Territorial formation on the margin: urban anti-planning in Brooklyn

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ABSTRACT. Theorists of social movements have identified a growing number of 'new social movements' which seek to 'bypass the state' in their pursuit of social power. This article proposes that one way to appreciate the changing opportunity structure for such 'new social movements' is to direct one's attention to changes in the degree and nature of state territorial control. It is argued that political-economic transformation is resulting in a situation in which margins are emerging: areas which are clearly within the boundaries of nation-states but in which the intensivity of state political-territorial control is limited. Social movements are gathering residual sources of social power in these supposedly 'emptied' margins in an effort to construct alternative forms of territorial control. Their attempts to redefine territory challenge the construction and uses of territoriality which enable capitalist uses of space. An analysis is undertaken of one particular movement from the margin—the Atlantic Terminal Urban Renewal Area (ATURA) Coalition, a grass-roots urban planning/community control movement in Brooklyn, New York City.

Introduction: situating new social movements

An irony of much of the recent literature on social movements is that it directs our attention away from the study of social movements. Fireman and Gamson (1979) criticize many resource mobilization studies for their exclusive concern with the organization of the social movement while ignoring the changes in the environment within which the social movement struggles. Pickvance (1985) criticizes Castells (1983) and other students of urban social movements for their construction of generic, ideal-type urban environments. He asserts that different urban social movements are in fact operating in different spheres of the urban environment and that the specific characteristics of each of these interrelated spheres need to be understood if one is to understand their respective oppositional movements. Cox (1988) similarly suggests that students of urban social movements devote more attention to the specific attributes of the place in which the movement which they are studying is operating. He notes that to comprehend adequately the dynamics of that place, one must, in turn, analyse the context of larger scale social processes.

Cohen (1985), Melucci (1988) and Scott (1990) level a similar criticism at students of 'new social movements'. Scott, in particular, advises against looking for some empirical
sameness among these new social movements which might be used to differentiate them from the 'old social movements'. Rather, he suggests, one should determine what is 'new' about the social context within which these movements operate. Fuentes and Frank (1989) similarly suggest that the aspects of 'new social movements' which are actually 'new' can be appreciated only by understanding the cyclical political-economic context and the changing 'political opportunity structure' which confront social movements.

Among the many kinds of new social movements are those concerned with urban planning and community control of the urban environment. Following the criticisms presented above, I propose that to understand how 'new' urban planning movements may be exercising and promoting new forms of territorial control, one must place these movements within the context of changing state territory and sovereignty. These changes, in turn, flow from and contribute to changes in global economy. Specifically, I suggest that recent changes in the structure of the world-economy are associated with changes in the nature and degree of territoriality exercised by nation-states. From this new territoriality have emerged margins: places which, while within the territory of the world-economy, are not fully integrated within its constitutive organizations of power. I suggest that the movements which are emerging from the margins are attempting to gather the sources of social power at their disposal. In the process, they engage in a redefinition of territory, piecing together new forms of territorial control.

In the case study which follows, I use this perspective to investigate one particular movement from the margin—the Atlantic Terminal Urban Renewal Area (ATURA) Coalition, a grass-roots urban planning/community control movement in Brooklyn, New York City. I suggest that despite the narrow focus, limited goals and only partial success of urban social movements like the ATURA Coalition, they successfully take advantage of the marginal position in which they find themselves. In so doing, they may be building a foundation from which they can make a substantial contribution to overall territorial restructuring and social change.

New social movements and the changing state

An oft-cited attribute of new social movements is their ambivalent attitude toward state power (Amin et al., 1991; Fuentes and Frank, 1989; Offe, 1987). The struggle for state power is associated with old social movements. 'New' social movements are seen as struggling for 'de-centered' power or for 'identity-oriented' empowerment. The state, for them, is often portrayed as a relic of an old system which they have no interest in controlling. In Offe's words, they seek to 'bypass the state'.

