**Postgraduate history research training: session 5: two turns**

**The spatial turn**

**Main features:**

* Is all the world a space?
* Semiotics of space; space as power and agency
* Influenced by Edward Soja, Henri Lefebvre, Michel De Certeau, David Harvey, and other philosophers/sociologists as well as by cultural geography
* Now intermixed with digital humanities – use of GIS to analyse big data

**Older cultural geographical studies**

‘City as text’ -

landscape as the page, meaning of which is constructed by owners of the land; streets and paths as sentences; buildings as punctuation; symbolic features as metaphors. Job of the geographer/historian to ‘read between the lines’.

Christopher Tilley, A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Movements (Oxford, 1994);
Stephen Daniels, Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States (Princeton, 1993);
James S. Duncan, The City as Text: the Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom (Cambridge, 1990);
Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan, Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape (Abingdon, 1992).

**Critiques of Daniels et al –** too one-sided, presumes that the inhabitants and users of spaces do not have agency to change their environments.

**More recent studies –** connected with the ‘memory boom’ – cite Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora – landscapes of memory and belonging

**Theory:**

**Three spaces:**

Firstspace: 1.  **Spatial practice** transforms place into space.

Michel De Certeau, ‘Walking in the City’, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980, transl 1984)

De Certeau’s much quoted chapter on the act of walking shows how everyday actions can turn places into spaces of meaning and history.

Henri Bourdieu, *The Production of Space* (1991) similarly underlines the role of spatial practices in moulding understandings of the physical environment.

Secondspace: 2. **‘representations of space’**.

For Lefebvre, representations are ‘tied to the relations of production’. In essence, representations of space are spaces of capital, whose physical form and the meanings ascribed to them are determined by wealth and elites.

This model parallels the influential interpretation of sociologist David Harvey, who argued that landscapes reflected the logic (or illogic) of commodity production at any given historical moment.

David Harvey*, Spaces of Capital* (2001)

Thirdspace: 3. **'spaces of representation',** or lived spaces.

This concerns how everyday practice is lived through the spaces constructed by elites and their symbols. This is associated with counter spaces which challenge or subvert dominant spatial practices or spatialities (Jon Stobart et al, *Spaces of Consumption: Leisure and Shopping in the English Town*, 2007, p. 22).

It echoes de Certeau, who showed how individuals could reappropriate spaces for uses other than those for which they were intended. Here is where popular agency is situated.

**The Material Cultural Turn**

* Is all the world material?
* Emphasis on material culture and objects – links also with museum studies and public history
* From ‘history of stuff’ to the semiotics of ‘stuff’
* Interdisciplinary – but problems with integrating different disciplinary approaches
* Agency of things?

Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 1986)