

My Ed Soja

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Generous. That's the word that comes to mind immediately when I think of Ed. Patient and kind come to mind too, but generous is the word.

I was a grad student in Geography at UCLA in the 1990s, and my initial thought was that I would study the Middle East. But I arrived in Los Angeles in 1992—the uprising had just occurred, Mike Davis' *City of Quartz* had just been published. It didn't take long before I knew that I was an urban geographer, and that I was going to study LA. Gerry Hale was my advisor, and because he already straddled both worlds, he guided my transition gracefully. I started reading. *City of Quartz* was my most important inspiration politically and empirically, but Ed's *Postmodern Geographies* was my theoretical north star. It insisted, along with all of his other work, that space is not an epiphenomenon, that space is fundamental.

So I emailed Ed, out of the blue, never having taken a course with him, or even met him, and I told him how important I thought his work was, and how I hoped I could maybe work with him for my dissertation. I am sure it was embarrassingly fawning stuff. I couldn't believe that he even responded, much less agreed to be on my committee. That was more or less the nature of our relationship for the rest of the time we knew each other: Ed listening patiently, reading attentively, advising gently but insistently, and me, star-struck, trying to soak it all in, never quite able to believe he was doing all this for me. But he did. He was always generous with his time – always on that crappy balcony appended to Perloff. He never rushed the proceedings. He patiently prodded me in the directions he thought I should go. He made my work much better, but he did it in an encouraging way, in a way that built me up as a scholar. He always did it with a glimmer in his eye: there was always a feeling of *joy* as we worked on ideas, always a sense of hope, or promise, a sense that this work – scholarly work – mattered, that it was worth doing,

1. Remarks read at Edward W Soja tribute sessions at the 2016 American Association of Geographers Annual Conference.

that it could help make the world a better place.

That's how I remember Ed. Generous, nurturing, patient, and joyful. I owe him an enormous debt that I can never repay. Thank you, Ed. For everything.