

Hardy, Stephen Paul

Old places, new spaces : recent developments in British cultural geography

Brno studies in English. 1999, vol. 25, iss. 1, pp. [157]-169

ISBN 80-210-2230-2

ISSN 1211-1791

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/104492>

Access Date: 25. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

STEVE HARDY

OLD PLACES, NEW SPACES: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN BRITISH CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

The last twenty five and particularly the last ten years have seen an increasing intensification and negotiation of the relationship between, on the one hand, predominantly francophone discourses relating to the nature of the theoretical analysis of cultural organization which have emphasised the significance of alterity and the dislocated nature of human subjectivity and, on the other, the more empirical and predominantly humanist socialism of what has come to be known as British Cultural Studies. An increasingly significant aspect of this relationship has been the increasing interaction and merging of cultural studies and cultural geography and I propose here to outline some of the more visible and significant developments within the latter since they seem to me to be of increasing relevance and value to anyone involved with the observation and analysis of late twentieth century British culture.

My opening sentence refers to two periods of time: the last twenty five years and the last ten. The period around 1973-4 saw the publication of a number of significant major texts and at least one smaller but equally significant development. To deal with the major texts first, these are, from the perspective presented here, *The Country and the City* by Raymond Williams, one of the founding figures in British Cultural Studies, *Social Justice and the City* by the geographer David Harvey, and *Production de l'espace* by the French cultural theorist Henri Lefebvre. While the last mentioned of these was not translated into English until 1991 Lefebvre's work had a considerable influence on British and American geographers, and particularly on Harvey, even before the date of the French publication. Lefebvre, like Raymond Williams, was a cultural critic and analyst of considerably Marxist disposition with a strong interest in the significance of the cultural politics of everyday life and of the effects and consequences of modern urbanisation. *Production de l'espace* is in many ways his most ambitious and complex work, one which calls for a unified theory of space which is neither that of either the somewhat amateur evocations of the significance of space (in Lefebvre's view) produced by some of his more literary-

oriented contemporaries (notably Roland Barthes) nor that of the more "scientific" approaches to urban space presented by geographers of the 1960s. The result is a complex, reflective, often rambling but considerably fecund approach to the way in which all discourses are part of a space which is itself produced by developing social practices. Lefebvre's aim in his book is to investigate not spatial truths or even the space of truth but the "truth of space" (Lefebvre 1991:132).

It is interesting that at about the same time Raymond Williams produced what many British literary and cultural analysts consider to be his most impressive academic work, *The Country and the City*. Lefebvre, despite living most of his life in and being constantly fascinated by Paris, came from and regularly returned to a small French village and always maintained an uneasy relationship with the more urbane cultural milieu of the better known cultural theorists of his era. Williams too, came from a small village and, though he spent most of his working life in Cambridge, constantly returned to it and also maintained an equally uneasy relationship with the dominant academic and cultural hierarchy located primarily in the triangle made up by London, Oxford and Cambridge.

The Country and the City is a critical literary history of approaches to country and city in English literature from the late sixteenth century to the time of publication of the book but one which very much emphasises the socially situated nature of the poetry and fiction which relates to these places and the relevance of such considerations to questions of social justice and community.

By 1973, David Harvey had already established a reputation as one of the leading young British geographers with the publication of his book *Explanation in Human Geography* (Harvey 1969) which was regarded at the time as a major contribution to an objective, empirical science of social space of the kind that was very much in vogue in the 1960s and to which Lefebvre's writing in *Production de l'espace* provides a critical reaction. Harvey's next major publication, *Social Justice and the City*, displayed a radical change of direction, one charted in the book itself, from a "liberal" stance which attempted to objectively chart aspects of urban development, to a "Marxist" stance which insisted on the political significance of such development and the obligation of geographers not simply to describe the world but to actively intervene where issues of social justice and exploitation were at stake. This led him to the writing of a series of books which investigated in great detail the relationship between the processes of capital accumulation and urban development, particularly in relation to Marx's theories relating to the production of capital in modern Western societies. At the same time these books were still considerably technical. It was not until 1989, with the publication of *The Condition of Postmodernity*, that Harvey's work really came to the attention of a wider audience, particularly one concerned with questions of cultural rather than socio-economic development.

By this time, cultural theorists had at least initially digested many of the shocks provided by the radical philosophising of French post-structuralist writers and discourses relating to postmodernism and postmodernity. The latter,

which can be argued to have their primary roots in an American rather than a French cultural milieu, tended to be equally if not more prominent. Harvey had been based since the late 1960s in Baltimore in the United States and his book was seen as something of an answer to the call for a form of “cognitive mapping” produced by the influential American Marxist cultural analyst, Frederic Jameson, who along with certain French cultural analysts, notably Jean Baudrillard, was alarmed by what he saw as the increasingly disorientating and exploitative tendencies of “late capitalism” and its cultural manifestations.