To assess the opportunities for new social movements amidst political and economic restructuring, we must, then, begin by interrogating the extent to which the world is becoming 'post-statist' and the extent to which new, non-statist routes to social power are emerging. A simplistic reading of political-economic restructuring holds that as production increasingly is organized at the global scale, the nation-state is becoming impotent. In such a situation, it might well make sense for oppositional social movements to seek social power outside the state-defined political arena. Yet many social scientists, including a number of geographers, have cautioned against over-reliance on this observation that social life has become increasingly 'globalized'. Even as productive institutions and other social organizations coalesce at the global scale, individual places continue to matter (Cox, 1992; Storper, 1992). Hence, the territorial-political institutions which serve to divide and control places—the various institutions of the state apparatus—remain important entities. The state remains a crucial institution even if the nature, degree and function of its social
power are undergoing fundamental change. Contemporary political-economic restructuring can better be characterized by the transformation of the state than by its demise.¹

As Taylor (1993) and Ruggie (1993) have noted, traditional social science paradigms are of limited use for conceptualizing such fundamental transformation of the state system. This failure stems from the prevalent conception of the nation-state as the basic unit of society. These political theories assume a spatially bounded social unit existing ontologically prior to the formation of the state as a political entity. The state emerges 'naturally' to govern this pre-existing society. Thus, international relations theory, for instance, is prepared only to describe changes in how pre-existing nation-states 'relate'. It lacks even a language for describing changes in contemporary political economy which affect the structures, functions and priorities of the states themselves. Confronted with radical changes in the political-economic environment, those who have heralded the demise of the state have made a provocative, but empirically faulty and simplistic prognosis.²

And yet, while the state's demise does not appear to be imminent, its role in society is undergoing significant transformation. International institutions are gaining unprecedented productive, military and regulatory powers. Whether because of global competition or for fear of capital flight, the state's ability to tax is increasingly being challenged (O'Connor, 1973). Whether because of capital's 'hypermobility' or because of the importance of 'territorial production complexes', states are increasingly finding it difficult to stimulate and retain investment in 'depressed' regions. This situation of continued state primacy amidst declining (or at least changing) state power is aptly demonstrated by the recent United Nations military actions on behalf of the 'New World Order'. While the interventions in Kuwait, Somalia and Bosnia-Herzegovina may indeed represent unprecedented multilateral coordination and military activity by an international body, their stated purposes have been to reaffirm the sovereign, territorial, competitive nation-state as a key unit in the organization of social life.

To understand this environment in which the composition and institutionalization of state power is changing, I heed Taylor's (1993) call to 'explore negations' of the state as a historical institution. Mann (1984) and Johnston (1989) stress that the state's primary function is territorial: the state binds space as a means toward exercising social control. Sack (1986) has demonstrated the many ways in which this territorial control may be constructed, depending upon the functional needs of, and the organizational resources available to the territorial agents. Mann (1986) has suggested that to understand this environment of variable resources and strategies we conceive of society not as a structured unit but rather as a loosely coalesced 'social power network'. Below, I suggest that by situating contemporary changes in state territoriality within such an understanding of society as a 'social power network' one can establish a framework for analysing the opportunities available to alternative, non-state territorial organizations, including the urban planning movement which is the subject of the case study that follows.

Social power network theory and the emergence of margins

Following Giddens (1984), Mann (1986) has proposed 'social power network' theory as a social theory which aims for a middle ground between structural-functionalist and agency-centered theories of social action. In an effort to avoid structuralist perspectives in which the actions of individual and collective actors are determined by systemic structural imperatives, Mann suggests that social scientists do away with the concept of 'society'. Rather, he proposes that we conceive of 'societies' as ever-changing networks of ideological, economic, military and political power. These networks emerge as individuals in a particular place attempt to organize the mechanisms of social power available to them
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for their own benefit. Social power organizations are 'promiscuous': those which successfully organize one source of power are often able to utilize this power to organize, at least partially, the other sources. Hence, despite his emphasis on agency in the construction of social power configurations, Mann does acknowledge that the actions taken by actors as they gather social power serve to structure the organizing opportunities available to other actors.

Organizations of power spread extensively and intensively in space and time in an uneven manner, thereby limiting and enabling others' organizing options. As different components of a power network have different levels of extensivity and intensivity, 'interstitial' spaces open up. These spaces generally occur on the frontiers of a society. From them new power formations emerge, founded upon the sources of social power which have not been well organized by the previous power network. For instance, at the frontiers of one power network, the political, ideological and economic power structures of control may be quite strong, but military control from the center may be weak. In such a situation, individuals may construct a new organization of military power and, from this military base, build a new power network which might eventually overtake or at least achieve autonomy from the original network.

