



Cartographic Convulsions: Public and Private Reconsidered

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CARTOGRAPHIC CONVULSIONS

Public and Private Reconsidered

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I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time.

—Fredric Jameson¹

The joyous disturbance of certain women's movements, and of some women in particular, has actually brought with it the chance for a certain risky turbulence in the assigning of places within our small European space. . . . Is one then going to start all over again making maps, topographies, etc.? distributing sexual identity cards?

—Jacques Derrida²

We are dealing with an imaginary cartography, which projects onto the real landscape its own shadowy ideological antagonisms, in the same way that the conversion-symptoms of the hysterical subject in Freud project onto the physical body the map of another, imaginary anatomy.

—Slavoj Žižek³

The first two of these quotations refer to broad empirical and discursive changes that might be grouped, for convenience, under the title of the postmodern. The historical narratives that had previously bestowed individual or social identity in relation to a shared past, Jameson suggests, are being replaced by spatial configurations that are more appropriately negotiated by mapping. Derrida, however, eschews the cartographic project, suggesting

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that it is liberation from the fixity of place that grants to some women's movements their radicalism. Žizek, finally, makes explicit the sense in which geography and politics, real and imaginary spaces, are irreducibly interwoven. Those who are designated *other* may literally find themselves exiled, condemned to a nomadic existence that is in no sense liberating. All three quotations are indicative of recent shifts within political theory toward a discursive fascination with the spatial: boundaries and their transgression, spaces and their mapping, figure a terrain wherein contestations of power are located and actors orientated.

This politics works on both metaphorical and literal levels. In the case of gender, feminists are already familiar with the potency of this combination and nowhere more so than in the modern distinction between public and private. As Anne Phillips has noted, this "was early identified as the crucial underpinning to patriarchal political thought."⁴ Carole Pateman insists that it is "ultimately, what the feminist movement is about."⁵ The main question addressed in this article is nevertheless whether it still makes sense, as we enter the twenty-first century, for feminists to privilege this particular spatial division. In the first part of my discussion, I will consider its nature and place in feminist theory, insisting on the complexity and ambiguity of what only appears to be a simple opposition. In the second, I will explain why I think this particular map of gendered space is becoming anachronistic due to a changing topography. In concluding, I will suggest the need for a renewed cartographic project.

I. CONCEPTUALIZING THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE DISTINCTION

Public and private are not inherently spatial terms, yet they have been consistently presented through a series of spatial metaphors that play on two figurative models. In one, a line divides space in two; in the other, a circle is drawn, its circumference marking a boundary between inner and outer. But the separation and identification of these areas make no sense unless they are internally as well as hierarchically related: each is defined by not being its other. In political theory, such spaces are normatively interpreted—in terms of higher and lower or inclusion and exclusion—on the basis of certain metaphysical judgments about what it means to excel as a human subject. The distinction then works politically because it excludes the ethos or practices associated with one realm from the other. It yields a barrier used both to prevent contamination and to protect and insulate. The location and permeability of

this boundary, as well as the association of the spaces it divides with particular groups or qualities, is not about geography, but power. For the metaphorical implications of space assume a literal dimension when activities are associated with particular locations appropriate to them. When populations are also distributed via roles specific to such places, then they can readily be divided and disciplined according to where their presence is permissible or forbidden. Where the normative hierarchy of spaces, the actual location of their practices, the personal qualities appropriate to those practices, and a social division of labor correspond, a particularly closed discursive field is at work. This is precisely the convergence that feminists discovered in modernity: one centered on gender and conveyed via the formula of public-versus-private.

Typically associated with the liberal political theory from which feminism itself was born, this distinction has been identified as a basic organizing principle for thinkers from Locke to Rawls, where it has been blamed for constituting, hiding, and legitimizing sexual inequality. While, however, feminists have approached political theories that deploy the distinction critically, it has also been one of their own most fertile conceptual tools in understanding women's inequality and gender difference. It cannot therefore be abandoned without serious consequences for feminist theory itself.

The distinction has also proven much richer and more intractable than the simple binary form of a public-versus-private division implies, since it shelters a number of different discourses that understand the terms, their values, the agencies to which they apply, and the location of their boundaries rather differently. Considerable confusion and disagreement arises then from their elision under what only appears to be a single dichotomy. As a consequence, feminists have themselves been ambivalent about the need to eliminate the vocabulary or separation of public and private. The editors of a recent anthology catch this ambivalence well when they note that feminism has "attempted to break down the rigid demarcation between public and private without obliterating the distinction between these two domains."⁶ Before deciding on the continuing relevance of this sort of language, it is advisable to disentangle some of its discursive strands to see why it appears to harbor both oppressive and emancipatory elements.

