

chapter 1

Theorizing Spaces

Don't you see?! Thanks to concrete, man can now shape his own destiny! The Stone Age is over!

—Mr. Slate to Fred Flintstone

According to American popular culture, human beings since at least the Stone Age have sought, often through technological achievements, to direct the course of their lives by reshaping the physical spaces around them. Though the quotation above overstates our ability to do that, it nonetheless offers an insight into the close, perhaps mutually causal, connection that exists between space and society. That insight, while not exactly lost on past social theorists, has not received adequate attention. In the last decade, however, we have witnessed what Edward W. Soja welcomes as a “long-delayed reassertion of spatiality in critical thought and practice” (1993, 115). Social theory, in other words, has taken an important spatial turn, provoked in part by the English translation, in 1991, of Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* and other suggestive works by Michel de Certeau (1988) and by Foucault (1979, 1986).¹

My study participates in this spatial turn in social theory. The central issue of this chapter is whether and how we can characterize the apparently nonphysical, disembodied realm of the virtual as a social space, or whether, on the contrary, a social space presupposes a physical space in the conventional sense, i.e., as a geographic space where bodies can meet in the flesh, where people can have unmediated face-to-face encounters. I argue that something nongeographic in a narrowly physical sense can nonetheless be a space because social space is practiced. It is the product