Mann's model of interstitial spaces and frontiers only goes so far, however, in explaining social power under global capitalism. Theorists as diverse as Mackinder (1969) and Wallerstein (1982) have noted that around 1900 the world became for the first time 'a closed political system ... of world-wide scope' (Mackinder, 1969: 161). In such a system, the concept of frontier no longer makes sense, for there is no geographical region on the edge of the social system, and few (if any) geographical regions where the capitalist world-economy has not penetrated, to at least some degree. States within the social system are demarcated by borders but, as Giddens (1985) has noted, these borders serve quite different functions than did the frontiers.

This is not to say that state borders are irrelevant to the accumulation of capitalist economic power. The function of state borders has changed considerably over time, and it should come as no surprise that the function of borders continues to change (Gottman, 1973; Kratochwil, 1986). The state is still the major institution of political power, distinct, as Mann notes elsewhere (Mann, 1984), because of its territorial control. However, the state's borders fail to delimit the territory of 'societies' or 'social power networks'. In the words of former Citicorp CEO Walter Wriston (1992), describing the global information economy, 'borders are not boundaries'.

Under global capitalism, the interstitial spaces, the spaces not fully covered by the existing power network, do not necessarily lie in the frontiers between nation-states. Rather, they lie in the margins: qualitative edges, locations of partial incorporation, 'part of the whole but outside the main body' (hooks, 1984: ix). Margins are spaces which are within the territorial structures of the world-economy but where the intensive reach of the power network is incomplete. In these areas the territorial control exercised by the state is only partial: the state is not able to exercise its territoriality fully.

Under capitalism, margins have emerged as a result of the uneven manner by which capital is invested and disinvested in productive, social and human resources. Since much of social life—including, but not limited to, productive investments—is characterized by constrained mobility, these processes result in uneven development in space (Harvey, 1982; Smith, 1984). Especially since 1900, with the elimination of frontiers, capital has commodified and subsequently devalued space lying within its territorial control.

Several scholars have suggested that in order to study the changing priorities and powers of the state one should focus one's study on the development of state territoriality.
A perspective centered on the changing territoriality of the state allows one to understand changes in the state in the context of broader social change which affects the resources available to it as the prominent territorial actor within the dominant social power network (Johnston, 1989). Such a perspective allows one to consider seriously systemic change while avoiding hasty conclusions about the coming demise of the state as a significant institution of social power (Taylor, 1993). In this era of postmodern capitalism, where space and time are organized and experienced differently than they were within other eras (Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1992), this perspective allows one to assess systemic change which disrupts and transforms fundamental institutions in the context of continuing global processes (Ruggie, 1993).

This approach, wherein a focus on the changing territoriality of the state is nested within a social power network understanding of social organization, can be especially useful in the study of the changing territorial organization of society. Using this approach, one can study both changes in the state's territorial power and changes in the ways in which social actors use territoriality (whether or not mediated by the state) to exert social power. From this perspective, one can proceed to analyse the potential resources available to oppositional, non-state-oriented, territorial actors, particularly those located in margins where state territorial control is weak.

Territoriality and modernity: the construction of 'conceptually emptiable' space

Before undertaking the case study of the ATURA Coalition, one additional point must be discussed. Sack (1986) notes that several innovative uses of territoriality have been developed under capitalism.3 Capitalist uses of territoriality have included: obscuring oppressive social relationships, practising 'divide and conquer', and creating a public–private distinction.4

Perhaps most significantly, though, territoriality has been used in the construction of 'conceptually emptiable' space:

> Capitalism reinforces the view of space as a framework for the location and distribution of events. Capitalism helps turn place into commodities. It helps us see the Earth’s surface as a spatial framework in which events are contingently and temporally located. Capitalism's need for capital accumulation and growth makes change paramount and, geographically, change means a fluid relationship between things and space. The future is conceived of, and future actions produce, continual alterations of geographical relationships. Territoriality then becomes the mould for both filling space and defining and holding a space empty.