Two quite different traditions of political thought are at work in the public/private distinction: classical and modern. In the first, the ancients distinguished between *oikos* and *polis*; in the second, liberals distinguish between the freedom, autonomy, and rights of private individuals and/or families and the legitimate or unwarranted power of society or state. The issue of these discourses' continuity and dislocation is largely responsible for both the fecundity and the confusion of the public/private dyad.

The classical model was predicated on a particular division of labor whereby the household (*oikos*) was the site of production and reproduction, the place of slaves and women. It was a denigrated space in that its association with particularity, transience (life and death), and the body placed it low in the chain of being. Those who operated there were seen as naturally inferior because of their association with the material realm of necessity. Plato worries that the women who inhabit its dark, secluded spaces will be a seditious force in the republic. Here, then, the figure of the line that dissects two vertically ranked spaces is appropriate. The public realm is distinguished as one of universality, permanence, and public recognition. It is the place, as Habermas points out, where the merely lived is revealed and reflected on. Public life (*bios politikos*) for the Greeks is accordingly constituted in rational discussion and common action (*praxis*). It literally takes place in open, visible, public spaces.⁷ But only those who are free from household necessities have the time, and only those who are associated with the higher spiritual domain have the right, to participate.

Although women were thereby excluded from classical citizenship, this Hellenic public sphere still exerts considerable normative power over modern thought, and this surely includes many feminists. It is true that demands for political representation have focused on women's rights to pursue their interests within the state, as well as their acquisition of the symbolic status of citizenship. But throughout modernity, there is also a more general appeal for access to a public sphere (as opposed to literal incarceration in the isolated privacy of the bourgeois household); for visibility and public recognition. Moreover, this communicative model of a public sphere has also been one favored by feminist politics.

It is no accident that such struggles for public inclusion should arise within modernity. For while the metaphysics that underpinned classical division was sustained by Roman law and religion across the middle ages, no public/private opposition such as we find it in ancient or modern societies existed under feudalism. Only in bourgeois society, as Habermas insists, was a public sphere reconstructed, as market relations overflowed the household economy and print and trade facilitated a civic public composed of private citizens, who associated to defend their collective interests against the newly constituted public authority. Older metaphysical hierarchies thus survived while a public/private distinction was reborn in new guise under quite novel political and economic conditions. Of crucial importance for women, of course, were changes in the sexual division of labor that economic modernization entailed. This was accompanied by the literal and ideological (re)construction of a domestic sphere. Paradoxically, the latter attracted both classical prejudices

against the realm of (re)production and the disdain of political economists for activities unproductive of social wealth.

The hiatus this conjunction of modern and traditional forms caused has provided an entry point for the critical analysis of modern political thought by feminists. In modern republican theory, such as that of Rousseau, the mapping of sexual difference onto differential domestic and civic spaces remains explicit. Greek ideas about women's seclusion and exclusion are combined with classical norms of civic virtue, as specifically masculine, and a renewed theory of participatory democracy, as an exclusively male preserve. In this case, it was relatively easy to demonstrate the contradictions between a conservative theory of female exclusion and the apparently radical theory of the general will.

In the case of liberalism, the inconsistencies are less explicit, but a considerable body of feminist analysis has nevertheless located points in its exponents' arguments where universalist and egalitarian claims are subverted by naturalistic and metaphysical residues regarding women's capacities.⁸ From Locke on, there is a more or less explicit allocation of women to the private sphere where the marriage contract and child rearing occur. Older norms of civic virtue—of citizens whose political judgment relies on independence from, and transcendence of, the particularities of family life and desire—survive to exclude women as naturally unsuited to political life. These vie with more typically modern ideals of individualism, where personal autonomy and development need protection from the intrusions of public authority. This is where positive and negative definitions of liberty diverge.

It is especially at this point, then, that a variety of meanings and traditions connected with a spatial politics comes into play, which is why feminists' response must remain plural. In typical liberal theories of negative freedom, it is the spatial figure of the circle that is operative. Its inside is not the excluded domestic sphere of the ancients, but it is still a gendered domain, even if its precise gendering remains ambiguous. In part, this ambiguity stems from the obscurity of who, or what, is to occupy this zone of protected liberty.

