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Opinion

Time-geography: a new beginning

by Nigel Thrift and Allan Pred

In a recent brief critique Alan Baker (1979) has, conveniently perhaps, touched upon a number of commonly held myths and misunderstandings about time-geography, as well as making some valid criticisms.

Baker, like many others, mistakenly views time-geography merely as a rigid descriptive model of spatial and temporal organization which lends itself to accessibility constraint analysis (and related exercises in social engineering). But, time-geography is much more than that. It is a discipline-transcending and still evolving perspective on the everyday workings of society and the biographies of individuals. It is a highly flexible and growing language, a way of thinking about the world at large as well as the events and experiences, or content, of one's own life. We want to use Baker's comments as a base from which to refute or dispute a number of widespread myths or misunderstandings. Baker's critique, at least in part, damns time-geography for sins of omission, inferring that because it has not yet touched upon certain areas it is therefore not able to. Because Baker mistakenly perceives time-geography as a finished model rather than a philosophical perspective, we would like to use this opportunity to comment on some recently touched upon and as yet untouched areas in which the time-geographic approach might make a useful contribution.

I Time-geography and underlying processes

Baker's first point is that

time-geography merely compounds the logical error of equating spatial organization with geography. While space and time may usefully be considered as resources whose competitive allocation gives rise to patterns of use which may be observed empirically and modelled theoretically, the nature of that human struggle to control and structure time and space – the process underlying the form – should be of paramount concern rather than descriptions of temporal organization which, in any event, operate at a variety of scales and are as much the concern of non-geographers as they are of geographers. The fact that no historian claims to be primarily concerned with temporal analysis should make more geographers hesitate to call themselves spatial analysts.

We are not totally clear as to the precise nature of the points Baker is making here. He seems to imply that time-geography is concerned and can only be concerned with the competitive allocation that gives rise to patterns of time and space use and temporal and spatial organization, and not with the processes underlying that allocation and organization. He further suggests that, in any case, time (and presumably, by this argument, space) are as much the province of non-geographers (like anthropologists and social historians?) as geographers. If this is a correct interpretation, then Baker has constructed his own time-geography here – one in which underlying processes can never be addressed, in which the problems of scale are ignored (Hägerstrand, 1973) and in which the only intellectual activity is description. The two latter points are simply incorrect, whilst the first basic point is difficult to comprehend.

Time-geography shows much greater flexibility as an element in dealing with the explanation of underlying process than Baker implies. Three examples of ways in which the time geographic approach could be or has been employed should suffice.

1) In a later paragraph Baker points out that 'the concerns of historical geography are less obviously with time and space and more properly with period and place'. But as Giddens (1979, 206-207) has pointed out in his time-geography influenced statement: 'Virtually all collectives have a *locale* of operation, spatially distinct from that associated with others. 'Locale' is in some respects a preferable term to that of 'place', more commonly employed in social [and historical] geography: for it carries something of the connotation of space used as a *setting* for interaction . . . If the notion of locale is combined with the influence of physical presence/absence (this being understood as potentially both temporal and spatial), we can characterize the *small community* as one in which there is only short distance in time-space separations. That is to say, the setting is such that all interaction has only a small 'gap' to carry over in crossing time and space. It is not just physical presence in immediate interaction which matters in 'small-scale' interaction: it is the temporal and spatial *availability* of others in a locale'. Nowhere is this notion of locale more important than in the consideration of the local connectedness of small communities, like English villages, over time.

At least three elements define this local connectedness (Thrift, 1980a; History

Workshop, 1979). First, there is the detailed awareness of basic 'time-demography' (Hägerstrand, 1978), of the biographies of not only people and families, but also of animals, institutions, and all the other man-made and natural objects found in the area under study. Each of these elements can be seen as a population bound together by the activities, or paths and projects,¹ of the human beings in the locality. Many of the different biographies interact simply because they are collateral, near to one another in time and space, bounded by the local area. Second, and following on from this latter point, there is an equal need to employ time-geography to study the social and cultural characteristics of a local area not only as a story of local continuity, but also as an illustration of the connection between micro-level interactions and wider social processes. The local area becomes the arena within which the grand categories of social science like class are transformed by propinquity into everyday activities and contacts, or projects. The social, economic and cultural processes of history are not simply passively received by a local area, they are transformed by it into local forms of hegemony, custom, and social reproduction in general, and in this form feed back into these processes in a constant dialectical interaction. Finally, there is the impact of the physical landscape and man's relationship to it embodied in a life-path reinforced sense of place and the sense of identity and community in general as they exist as part of the 'practical taxonomy' (Bourdieu, 1977a) or 'inventory' of a place (Hélias, 1978). The project-based ties of people to a locality and to other people in the locality are strong and interwoven and are continually reinforced by the everyday activity-experiences of living.

