



Justice et injustices spatiales, Nanterre 2008

The Practice of Spatial Justice After the End of Liberal Democracy *La pratique de la justice spatiale après la fin de la démocratie libérale*

Brawley Lisa, Lecturer in Urban Studies and Media Studies, Vassar College, 124 Raymond Avenue, Poughkeepsie, NY 12604 USA

This paper takes the work of political theorist Wendy Brown as a framework for a consideration of spatial justice under the twinned forces of neoconservatism and neoliberalism in the United States. As Brown importantly reminds us, as a mode of political rationality, neo-liberalism represents not a return to the ideals of political liberalism but rather their foreclosure. In the neoliberalizing state, economic liberalism is substituted for political liberalism; neoliberalism not only aims to govern society in the name of the economy, but also actively creates institutions that work to naturalize the extension of market rationality to all registers of political and social life. Neoliberal political rationality is not scandalized by disclosures of the inequitable distribution of rights, instances of injustice, or unequal life chances, but rather incorporates these as the necessary costs of what it now takes as its political and social (not merely economic) imperative: fostering “economic growth.” Emerging alongside neoliberal political rationality is an increasingly potent neoconservatism, which furthers the hollowing out of the political, even while it bolsters the power of and lauds the resurgent moral agency of the state. Neoconservatism furthers the spatially decentralized production of “the undemocratic citizen.” Brown argues that the contemporary convergence of neoliberal and neoconservative political rationalities is producing a “new political form” whose effects are the increasing de-democratization of the United States.

This paper addresses the spatial registers of this “new political form” and outlines the contours of a spatial justice adequate to the shifted terrain of the political that it represents. It begins by demonstrating that much of the current literature addressing spatial justice in the United States presumes the continued efficacy of strategies aimed to produce a crisis of legitimacy for the authority of liberal democracy. Denouncing the use of urban surveillance, documenting a growing socio-spatial segregation, revealing the scope of the private acquisition of public infrastructure, outlining the proliferation of gated communities, or deploring the mounting militarization of national and municipal borders: these are strategies which seek to provoke a no-longer liberal democracy into keeping promises it no longer recognizes as such, and to engage de-democratized citizens into demanding an accountability of political power that they no longer expect. The paper concludes by exploring the ways in which the unstable alliance of neoconservatism and neoliberalism—the “end of liberal democracy”—both demands and provides the opening for a re-visioned spatial justice, one that is not enthralled by the contradictory spatiality of liberal democratic “public space” as both the proof and promise of democracy. This re-visioned spatial justice understands democracy to be constituted through embodied spatial practices of shared power and collective freedom, and works to challenge not only the legitimacy of the authority of the neoliberalizing state, but also the legitimacy of its power.