Consistent with liberal thinking, one would expect it to be the individual. This is, I think, how J. S. Mill conceived it. It is interesting to note in this context that while his distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding acts seems essentially a-spatial, its application has often fallen back on quite literal distinctions between acts that are publicly visible and those that take place in the hidden spaces circumscribed by physical walls.⁹ These are in most cases the same walls that I earlier argued women sought escape from into a public domain. Thus, on one hand, women find domestic space stultify-

ing and oppressive; on the other, negative liberty tends to be attached to acts performed in the home, that is, to the site of the patriarchal family. While women experience this as a place of unfreedom (stifling and unprotected by civil liberties), men demand that it be a place of both personal privacy and unconstrained patriarchal power (and feminist analysis of liberal texts suggests that it is typically the patriarchal family, or its male head, that masquerades under the title of the autonomous individual). A variety of senses, with differentially gendered implications, thus compete within the notion of the private. This is hardly surprising, given the mixture of normative and spatial indices, and classical and modern references, that are interwoven there.

It is nevertheless in this individualist sense that some feminists continue to argue for the preservation of the public/private distinction, insisting that, for example, women as individuals must be granted state protection against domestic violence, while as embodied subjects, they must be accorded rights to make reproductive choices without the intrusion of moral or state authorities. As long as we inhabit a liberal polity, the reasoning goes, then the language of negative liberty and protective rights must be deployed on women's behalf. The feminist task is to neutralize a tendency to equate the individual with a single gender (although this task has itself become contentious insofar as other feminists have demanded that women's difference be recognized, insisting that the gender of individuals cannot and should not be occluded). In any case, the question of where to draw the line between public and private still remains as contentious as it did in Mill's day, probably more so, given that the boundaries and identity of any conceivable candidate for the protected zone of negative liberty have become deeply problematic and politically questionable. As a result, feminists are now more inclined to perceive the location of any line dividing public from private as intrinsically unstable and the very site of political struggle, rather than as a general theoretical question.

Many feminists anyway remain profoundly skeptical that any woman-friendly discourse predicated on the topography of public-versus-private can be salvaged. Even where liberalism does manage to purge itself of traditionalisms, they argue, it merely reproduces the gendered nature of spatial division in new form. For the value accorded to autonomous individuals who must be left alone to pursue their interests is associated with a conventionally masculinist view of human nature (as competitive, rational, self-interested, etc.), while the model of the rational individual ignores persons' familial and social constitution as well as their emotional ties: it is an abstraction appropriate to *homo economicus* but not to actual subjects. If both public and private are conceived in these terms, then conventionally feminine orientations, such as caring and cooperation, have no place in either of

modernity's dominant spaces, and translating familial problems into the individualist language of rights only illustrates this lacuna. But of course few liberals are themselves happy with this outcome, and few dare Hobbes's consistency here. A third space is thus maintained on the margins, where naturalistic claims about domestic bonds and feminine subjectivity are retained. Liberalism thus tends to hold a schizoid attitude toward the private realm as civil society and domestic sphere, modern and traditional, masculine and feminine, individualist and familial, contractual and natural. One suppresses the feminine, and the other oppresses the women who must represent its norms.

Kate Nash has recently argued that the undecidability of women, as both like and unlike men—a theme she traces from Locke to its enhancement in contemporary neoliberalisms—actually exposes liberalism's potentially emancipatory aspects since it never has been able to assign women unequivocally to the domestic sphere. "The undecidability of women between the individual of the universal liberal principles of liberty and equality and the naturally caring woman of the domestic sphere," she writes, "has been opened up by the liberal democratic practices of the late twentieth-century and this has complicated the institution of the public/private opposition itself. Furthermore, this undecidability is now very difficult to close down."¹⁰

While I agree with her about this undecidability, however, I would suggest that this has been a productive ambiguity for liberalism rather than a sign of its weakness or vulnerability. It is neither, in other words, merely a target for critique nor a destabilizing ambiguity, as feminists generally claim; rather, it is part of the secret of liberalism's endurance. It allows it to hold, for example, that women are sufficiently rational and autonomous to consent to the social or marriage contract, and thus legitimately subordinated, while they are simultaneously deemed unsuited to holding power in either sphere. It also allows liberal capitalism both to draw women into the labor market when needed, as self-interested individuals, and to exclude them without recompense, as carers and dependents, when markets render their labor superfluous. Moreover, this internal diversity allows liberalism to treat different groups of women differently, so that some will be exhorted to work, some to care, and others to combine both, as situations change. Debates among feminists about equality versus difference also take place within this discursive field that liberalism inscribes, one that close analysis might reveal as a heady mix of the dominant elements of western culture: religion and capitalism. Although its inconsistencies are theoretically unsatisfying, in the economy of gender power, they permit an entirely functional flexibility.