2) Elsewhere in his critique Baker pleads for 'the adoption of a marxian humanism' by historical geographers. He and others should realize that the use of time-geography is more than compatible with such an adoption. For example, whereas marxist scholars in a variety of disciplines have justifiably stressed the impact of the prevailing mode of production upon the social relations in which individuals are swept up during the course of their lives, they usually have done so only in rather general terms. The use of the time-geographic path and project concepts, however, can provide historical geographers pursuing mode-of-production analysis with a concrete and consistent means of empirically linking the workings of economic institutions and culturally entrenched practices with the specific everyday social relations of people. Thus, in a recent analysis of the individual life-content consequences of the rise to dominance of the factory and large-scale workshop mode of production in the major cities of the United States during the nineteenth century (Pred, 1981a), the use of time-geography provided new insights and also allowed some conventionally made general arguments to be given greater substance. More precisely, it was shown that individual participation in the tightly synchronized and 'synchorized' production projects of factories and large-scale shops of necessity also imposed time discipline and coupling constraints upon essential family projects, thereby contributing to a modification in the nature of the family itself. Likewise, it was shown that the way in which production projects were defined in conjunction with the factory and large-scale shop mode resulted in both a clearer break between production projects and individual 'free-time' projects (as suggested

by Thompson (1967) for the English case) and the imposition of severe coupling constraints and time discipline upon the latter class of projects. These findings are consistent with, among other things, the contention of Lukács (1976) and others that the regimentation prescribed by industrial capitalism eventually penetrates all spheres of social life and consciousness.

3) A final example, at a very different scale, of how time-geographic analysis can be linked into underlying process is provided by the possibility of an historical analysis of the time demands and supplies of large business organizations. Over time there have been a number of changes in the way large businesses are organized, all replete with geographical implications (Chandler, 1962). There is an obvious relation between the time available to an organization (in person hours) and the impact of technical innovations. For instance, in Britain companies started to reorganize on divisional lines from the 1920s to the 1940s. One of the preconditions for this form of organization was the existence of the telephone, the duplicator, and the comptometer. Collectively, the taking up of these innovations added sufficient time supply to satisfy the universal time demands of the new form of organization without generating massive increases in employment (Hannah, 1976). Similarly the advent of the computer seems to be bringing into existence information systems which give an organization such a degree of information processing capability that many middle range management activities have been made automatic. This also allows organizational forms based on what would formerly have been impossible time demands in terms of person hours to come into being, so-called 'matrix' or 'grid' organizations (cf. Knight, 1976) based around project management and overlapping responsibilities (Aglietta, 1979). These new organizational forms have especially increased the ability of large business organizations to indulge in long-range planning which (in theory, at least) enables them to adapt more easily to the changing, ever more turbulent business environment. The implications of these time demands on the different organizational forms of capitals for political economy are presumably obvious enough.

II Time-geography and ideology

Baker also criticizes time-geography for ignoring the way in which:

time and space are seen as reflecting social organization and social power struggles. Ideologies structure time and space: studies in historical geography most logically therefore embrace ideologies, as well as being themselves ideological.

Given the existing published literature, we think that this is a better-placed set of criticisms. Time-geography has tended to ignore the role of time and space as explicit reflections of the process of continual social reorganization, although implicitly it has not (cf. Mårtensson, 1979). Yet time-geography is in a good position to embrace Baker's point by taking into account the changing constraint structure of society since the process of social structuration is a set of continuous historical

processes (made up of ensembles of material human structures, conventions, ideologies and practices) interacting with the social and physical structure of previous historical events, and therefore both changing and being changed (Bhaskar, 1979). Such a process, describable in the dialectics of path and project, generates new often unforeseen constraints and possibilities as old constraints and possibilities are removed. These constraints and possibilities time-geography can often identify. Let us give just two examples of how time-geography can be used in the analysis of social process and ideology.