> A modern use of territory is based most of all upon a sufficient political authority to match the dynamics of capitalism: to help repeatedly move, mold, and control human spatial organization at vast scales ... Territory becomes conceptually and even actually emptiable and this presents space as both a real and emptiable surface or stage on which events occur. (Sack, 1986: 48, 87)

Castells similarly notes:

> The new urban meaning of the dominant class is the absence of any meaning based on [place-based] experience. The abstraction of production tends to become total ... Space is dissolved into flows. (Castells, 1983: 314)

This social construction of space as an abstract plain on which social relations can be located at will is crucial for facilitating the commodification of production, consumption and space itself. It also plays a key role in facilitating regional and urban planning. But the
construction of conceptually emptiable space generates its own contradictions; territoriality is a dialectical process. Attempts by the state to control space engender oppositional movements seeking to wrest their space from state control (Lefebvre, 1991). The cycles of disinvestment and investment in the built environment identified by Harvey (1978) are, in effect, cycles of ‘emptying’ and ‘filling’ space. Hence, the practice of territoriality under capitalism engenders the creation of margins. At the same time, the partial nature of state territoriality in these margins facilitates oppositional movements.

The movements from the margins are aided by the fact that, despite the efforts of capitalists to define the margins as ‘emptied’ (so that they can unproblematically be ‘refilled’), these spaces are not truly empty. Prior to the closing of spatial frontiers, the emptying carried out by expanding capitalism was most intense in areas on the spatial frontiers of the power network. In peripheral areas of resource extraction, those resisting the emptying of their lands had few resources at their disposal with which to gather power and form new power networks. In a second era, from 1900 and especially since decolonization, Harvey’s ‘spatial fix’ has increasingly been applied within and among established territorial states which, in turn, have operated within the capitalist world-economy. Even then, however, states could direct formidable resources—including a range of ‘carrots’ and ‘sticks’—at ‘trouble spots’. By applying ideological, economic, military and political power to these emptied places, the state could still keep these places firmly within the territory of the dominant power network; potential sources of social power remained relatively inaccessible to oppositional movements and hence the state’s territorial control—including its ability to define space as conceptually emptiable—went relatively unchallenged.

As the dominant power network becomes ‘disorganized’ (Lash and Urry, 1987) and as the speed and intensity of investment–disinvestment cycles increase, margins are emerging not just on the frontiers but at the very heart of the world-economy. ‘World cities’, in particular, are characterized by marginal spaces in close proximity to centers of capitalist decision-making (Sarsen, 1991). Because of their location within the world-economy, these margins are anything but empty: social relations continue in and around the margins, and these residual relations can provide the basis for alternative sources of power to be gathered by oppositional social movements. It is in such margins that new social movements are attempting to construct alternative territorial formations which bypass the state and which use territoriality for different, oppositional ends. Secession is rarely on these movements’ agendas. Rather, they seek to control space to a degree that enables them to control certain social relations—social relations which themselves serve to construct places and which, more abstractly, have been used by the dominant power network to support a general societal conception of space as emptiable. It is to one such oppositional movement—the Atlantic Terminal Urban Renewal Area (ATURA) Coalition—that we now turn.

The ATURA Coalition: urban planning on the margin

The Atlantic Terminal Urban Renewal Area lies in a classic transition zone, at the convergence point of three of Brooklyn’s major vehicular thoroughfares, 14 bus lines, all three of New York City’s subway systems and the Long Island Rail Road. Forty percent of Manhattan’s workforce passes through or under the site (Davis, 1986). About a kilometer away, down wide streets lined with dingy antique stores and single-room occupancy hotels, is Downtown Brooklyn, which New York City has been trying to promote as a center for finance industry back-office operations (Figure 1).
While some of the neighborhoods surrounding the 9.7-hectare (24-acre) site are industrial or commercial, others are residential and span a broad range of income levels, ethnicities and housing types. Most of the neighborhoods surrounding the site are unusually well integrated racially (Table 1). Portions of the surrounding neighborhoods underwent considerable gentrification by both white and African-American households in the 1980s: median household income for the surrounding neighborhoods rose 111 percent from $11,616 in 1980 to $24,473 in 1991. In 1990, 23 percent of the housing units...
Table 1. Neighborhood racial composition, 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Fort Greene (%)</th>
<th>Park Slope (%)</th>
<th>Boerum Hill (%)</th>
<th>Prospect Heights (%)</th>
<th>Downtown (%)</th>
<th>Gowanus (%)</th>
<th>Clinton Hill (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic1</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Department of Housing and Urban Development (1992). Notes:
1 Hispanics have been classified as a distinct 'racial' grouping and have been eliminated from the figures for other 'races'. The failure of some columns to total 100 percent is due to rounding.
2 The ATURA site is located in Fort Greene and is immediately adjacent to Park Slope, Boerum Hill and Prospect Heights. The other three neighborhoods are a bit farther from the site. All parties involved, however, agreed that these neighborhoods would also be affected by the proposed development.