For political liberalism is additionally interwoven with a further discourse, political economy, which is also crucial to the way public and private

are understood in modernity and which furthermore directs its critics to think explicitly about material relationships. Because my case for a new postmodern politics of space will rely on anticipating structural developments here, it is important to insist on the historical relationship between two closely related oppositions: public/private and work/home.

In ancient thought, the economic and the domestic were indivisible sites of the private. But if industrial capitalism means that production becomes a collective venture undertaken outside the home, it creates the familial, domestic sphere precisely as a third, unproductive site. Although civil society therefore usurps the place of private life in liberal thought, its emergence also creates a new space that is even more confined in that it is excluded from social production. This is why, when women campaigned through modernity for access to public life, they meant not only citizenship rights but also access to the publicly recognized, collectivist activities of economic life. For while economic life is called private by liberalism, because it should be free from state intervention, it is nevertheless a site of extradomestic, socially recognized and remunerated, public activity, as far as women are concerned. Domestic life, as a shrunken site of child rearing and housework, which were themselves products of modern ideas about childhood, intimacy, privacy, and consumption, now became more literally private qua incarceration and isolation in the home (this more literal spatial politics is illustrated well by Latin American feminists' distinction between home and street—*casa/calle*). Women in modernity found themselves excluded from economic life as they had not formerly been, while the transition from production of use values to that of exchange value meant that those who earned no wage became dependents. Not only was the economy now more literally a male preserve, but the liberal-capitalist state was increasingly itself modeled on the masculinist, economic values associated with it.

The emergence of civil society thus further complicates the discourses that feed into the public/private division; it alters the composition of both public and private life and directs attention beyond the textual topography promulgated by political theory, toward a material exclusion that theory is seen to legitimize as well as reflect. Such complexity is in part reflected in Habermas's more Hegelian distinction, which replaces liberalism's simple public/private dichotomy with a tripartite division between family (its modern patriarchal-conjugal form characterized by a "permanent intimacy"), economy, and state, where the transition to capitalism is recognized as crucial in shaping all their modern forms. A fourth, emancipatory, public sphere is then appended, which relies on the sort of subjectivity (the "innermost core" of modern privacy) the family constitutes.¹¹ While this is a salutary reminder of the economic indices and historical innovations involved in spatial divi-

sion, however, it remains insufficiently attentive to the hierarchical gendered relationships that also play within and between all four domains.¹²

It is here, too, that a dilemma that must trouble any contemporary feminist cartography starts to become apparent. I have argued so far that the modern public/private split must be recognized as a complex distinction that combines several discourses and thus harbors more meanings than the simplicity of the formula suggests. I have also suggested that while feminists tend to view the resulting hiatuses as theoretical inconsistencies and hence as opportunities for criticism, it is important additionally to recognize how they facilitate a continuous process of reconstruction whereby exclusions are always being reproduced in new form as conditions and power relations change. From this perspective, feminists would be advised to treat with caution any reified sense of a simple and massive binary divide. But equally, it would be naive to believe that space/power might be simply deconstructed away by acknowledging topographical mobility. The challenge is to concentrate instead on a genealogy of gendered space in all its multiplicity and to combine this with a future project of remapping. It follows that a certain plurality and ambivalence in feminist responses to the public/private divide is both inevitable and appropriate.

Genealogy offers a salutary reminder here that historical forms emerge contingently out of myriad random and disconnected details that are nevertheless vehicles for power and available for colonization by powerful forces. It thereby avoids any teleological, universalist narrative. Especially significant in the context of analyzing the public/private opposition is its replacement of the search for origins or a single cause—such as nature, essential sexual difference, or universal patriarchy, a (re)productive imperative or economic determinism—with a carefully documented tracing of its “whole, long, hard-to-decipher hieroglyphic script.”¹³ As Foucault insists, “The isolation of different points of emergence does not conform to the successive configurations of an identical meaning; rather, they result from substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals.”¹⁴ Genealogy registers how fibers of power congeal into relatively enduring forms while remaining alert to the shifting strategies and meanings through which this process occurs. The plural ways public/private discourses take different and unpredictable forms, while reproducing gender inequalities and boundaries in different guises, can then be accommodated. Both changing patterns of power and the resistances they incite are at work here.