1) It is now realized by some (Baudrillard, 1972) that there are many other (admittedly subordinate) circuits of capital than simply those of industrial capital (the process through which value is produced), commercial capital (the circulation of value in its commodity form) and finance capital (the circulation of value as money) (Gregory, 1978). Bourdieu (1977b), for instance, talks of a circuit of symbolic or cultural capital, the circulation of value as academic qualifications or other symbolic instruments of power, and of an associated circuit of linguistic capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), the circulation of value as language through an 'invisible pedagogy' (Bernstein, 1975). In the same way we might think of place of residence and work and other path and project nodes and the ability to gain access to those nodes as altogether constituting a kind of 'access' capital. That is, from birth onwards, there is a constant dialectical relationship between the previously accumulated path experience, or project participation, of a person and the objective life chances that remain open to him or her (Wallin, 1974; Pred, 1980, 1981b). One need only think of the possibilities of extending time-geographic studies on women and the family (e.g. Palm and Pred, 1978; Miller, 1979) to the study of class formation.

2) A second possibility concerns the empirical study of ideology. At least five types of interrelated 'unknowing' can exist in any social formation at any time (Thrift, 1979), each of which can be considered to have an ideological component, since what we are able to do, and therefore know, interplays dialectically with what we are able to think.

- a) *Unknown*, and not possible to know, in terms of being totally unknown at a particular time either to a society, or locale, or to certain members of it.
- b) *Not understood*, in terms of not being within a society's, or a locale's, frame of meaning, or not being within the frame of meaning of certain members of a society or a locale.
- c) *Hidden*, in terms of being hidden from certain members of a society, or a locale.
- d) *Undiscussed*, in terms of being taken for granted as 'true' or 'natural', either by a society, or locale, or certain members of it.
- e) *Distorted*, in terms of being known only in a distorted fashion by a society, or locale, or certain members of it.

Over the period 1500 to 1900, say, which of these types of unknowing applied to particular members of English society in particular locales? This requires not

only a consideration of the development of literacy and what could be read and the development of educational systems and what was taught, but also where and when certain knowledge was able to be read or taught. In one sense, at least, knowledge was location-specific both temporally and spatially, and hence a time-geographic approach has been invaluable in studying this latter aspect in particular.

III Time-geography and the analysis of determinate situations

Baker tells us that:

Gregory (1978c) used his opportunity [to 'flirt' with time-geography in order] to undermine the very premises on which much time-geography is based, for he concluded that 'there can be no theory of structures, and our discussions must be located in determinate situations'.

All we are able to say in reply to this charge is that time-geography is *not* trying to provide a general theory of structures. It is trying to provide a theory of social structuration. In so doing it also provides a general notation for describing and analysing exactly the determinate situations that Baker implies are missing from its realm of consideration.

Consider one powerful but very general theoretical concept which time-geographic notation could help to tie down to determinate situations. This is Raymond Williams's notion of 'structure of feeling', first used in *The long revolution* (Williams, 1961), and since a feature of a number of his other works (e.g. Williams, 1973; 1977; 1979). With this concept Williams is trying to articulate the presence which a particular social formation (or, more accurately perhaps, a class and/or generation within it) has at a particular time; the feeling of being situated within it, its ambience. Sometimes a particular structure of feeling will be the forerunner of new social forms, what Williams calls 'emergent' forms, in other cases it will simply be a reworking of old forms in new ways. Such a structure of feeling within a locale must come partly from path-based common exposure to particular historical events by a generation or class, and partly from the everyday intertwining of individual paths and institutional projects, both of which in themselves constitute history (Thrift, 1980b). The time-geographic notation is one way in which these common paths, exposures and projects might be noted down, and catalogued or archived for, in the final analysis, the shape of a particular structure of feeling must come, in part at least, from the constraints and possibilities felt in the web of daily interactions between people, other people and objects (e.g. motor cars, books, television or radio). This shape will come, to be more exact, from the specificity of these objects (a particular make of motor car, a well-known book, a particular television or radio programme) that may act as a catalyst, evoking the presence of a structure of feeling by conjuring up from one symbol the presence of a whole symbolic system, what Bourdieu (1977b) has called 'the cultural field'.