In the surrounding neighborhoods were owner-occupied, 38 percent of these being in one- or two-family houses and the rest in larger buildings. Of the homeowners, 66 percent were white and 28 percent were African-American, with less than 6 percent Hispanic or Asian (US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1992).

Designated an urban renewal area in 1968, most of the public housing designated for the ATURA site was never built. The bulk of the lot sat vacant until 1985 when New York City awarded one of the city’s major development firms a contract to build a $530 million development project, including two 24-storey commercial office towers, a 1000-car parking garage, a 4645 m² (50 000 ft²) supermarket, a 10-screen cinema with adjoining mall, and 643 middle- and upper-middle-income condominiums. The City was to subsidize the development with $161 million in tax abatements and infrastructural improvements, with the Federal Government contributing an additional $16 million.

The ATURA Coalition, a grouping of tenants, homeowners, merchants and religious and neighborhood organizations, opposed the proposed development primarily on two grounds: environmental and housing. Environmentally, the retail component of the project was clearly oriented toward commuters and shoppers with cars. Their added presence would exacerbate a traffic and carbon-monoxide situation already in violation of Federal Clean Air Act standards. Additionally, the 1000-car parking garage and the supermarket’s loading dock were planned to abut one of the subsidized moderate-income co-op buildings which had been built on the site in the early 1970s. In terms of housing, it was feared that the condominiums and office towers would exacerbate ongoing gentrification pressures and force local tenants out of the surrounding neighborhoods.

More generally, the Coalition was opposing the way in which land use and development planning was being organized in New York City. A report published by the Academy of Political Science in 1986 details how the Atlantic Terminal Project was conceived and fostered by major city finance and real estate interests and how David Rockefeller’s New York City Partnership served as power broker, joining the interests of the business community with City government (Davis, 1986). The report, written by Perry Davis, a Senior Consultant to the Partnership, makes no mention of the Partnership attempting to consider and incorporate the interests of community residents and merchants. Community
residents are portrayed only as potential obstacles to the plan; Davis discusses how local elected officials might be used to 'split the opposition'. City officials made it clear that the Atlantic Terminal Project was part of a broader plan to attract multinational investment in real estate and the financial services industry to Downtown Brooklyn and, more generally, to New York City (Davis, 1986; Foster, 1990; Hernandez-Piñero, 1990).

In one sense, the ATURA site is anything but a margin within the capitalist world-economy. Lying just a few kilometers from Wall Street, the area is firmly within the territorial control of the dominant power network. Yet the residents of the site and surrounding neighborhoods include many of those who are classically called 'marginal' members of society; adjacent neighborhoods are peppered with drug and alcohol treatment centers, 'welfare' and single-room occupancy hotels, and homeless shelters. Abandoned buildings in surrounding neighborhoods and the barren landscape of the ATURA site itself are the legacy of decades of disinvestment, or margin creation. The dominant power network had created this seemingly 'empty' space, but global political-economic conditions were now depriving the state of the resources which it needed to 're-fill' it. Like most such coalitions, the ATURA Coalition was eminently dividable, with each interest group having its own specific concerns. However, the City could not afford to co-opt the Coalition. As then Deputy Mayor for Finance and Economic Development, Sally Hernandez-Piñero, informed the Coalition, the concessions involved therein would make the site uncompetitive (Hernandez-Piñero, 1990). Nor could the City afford outright repression; any backlash of anti-development violence would greatly harm the City's campaign to make a borough with a rather bad reputation an attractive location for transnational investment. In earlier times, when the organization of economic power was at a more local, or even national, scale, such a coordination of economic power with political, ideological and military power might have been possible. Now, however, the state was left without much room to maneuver. As the Deputy Mayor's spokesperson said of the ATURA Coalition, 'What they want is something that we cannot do' (Jetter, 1990).