Accordingly, the home/work and private/public oppositions are to be understood as effects of a whole series of developments (such as new attitudes toward sexuality, childhood, individuality, and privacy; men's struggles to exclude women from employment and changing forces of production;

the revival of classical metaphysics and the development of the institutions and theories of the modern state; and so on) that came together in a contingent but powerful unity within modernity, without ascribing ultimate causality to any one. The gendered norms of public and private spaces, even if they are only contingently or metaphorically linked to woman, are then able at a certain point to discipline actual women so that they conform with the roles and orientations that appear natural to domestic life.

From this perspective, it would be easy to deconstruct the sort of encompassing narrative that Habermas (along with many feminists) presents and to dismiss it as too economically and geographically focused. After all, the transition from feudalism to capitalism that it relies on remains specific to certain, primarily European, societies, while the changed sexual division of labor that it yielded affected different classes and races of women quite differentially. Yet this history surely does retain a more generalized significance, both because it was in such societies that the pervasive distinctions of liberal political thought evolved and because even those women who did not conform with its equations between femininity and privacy fell under its ideological and disciplinary imperatives. The broader structural changes whereby the transition to modernity redefined the geography of gender along broadly binary lines surely then remain a crucial dimension of political analysis, even if their generality does not apply equally to everyone, everywhere. It is also in precisely those societies where the Habermasian narrative fits best, that postmodernization is calling the public/private distinction into question. The centripetal pull of a broad structural analysis, which feminists have deployed to considerable critical and political effect, is nevertheless in tension with more centrifugal forces of dispersal and undecidability, genealogy and deconstruction, that are often associated with the postmodern.

My own discussion thus far, like most feminist engagements, has been undertaken within the specifically modern discursive field that takes for granted the centrality of the public/private division. The analysis is inconclusive concerning its continued relevance. On one hand, changing roles and opportunities suggest its erosion; on the other, it seems to be reproduced in different guises and thus in need of constant unveiling and challenging. Because feminism is so closely identified with the language of public and private, the danger is that we might carry on using it in a situation where it is no longer empirically relevant or politically useful. The liberal texts that feminists dissect were, after all, written primarily during early and high modernity, when they corresponded with a division of labor, patterns of exclusion, and conventions of gendered identity that were specific to the age. But equally, we must be wary lest discursive fashion should encourage us to aban-

don the theoretical tools that are most appropriate to an analysis of enduring power relations. After all, the stark public-private dichotomy remains useful in conveying one fairly crude and universal truth. Women have been enduringly ascribed responsibility for reproduction and its related activities while they continue to struggle for visibility and recognition: two sides of a gender politics deeply imbricated in a geography of prescribed and proscribed spaces.

In the next part of my article, I will anticipate certain trajectories that suggest to me the necessity for new maps. Since the latter do not (yet) exist, I will present the relevant developments in point form, to avoid the illusion that they amount to any totalizing picture of postmodernization.

II. POSTMODERN SPACING

1. As I reconstructed women's struggles in my earlier discussion, the question of public access has been their defining feature. Women demanded inclusion in public life, which was defined as the space of state and citizenship; as the site of social production and recompense; and more generally, as a communicative, visible, and socially recognized public sphere. But the battle for formal access has surely been won already. Women have been enfranchised for many decades now and were even recently elected in significant numbers to the new Labor government in Britain. At the same time, the British labor force is poised to become predominantly feminized, while I think one could make a good case for arguing that most women enjoy at least equivalent opportunities for communicative action to most men.

None of this of course means that women have succeeded in gaining equality in, or in transforming the ethos of, these public domains. And this is at least in part explained by a residual aura of domesticity that follows them there and by unresolved problems regarding child care (whose own public/private status is now deeply contentious). But the lack of formal rights of access that the public-private divide once so clearly legitimized and encapsulated is no longer a significant problem, and where access is unequal, it is so diversified according to class, race, ability, domestic status, and so on that the overarching explanation of an ideology that equates femininity with domesticity no longer seems very helpful. Moreover, the norms of femininity that once accompanied women's incarceration in the private sphere (passivity, helplessness, modesty, etc.) are hard to recognize in many contemporary societies, as testified by a variety of phenomena from girls' superior educational attainments to "girl power."