IV Conclusions

In this paper we have outlined only a few of the possibilities inherent in the time-geographic perspective on the individual and society. There are many more (cf. Pred, 1977; 1978; Wallin, 1980). But we think we have provided enough examples to show that Baker has, in fact, set up a series of false oppositions, between time-geography and underlying process, between time-geography and wider social organization, between time-geography and determinate situations, that either do not exist or have yet to be touched upon. Many of the problems, we suspect, arise from the fact that time-geography is a very young approach with a small number of practitioners and therefore is confronted by a packing problem (of man hours into subjects for investigation).

It is essential that Baker, and other critics sharing his views, recognize that insofar as time-geography is fundamentally dialectical, it does not only address the underlying processes it supposedly neglects, but it can also incorporate them. To be more specific, because of the nature of its path and project concepts, time-geography is capable of helping historical geographers, and human geographers in general, to bring a dialectical and thereby dynamic perspective to the study of the interplay between individual behaviour and experience, the workings of society, and societal change (Pred, 1980, 1981b). It can be argued that the structural forces that perpetuate stability or precipitate change in a society are at one and the same time both the 'medium and the outcome of the reproduction of social practices' (Giddens, 1979), or *the repeated channelling of individual paths into and out of the activity bundles of institutional and other projects*. By the same token, it is not only true that, as Baker claims, 'ideologies structure time and space', but it is also true that ideologies are both acquired and contributed to by the spinning out of paths and the carrying out of projects in time and space. Moreover, because the path concept stresses the physical indivisibility of individuals, it forces us to recognize that altered participation in one type of institutionally (or individually) defined project invariably brings about participation adjustments or changes in other types of projects. In addition, the individual's involvement in projects which are feasible within the time-geographic constraints of a place or area are themselves the outcome of a dialectical interplay between corporeal actions and mental experiences and intentions. That is, in physically channelling her path into projects or interactions with other persons and objects, an individual inevitably amasses experiences that are fundamental to the shaping of her values, perceptions, attitudes, capabilities, preferences, and conscious or subconscious motivations, and hence her goals and intentions. Yet, in choosing among projects, and thereby eventually adding physically observable actions to her daily and life paths, she cannot escape the influence of her previous mental experiences and consequently derived goals and intentions. Or, because of this 'external-internal' dialectic and other time-geographic dialectics, every social situation is inevitably rooted in past situations and inevitably becomes the root of subsequent situations.

These extremely brief observations on the underlying dialectics of time-geo-

graphy are of no small import; for it is quite apparent that the interrelationships between individual and society represent the most challenging issue confronting contemporary social theory and analysis. In other words, the dialectical perspective of time-geography holds the promise of allowing human geographers to reverse their long-time dependence on conceptual impulses from other disciplines, and to move from critique to *active* participation in the theoretical debates and developments now occurring within the social sciences. Such a move is appropriate because, insofar as the path and project concepts are applicable to all human situations, time-geography should know no disciplinary bounds.

Finally, we should like to add one more vital point. That is that time-geography is a very powerful heuristic device. We cannot stress too much that once a person has learnt to think in its terms they will have been provided with a new way to look at the particular (determinate!) situation, especially if they are interested in making the links between the macrocategories of social science like class and their microcomponents, the actual human practices and interactions that make up a sociology of detail. Some see the graphs used in time-geography as just neat pieces of art but others, in turn, are able to internalize the perspective represented by the graphs and use the path and project language as a way of thinking about themselves and the world. This will we believe be *the* lasting legacy of time-geography.

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Note

1 In time-geographic terms a project consists of the entire series of tasks necessary to the completion of any intention-inspired or goal-oriented behaviour (Pred, 1980). Each of the logically sequenced component tasks in a project is synonymous with the formation of activity bundles or with the convergence in time and space of the paths being traced out by either two or more humans, or by one or more people and one or more physically tangible inputs or resources, such as buildings, implements, and raw materials.

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