Finding itself in a margin, the ATURA Coalition did not abandon the state—lawsuits were filed and legislators were lobbied—but the state was not truly considered a potential ally or source of power. Nor were elected officials treated as 'ambassadors' (Gans, 1962). Rather, the state was considered the weak link in the system. It was understood that in the long run the state—locked into a system of political-economic competition—would side with the interests seeking a development to complement Downtown Brooklyn rather than one to aid the existing community. Bypassing the state, the ATURA Coalition sought to assert its own limited territoriality.

**Defining territory on the margin**

The difficulties facing the ATURA Coalition lay not in its desire to nest a non-state territorial organization within the state system. There is a long history of nesting territorial structures within the territory of the state, as individuals and groups outside as well as within the state structure have used territoriality to wield political power (Cox, 1991). Indeed, the level of 'stateness' characterizing the territorial division of the world has varied considerably even within the modern era, and absolute control of the space within the formal boundaries of the state has frequently been more of an ideal than reality (Giddens, 1985; McLaughlin, 1986; Taylor, 1993).

What was problematic for the ATURA Coalition was that the specific form of territorial control which it sought to achieve was inimical to the goals of the territorial control utilized by the capitalist state. Thus, while Sack identifies capitalists (and pre-capitalists)
using territoriality to obscure unequal access to economic and political power, the ATURA Coalition used its struggle for space to highlight these inequalities. For instance, one Coalition leaflet—which features a hand grabbing a money bag on the cover—in its paragraph describing the proposed on-site housing, states:

Even if the price of a condo does not rise above the projected average of $145,000, they will be well out of the range of the typical Brooklyn household, which in 1986 earned $16,800. The condos will certainly be out of the range of the families now living in the blocks closest to the site, 45% of whose incomes fall below the poverty line. (ATURA Coalition, 1990: 3)

The ATURA Coalition newspaper constructed its description of a Coalition-sponsored 'speak-out' so as to highlight class polarization around the project:

Testimony varied widely, both in form and content, from Brooklyn's famous rapper Professor Louie ('They [developers] steal it when you're lookin'; they steal it when you're not; they're stealin' stealin' stealin' everything you got') to Friends of Atlantic Center activist Forbes Hill ('I support gentrification because, after all, I'm part of the gentry'). (Steinberg, 1990a: 1)

Coalition members decried the proposed development as a 'playground for the rich' and publicized how the City's awarding of the ATURA contract coincided with the developer being one of the largest contributors to both the mayor's and the borough president's re-election campaigns.

Similarly, another function of territoriality identified by Sack is that of assisting capitalists in their effort to construct space as being 'conceptually emptiable'. Again, the ATURA Coalition attempted to use territoriality to assert just the opposite: that this place was not empty and could not be emptied. Seeing the ATURA site as emptied, with social relations disconnected from the land on which they were taking place, Davis was able to classify the site as 'a manageable risk'. The ATURA Coalition, on the other hand, was proclaiming that this place was not empty and should be thought of as emptiable. Thus, meetings, rallies, leaflets and lawsuits decried 'indirect and secondary displacement' and 'destruction of the neighborhood', while a frequent slogan of the Coalition was 'urban renewal means urban removal'. At a community speak-out attended by some 200 area residents, opponents of the plan made such statements as, 'We want development on this site, but development for people who've lived here for years' and 'We want a proposal, not an imposal' (Hirsch, 1990).

As an alternative, the Coalition hired a professional planner and held a series of community meetings in an effort to develop, promote and ultimately construct a 'community-oriented plan'. The Coalition's aim was neither to institutionalize its interests as state policy nor to declare a new, autonomous territorial entity within the state system. Rather, the aim was to utilize the sources of social power at its disposal to challenge directly territoriality as practised by the state. The Coalition was challenging a construction of territoriality premised upon the malleability of space and which lies at the root of capitalist urban planning techniques.

