

On Edward W. Soja

Sue Ruddick

University of Toronto

Guest Editor

Ed Soja was a leading scholar in Geography, a central proponent of the spatial turn and inspiring thinker of the Los Angeles School. His career spanned a half century, beginning at Syracuse University in 1965, and spent primarily at the University of California, Los Angeles where he became the Distinguished Professor of Urban Planning in the School of Public Affairs in 1994. His life-long fascination with spatiality coalesced first in the publication of what remains his cardinal work *PostModern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989) and culminated with *Seeking Spatial Justice* (2010). These two publications bookended a series of works on the socio-spatial dialectic that provoked a radical shift in geographic thought around the spatial turn and amassed a widespread global following – with translations appearing in Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese, Serbian, Korean and Spanish.

As a scholar who, in his own words, “tried to see the world through a range of perspective lenses . . . political economic or cultural, or shaped by class, race, gender, sexual preference; or screened through discourse, linguistics, psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism,” (Soja 2009:11) he put space passionately, assertively, personally first.

It is fitting perhaps that the compilation of reflections in this special issue on Ed’s life are a not a linear unfolding of a life, but study in multiple story lines – intensely personal accounts that reveal Ed’s many sides – a “crotchety, critical intellect,” and yet a “friendly bear of a man” (Dear); a man with a “Zorba like sense of hospitality” (Thompson); an encouraging mentor (Purcell); with a passion for music, and sensitivity for reading the world around him in its intimate details, who made you see the liveliness of space “changing constantly before your eyes” (Benach and Albet).

Ed’s rallying cry for spatial justice is ever more visible in multiple global

struggles – whether against the creation of sacrifice zones or around the occupation of city centers. And his scholarly legacy will undoubtedly endure for many decades to come. Yet it is still difficult to come to terms with a world devoid of Ed’s loquacious and expansive personality, his humor and generosity, his way of unsettling and enlivening the world. We will miss you.

References

Soja, E. (2009) “Taking Space Personally” in Barney Warf and Santa Arias (eds.) *The Spatial Turn. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Routledge New York, Milton Park. Pp. 11-35