Ironically, too, during the British and American governments' development of welfare-to-work programs, many women have found themselves

fighting for the right to stay at home and rear their children. This in itself raises interesting questions as to whether feminist struggles must necessarily focus on access to the public sphere rather than on opportunities to sustain a domestic life (in the former Eastern Europe, for example, the latter was often more common). It also situates feminism within the broader problematic posed by late capitalism: of how those without access to a wage are to subsist (for which women's unpaid domestic work and marital dependency were previously the main solutions).

2. The feminization of the workforce is especially significant, since I have argued that struggles over spatial allocation were crucially linked to the new gender roles modernity introduced following the split between home and work. Not only do a majority of women now work, whence they also comprise close to a majority of the workforce (albeit in the sort of part-time, servicing jobs that have proliferated and been labeled typically post-Fordist or postmodern but that were always in fact identified as activities appropriate to women), but the division between a domestic space and a place of work is literally being eroded.

Many workers, women especially, have part-time jobs that allow them during the course of the day to combine child care with waged employment inside or outside the home, thus blurring the distinction between domestic and social production and the public/private locations where days are spent. Indeed, some women, and especially those previously dependent on state support, must now entrust their own children to outside carers in order themselves to take up paid child care for others. This process propels them into the waged economy, public tax system, and a web of legal regulations even where such work is still undertaken in the home. In this sense, what was once a quintessentially private, domestic act outside the realm of exchange is merely succumbing to the relentless march of commodification.

A significant number of carers might also have unemployed partners or partners whose roles are interchangeable with their own. Moreover, information technology increasingly allows workers of both sexes to work from home, where the Internet renders the most private of spaces part of a global communications network and work may be punctuated by the most intimate labors of servicing dependents' needs (which might themselves be met in part by telecommunications systems). If a new figure, that of the isolated yet networked individual, might haunt the spatial imaginary of the future, its gendered dimensions remain for us indistinct.

At the same time, domestic activities such as shopping or taking children to school may well involve women (or, increasingly, men) in conversations that might qualify the supermarket or playground as a public sphere. In their

everyday lives, individuals are therefore likely to find themselves traversing a number of ambiguously coded spaces, few of which could be definitively or usefully classified as public or private. Even if the terms enjoy a lingering normative power, then, this is severely attenuated once it is no longer supported by actual spaces. On the other hand, while public access coincides with long-term feminist demands, it is surely the case that women are being swept along relatively passively by these broad economic and technological changes. The relationship between a real deconstruction that is going on socially and a critically inspired one seems unfortunately to favor the former, and it is crucial to feminism as a political movement that it should seek ways to rectify and respond to this. From this point of view, any tendency for formerly more private, isolated acts to be drawn into a public, communicative sphere is charged with a salutary political potential.

3. The merging of public and private life also has more sinister connotations in terms of the penetration and colonization of the private by the public. Welfare, juridification, commodification, and normalization all mean that even the most apparently intimate spheres of the body, reproduction, and desire are structured, even constituted, by public forces, while the boundaries and experiences of private life will themselves be effects of public discourses rather than existing as some innocent inner domain to be protected from them. Moreover, the very opportunity to lead a private life will for many women depend on state support, while most of the apparently private choices women make, or fight for the right to make, will already have been structured by public policies, by legislative decisions, and in cases like those of reproductive rights, by those who develop and control the technology. Again, then, it becomes difficult to establish a boundary between public and private or to establish a stable conception or valuation of them, since spaces are now more mobile and connected. While the response of some critics, feminists among them, has been to reach for a liberal language of negative liberty, privacy, and protective rights, these would seem to have only a marginal relevance to the sort of processes mentioned here.

Indeed, feminism has itself been instrumental in the erosion of illusions about the existence of some pristine zone of autonomy. Because liberalism defined the domestic as an apolitical space, it was early on charged with denying the political nature of sexual and familial relations; its conception of the political was itself contested. Modern feminists have waged a protracted struggle for civil rights and protection by public bodies within the family. But a corollary of this has been an insistence that since the domestic is a thoroughly politicized space, the limiting of politics to the public arena surrounding the state is itself a political act that hides the political nature of sexual rela-

tions. Feminists insist, consequently, not only that the bounding of the private is a political act of exclusion but that insofar as the private realm is familial, it is already political in terms of its internal power relations.

