forum for discussion. The Project also has

a web page that serves as an archive_as well as a collaborative space for building networked projects.

Even to begin a discussion of "postmodern space," we have made certain assumptions: that space is implicated in time, if not history; that space can be other than as it is; that it is determining and determined. Through various specific questions addressed to the body and the social space in which it acts, the Postmodern Spacings seminar grew from a general question posed toward contemporary culture: what are the conditions of possibility present in various spacings of the everyday? Over the course of several months, twelve of us have engaged in readings of various texts that served as openings to questions about space and spacing. We drew from our various technical, academic, and professional backgrounds and attempted to produce a collaborative, coalitional space of our own in which to explore these topographies. We carried on our exchanges in real-time as well as by Majordomo mailing list.

This current hypermedia work is still in progress. Rather than presenting a finished product, the Postmodern Spacings is a project in its truest sense, opening outward, forward, toward a positive expression. It provided a series of intersections on spatial issues in philosophy as well as social space. It examines the production of bodies and the assemblages that allow for that production.

Real-time disucssion took place at 1k+1 a MOO sponsored by The Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanties, which also sponsors this seminar. **MOO**s (**M**ulti-user dimension, **O**bject-**O**riented) are themselves wrapped up in metaphors of space and have generated a volume of work. Although only one discussion focused specifically on MOOs and "cyberspace," the topic remained an undercurrent in many talks given the forum of our discussions. Our MOO discussions also gave rise to a parallel web/MOO project.

Postmodern Spacings Participants

Paul Bains is a 'mature' Ph.d student at Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia. He is exploring (amongst other things) the intersection of philosophy and science, particularly the concept of autopoiesis. Among his other works, he co-translated Felix Guattari's final work *Chaosmosis*, and also a collection of essays by Isabelle Stengers, *Power and Invention: Situating Science*. His most recent essay "Subjectless Subjectivities" will appear in the 1997 fall issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*

Vic Bancroft works at the Artificial Intelligence lab at the University of Georgia. He has done significant work in fractal generations and network theory.

Angela Hunter is currently a graduate student in Comparative Literature at Emory University. She has been involved in cyberlife and cybertheory since 1994 and has published several poems and essays thereabout. Her primary research interests are post-structuralist, psychoanalytic, and feminist literary theories.

Paul Mathias teaches Philosophy at the Lycée Henri IV in Paris and at the Paris Institute of Political Science. Among his other interests, he has written on the politics of the internet (*La cite internet*), and is preparing a book on notions of selfhood and the protean formation of knowledge or the arts in online environments.

Mark Nunes is an Assistant Professor in the Humanities Department of DeKalb College, Atlanta, GA. He has written several articles on spatial figurations of online communication, including "What Space is Cyberspace?" in *Virtual Politics* and "Virtual Topographies" in *Cyberspace Textualities*.

Laurent Oget participated in this project while on conscripted duty with the French Marines. He lives in Paris, has an interest in Situationist thought and neo-Situationist activity. He is a "thesard" at the Laboratoire d'Informatique Algorithmique: Fondements et Applications.

Ariosto Raggo has spent the better part of his young adult life pursuing hands-on research on skepticism and sensibility, contemporary Latin, Baroque art and philosophy, phenomenological hermeneutics, literary theory, and psychoanalysis. Currently he is engaged in mastering the art of theoretic fictioning, fragments, and parody.

Bjarte Rekdal is a Lacanian psychotherapist and an Assistant Professor at Sor-Trondelag College in Norway. He is author of *Det Umedvitne Sprket. Jacques Lacan og den Franske Psykoanalysen* (*The Unconscious Language. Jacques Lacan and French Psychoanalysis*).

Martin Rosenberg is an Assistant Professor of Communication at Kettering University, where he teaches critical theory, literature and science, and

argumentative writing. He is writing a book entitled *Fables of Self-Organization: The Cultural Work of Complexity in the Avant-Garde,* which will be completed this summer. He has also published many articles on Deleuze, Duchamp, Pynchon, and hypertext.

Harry Smoak received his BA in Theater from University of South Carolina. He currently works at Mindspring.com.

Heather Wagner is a multimedia artist living in Manhattan. She is a former editor of *BLAST!*.

The following works served in part as a reading and reference list for the seminar. It is by no means inclusive or definitive. Some works arose in passing reference. Others were the focus of ongoing discussion. The links on this page point to texts within the Postmodern Spacings project that addressed a particular work in a direct manner.

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