It was this attempt to utilize territoriality for very different ends that led both to the Coalition's successes and to its failures. On the down side, despite constant assurances that a community-oriented plan was just around the corner (Cohen and Steinberg, 1990; Steinberg, 1990b), such a plan never materialized. To some extent this was due to funding constraints and also to divergent interests within the Coalition. However, there was a broad
consensus that the supermarket should be moved, that the non-housing components of the project should be scaled down so as not to attract individuals arriving by cars, and that the money saved from this scaling down should be used to subsidize the housing additionally (and thereby lessen secondary displacement effects).

In retrospect, it seems to me that the Coalition's inability to develop a formal plan follows from the kind of territoriality which it was trying to construct for the community. As Sack points out, planning is dependent upon seeing space as an abstract surface which can be emptied and filled. Investments can then be located in space, at the point of greatest profitability. The Coalition's opposition to the City's proposed project was based on the assertion that this space in fact is not empty but is rather part of and defined by its surrounding community. This conception of spatiality, premised upon 'the pre-eminence of human experience over state power and capitalist profit' (Castells, 1983: 311), made it difficult for the Coalition to work within the conventional planning paradigm. Hence, the formal 'alternative plan' long promised by the Coalition never advanced beyond the stage of a slogan on a button (Figure 2). Interestingly, while this alternative conception of space made it difficult for the Coalition to develop a community-oriented plan, the group had no problem engaging in 'reverse-planning', envisioning where the continued profit-maximizing allocation of capital in conceptually emptiable space would lead (Figure 3).

As the struggle proceeded, the Coalition found that it did not have enough resources within its margin to challenge the dominant power network directly. The Coalition, however, was able to 'sit-in'—as it were—in its marginal space, blocking construction through lawsuits. The Coalition was able to prevent development until the margin widened, with the New York real estate slump. Since then, the developer has run into financial problems and has entered into partnership with another developer who had recently built several office buildings in Downtown Brooklyn. In response to the downturn in the real estate market and the change in developers, the Coalition has abandoned its attempts to develop a formal plan for the site. Instead, it has put its energy into finding alternative funding sources to assist the developer in creating affordable housing. With the margin having widened, and with the ATURA Coalition having established itself there, the current development plan is much more (though not entirely) to the Coalition's liking. The office component has been put on hold indefinitely, the retail component vastly scaled back, and the parking dispersed throughout the site. The town-house units will be scaled back from 643 to 450 units, with two-thirds designated for rental. One
hundred of the units will be purchased by the New York City Housing Authority and marketed to moderate income households (annual incomes of $20,000–$32,000) while the remainder will be middle income (approximately $37,000). An additional 113-unit housing complex will be constructed to house low- and moderate-income senior citizens. To date, the Coalition has been least successful in its attempts to down-size or move the supermarket.
Conclusion: margins in context

The ATURA Coalition serves as a particularly vivid example of a movement from the margin. Its mission is explicitly to redefine the way in which territory is constructed. Its physical location is clearly within the capitalist system, just minutes from Wall Street and the site of international finance capital investment. It is at the same time clearly a margin, a place which capitalism has attempted to empty and where the rules and powers of the dominant network are therefore now vulnerable to circumscription.

The saga of the ATURA site, however, must be seen as part of a larger process which is occurring throughout the world. Margins are forming and territoriality is being renegotiated at many scales of social life. Ruggie (1993), borrowing a term coined by Kratochwil (1986), writes that postmodern capitalism will likely be characterized by the 'unbundling' of state territoriality. While he makes passing reference to substate social movements, Ruggie is primarily referring to the multinational and transnational organizations which are increasingly taking over some of the state's territorial functions. Taylor (1993) develops a similar concept, devoting equal attention to those substate social movements which are 'undermining the system from within' and to the simultaneous reorientation of certain territorial functions to the super-state scale.

This process of unbundling and the concurrent struggle surrounding the 'rebundling' of territorial functions around alternative institutions amounts to more than a simple institutional reorganization. For, in their struggle for a degree of territorial control, social actors like the ATURA Coalition put forth alternative definitions of territory and propose alternative ways of conceptualizing space. Plotkin (1987) has recognized the significance of such urban land-use conflicts within the broader context of the spatiality of capitalism. He suggests that land-use struggles will have a critical place in political-economic transformation. A similar acknowledgement of the significance of questioning the territoriality of the state system has been made within development studies. Critical development theorists have questioned both the functions and the appropriateness of the territorial state and the assumptions behind the program of developing and modernizing—or 'filling'—abstract, emptiable space (Friedmann and Weaver, 1979; Sachs, 1992).