This was succinctly captured under the slogan, "The personal is political." The claim it originally advanced was that while domestic hierarchy appears to be a merely personal, private relationship, it is actually sustained by public institutions that are patriarchal. Although this has subsequently come to mean that politics is to be practiced in the private domain, where intimate negotiations of sexual relations or domestic roles are themselves political acts with wider ramifications, the point I think early radical feminists like Kate Millett were making was that patriarchy could not be challenged effectively as long as it was experienced and contested as a merely personal matter. The public structures supporting its scattered manifestations had to be recognized and confronted, otherwise domestic inequalities would simply be reproduced. In this sense, the constitutive role of public practices and discourses in structuring and reproducing private life was already recognized, but following Habermas and Foucault, in particular, the process is now recognized as far more profound. Although rights claims will undoubtedly continue to have some local relevance to women in specific cases, then, it is difficult to see appeals to privacy in general as having more than fairly marginal (and ever-contested) significance.

4. The public-private opposition has been presented (and criticized) by feminists as a specifically gendered one. However, postmodernists note that many identities intersect, such that social and symbolic spaces are fissured along multiple force lines. The simple figures of a dissected space or a protective circle accordingly give way to an image of a dense network of shifting planes and the opening and closing of unstable, transient spaces. It is in this context that feminists have recently spoken about a re-siting, or revisioning, of the political, taking account of multiple politicized spaces and the need for new maps. Not only are women themselves seen to be differentially distributed across a series of spaces, due to their complex identities, but it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain that gender is the privileged index of spatial politics.

Discussion here is then about opening spaces, where all boundaries or closures are suspect, and such spatializing is presented as the very process of democratization itself. As Anna Yeatman writes, "Democratic politics is centered in the evanescent openings of public space," where "the polity" has lost a clearly bounded centrality and become a "more or less (dis)continuous series of politics."¹⁵ The ambiguities and inconsistencies of a genderized public-private dichotomy, mined so effectively by feminism, are accordingly giving way to perceptions of a far more complex and diffuse terrain whose heteroge-

neous spaces (as yet) defy mapping and where it is not just the location but the very imposition of boundaries that is politicized and contested in postmodern discourses. This is exemplified in the introduction to a recent collection of feminist essays under the banner of "Siting/Citing/Sighting the New Democracy." Here, the editor, Jodi Dean, explains that to "*resite* the political is to recognize the multiple terrains and spaces producing and produced by politics." She insists on the "limits of traditional theoretical frameworks built around ideas of the public, the private and the degrees of autonomy and dependence proper to each," where a multiplicity of new spaces and locations "is to be understood as requiring a new articulation of its constitutive political positions."¹⁶

5. The vocabulary and agenda cited in the previous paragraph is indicative of a broad discursive shift identified with poststructuralism/post-modernism. This involves a general antipathy toward the sort of binary schemas that the public-private opposition, with its rather precise mapping onto a dyadic sexual difference, entails. Despite their political utility, such formulae are not only perceived from this perspective as too simplistic to accommodate the diversity of social life, but their very binarism is implicated in a metaphysics of sexual difference that takes for granted what it is supposed to challenge. In this sense, a dichotomous cartography looks both anachronistic and complicit.

Such charges of anachronism, however, raise more complex epistemological questions about the relationship between the discursive and the real. Formerly, I think political theory tended to be understood by feminism in a rather Marxian way: as an ideology that both legitimized and mystified the gendered power relations actually instantiated in social, political, and economic life. But feminists are now more likely, under the influence of Foucault, in particular, to integrate everything into the discursive on the grounds that it is within discursive fields that structures of power are constituted and that there is no prediscursive reality that acts as an independent referent. In this sense, the validity of postmodernism's representations of more heterogeneous spaces cannot be established simply by appealing to a reality whose truth they might more or less accurately convey, since the real and its representation can no longer be separated or linked in this way. Rather, a theoretical penchant for focusing on multiplicity and dispersal would itself restructure spatial experiences and their political significance. Radical cartographic experimentation, in other words, would constitute a novel topography: one that would itself engender new political effects. Retrospectively re-presenting the modern public-private opposition in a more genealogical and plural way would itself be implicated in this process.