It remains to be seen how successful the movements from the margins will ultimately be in their quest to redefine territory and construct new formations of territorial control. Their successes will depend on the degree and sources of social power available to them. I have argued here that changes in global political economy—in the dominant power network—may be presenting new opportunities to the movements from the margins. But these transformations in the opportunity structure will surely be gradual. Despite its relative success, the ATURA Coalition appears to be winning a compromise development at best, and this has been only after 'getting lucky' because its successful postponement tactics coincided with a drop in the New York real estate market.

In the end, the lessons of the ATURA Coalition are ambiguous. Perhaps the movements from the margins will prove to be merely reformist, asserting their territoriality in certain spaces only to reintegrate that space into the dominant power network. Perhaps the dominant power network will develop new institutions of territorial control and regain its ability to close the margins. Even if unable to close the margins, the dominant network might succeed in developing mechanisms to drain potential sources of oppositional power from the margins, in effect succeeding in its goal of emptying space. Or perhaps the movements from the margins will grow increasingly strong, until they come to constitute a new dominant power network within a certain geographical space. Whatever scenario gets
played out, the struggle to redefine territory will play a major role in the continuation or transformation of our political-economic system.

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Notes

1. Throughout this paper, the state is conceptualized as a fairly unified apparatus (Clark and Dear, 1984). This is not to say that the state is a rigid, top-down structure, with the nation-state unilaterally establishing the lower levels and setting their priorities. But the local state is conceptualized as one part of a multistate system of which the nation-state is the primary political-territorial unit.
2. Clarke and Kirby (1990) have made a similar critique of the 'demise of the local state' literature.
3. Sack (1986: 1) defines territoriality as 'a spatial strategy to affect, influence, or control resources and people, by controlling area' (see also, Sack, 1986: 19–21; Soja, 1971).
4. The last of these uses—the public–private distinction—is not explicitly discussed by Sack. He does, however, discuss how territoriality serves to define certain social relations as incompatible with the current territorial organization of space and therefore uncontrollable by accepted territorial institutions. In this manner, certain social relations become defined as appropriate for control by certain territorial (and non-territorial) institutions. I would suggest that this territorial 'mismatch' serves to support the public–private distinction frequently recognized by theorists ranging from structural Marxists (Althusser, 1971) to socialist feminists (Clark, 1978; Kelly, 1979) as a social construction supportive of ideological domination. The construction of certain social problems as beneath, within or beyond the scope of the nation-state has served to limit the ways in which these problems are conceptualized (Agnew and Ó Tuathail, 1992; Mitchell, 1991; Shapiro, 1988). The territorial construction of the state as an entity which can contain or fail to contain a problem within its geographical boundaries supports these discourses of 'domestic' and 'international' politics.
5. The exact configuration of the development changed continually, as the developer responded to market conditions. The configuration outlined here was the one proposed by the developer for approval by City agencies. Financing figures were compiled by the ATURA Coalition from various City and Federal documents (ATURA Coalition, 1990).
6. I served as Director of the ATURA Coalition from November 1989 to August 1990.
7. New York City's rent control/rent stabilization regulations apply only to buildings with more than six units. Many of the low-income brownstones surrounding the ATURA site were therefore not covered by this legislation.
8. Indeed, Davis's article so blatantly demonstrates the Partnership's contempt for community interests that the ATURA Coalition chose to excerpt (and critique) the article in its newspaper (Glick, 1990).
9. I have no doubt that the City was aware of these divisions. 'Spies', for instance, were discovered at ATURA Coalition meetings.
10. Elements of the Coalition’s staff and voluntary leadership who concentrated on swaying equivocating elected officials were frequently berated by the rank and file at Coalition meetings.

11. This plan was the one currently being considered as of the date of this article’s original submission. Details of this plan were obtained by means of an interview with ATURA Coalition co-chair Ted Glick, December 1992.

References


Territorial formation on the margin: urban anti-planning in Brooklyn