Yet in evaluating the continued relevance of the public-private schema to feminism, a central concern must surely remain its adequacy to the changing material conditions it interprets for purposes of critique, orientation, and change. If it then remains the case that a basically dualistic spatial distinction does still underpin and reproduce sexual inequality, it would be foolhardy for feminists prematurely to abandon, or deconstruct away, this critical instrument. On the other hand—and this is broadly the challenge I have been pursuing here despite its epistemological difficulties—it may be the case that experience is being restructured, independently of discursive shifts, in a way that calls for new maps. It would then be unsurprising and indeed appropriate that the postmodern imagination should be haunted by images of drifting, fast-proliferating spaces and unstable, permeable boundaries. But this unfamiliar landscape, too, remains riddled with exclusions and power, and as such, the cartographic task itself remains a wager not an anachronism.

CONCLUSION

Given its own methodological and theoretical history, feminism is well equipped to take up this challenge of engendering new maps. Feminists have long recognized and explored the connections between political theory's spatial divisions and the gender relations they adumbrate and reproduce. They have engaged in an immanent critique of political thought by disclosing its internal tensions, inconsistencies, and ambiguities, as well as revealing the power relations internal to its apparently only formal spatial stratifications. Feminists have also engaged in detailed analyses of socioeconomic developments, insisting on the relationship between material structures and political categories, and thus resisting temptations to merely formal theorizing. It must be emphasized nevertheless that the public-private distinction was never one that was empirically obvious and simply awaiting representation. It was formulated in a political context and makes sense of a complex mass of individual and collective activities that are themselves disclosed as deeply political. Feminism does not itself pretend to political neutrality in such theorizing but understands the force field of the social to change it, reading its vectors in terms of emancipatory opportunities for (differentially positioned) women.

Feminism cannot then simply replace hegemonic space with spatial fantasy but must recognize the cartographer as one who both discovers and explores, reinventing once familiar landscapes by stylistic experimentation. For a map is a kind of spatial narrative that serves to orient actors and travel-

ers. The mapmaker is accordingly guided by certain strategic, pragmatic concerns. Mapping sociopolitical space according to public and private places formerly satisfied these criteria in an exemplary way. My question, however, has been whether this map has now become merely a diagram. Has the public-versus-private become a reified formula that takes on a life of its own, disconnected from transformations in actual space/power? If so, then the confused, lived indices of gendered geography summon a renewed cartographic process.

NOTES

1. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 64.
2. Jacques Derrida, "Choreographies," in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (Hemel Hempstead, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 443.
3. Slavoj Zizek, "You May!" *London Review of Books*, March 18, 1999, 3.
4. Anne Phillips, "Universal Pretensions in Political Thought," in *Destabilizing Theory*, ed. A. Phillips and M. Barrett (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1992), 17.
5. Carole Pateman, "Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy," in *Feminism and Equality*, ed. A. Phillips (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1987), 103.
6. Mary Lyndon Shanley and Uma Narayan, introduction to *Reconstructing Political Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1997), xiv.
7. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1989), part 1.
8. See, for example, Diana Coole, *Women in Political Theory: From Ancient Misogyny to Contemporary Feminism* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993), chap. 4.
9. Note, for example, Mill's own solution to gambling in *On Liberty*.
10. Kate Nash, *Universal Difference* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1998), 138.
11. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 44 ff.
12. Nancy Fraser refers in this context to an "unthematized gender subtext." While Habermas is charged with ignoring the modern linkage between the worker/breadwinner and masculinity, she acknowledges that its corollary of the feminine consumer, which "phantasmatics of desire" is especially promulgated by advertising, is becoming increasingly less gender specific. Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1989), 123 ff.
13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9.
14. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 151. Nietzsche, in *Genealogy of Morality*, writes similarly that

the whole history of a "thing," an organ, a tradition can . . . be a continuous chain of signs, continually revealing new interpretations and adaptations, the causes of which need not be connected even amongst themselves, but rather sometimes just follow and replace one another at random. The "development" of a thing, a tradition, an organ is therefore cer-

tainly not its progressus towards a goal . . . —instead it is a succession of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of subjugation exacted on a thing, added to this the resistances encountered every time. . . . The form is fluid, the “meaning” [Sinn] even more so. (55)

15. Anna Yeatman, *Postmodern Revisionings of the Political* (London: Routledge, 1994), 108 f.

16. Jodi Dean’s introduction to her edited *Feminism and the New Democracy: Resiting the Political* (London, Sage, 1997), 2 f.

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