Harvey’s book, in contrast to Jameson’s considerably mandarin and baroque cultural speculations, produced a rather more accessible and direct analysis of the cultural condition of postmodernity referring it in more specific terms to questions of social and economic development in the post war era. The essential thesis of the book was that processes of capital accumulation had reached a point of saturation in terms of the “Fordist” approach originating in the earlier part of the twentieth century and that a new form of “flexible accumulation” had begun to develop during the early 1970s. A number of points about Harvey’s analysis particularly stand out in retrospect. One, as already partially indicated, is its strong narrative element, closely related to another, its considerable hostility to and scepticism towards the degree of celebration of “difference” which Harvey portrayed as being not so much as a new cultural paradigm as one which continued tendencies already present in the significant economic developments of the 1970s.

At some points in the book this approach led to an outright condemnation of “postmodern philosophers” as not so much introducing us to a new age of respect for the Other, the main ethical impetus of much post-war European philosophy attempting to come to terms with the horrors of the attempted total extermination of such Others during the Second World War, but as colluding with processes of economic and social exploitation:

Obsessed with deconstructing and delegitimizing every form of argument they encounter they can end only in condemning their own validity claims to the point where nothing remains of any basis for reasoned action. Postmodernism has us accepting the reifications and partitionings, actually celebrating the activity of masking and cover up, all the fetishisms of locality, place or social grouping, while denying that kind of meta-theory which can grasp the political-economic processes (money-flows, international divisions of labour, financial markets and the like) that are becoming evermore universalizing in their depth, intensity, reach and power over daily life. (Harvey 1990:116-17)

Such is one of the polemical peaks of the book. The vocabulary of this particular passage seems to support a Habermasian defence of the rational legitimation of emancipatory social practices as the positive side of “the project of the Enlightenment” which Habermas himself has been keen to defend against the perceived attacks of writers such as Foucault and Lyotard. In fact, Harvey has many appreciative things to say about these writers and notes that Habermas himself is insufficiently attentive to the significance of space in social theory.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on the significance of maintaining a strong meta-narrative which is able to resist the exploitative tendencies of late twentieth century international capital is, and remains, an integral part of his thesis.

The other particularly significant aspect of Harvey's book is that it represents a geographer as very visibly involved in major debates relating to late twentieth century cultural developments, at least in the Western world. This in itself might be seen as evidence of an increasing tendency in a discipline which hitherto had seen itself as a science to become increasingly involved with questions usually seen as relating to the field of the arts. Interestingly, the publication of Harvey's book roughly coincided with one by an American geographer, Edward Soja, whose *Postmodern Geographies* analysed the neglect of the significance of questions of geography and space as opposed to those of history and time in Marxist social theory. Soja, again someone with a long history of writing before the publication of this much better known book, included a considerable literary dimension to his work, often referring to the work of Raymond Williams, John Berger and particularly Borges and like Harvey, very much influenced by the work of Lefebvre.

Harvey's observations, while influential, did not however go unchallenged and this leads us back to the final development I referred to in the context of those which occurred during the last twenty five, as opposed to the last ten, years. In a book entitled *Feminism and Geography*, about which I will have more to say shortly, Gillian Rose, a British geographer, notes one of the first appearances of a work of feminist geography, in 1973, in the journal *Antipode*, an early home for the newly developing Marxist as well as feminist geographies. (The article she refers to is "Social Change, the status of women and models of city form and development" in *Antipode* 5, 1973:57-62).

This observation can lead us into a broader and more detailed consideration of the variety of geographical perspectives in the British context which have increasingly concerned themselves with socio-cultural questions in ways which are pertinent and accessible to those with an interest in British cultural studies, and we can begin by continuing to consider aspects of David Harvey's writing since his views as expressed in *The Condition of Postmodernity* stimulated a particularly memorable and provocative series of reactions from another major British social geographer, one constantly based in Britain, concerned primarily with developments in British social geography and, unlike Harvey, a woman.

In 1990 David Harvey appeared as keynote speaker at a conference at the Tate Gallery in London, entitled "Futures" and organized by members of the Department of History of Art and Cultural Studies at Middlesex University. This eventually resulted in a book entitled *Mapping The Futures: Local cultures, global change* (Bird, J. et al. 1993). The opening article, *From Space to Place and Back Again; Reflections on the Condition of Postmodernity* is by David Harvey and begins by emphasising the importance of difference and otherness as a fundamental and integral part of Marxist and historical materialist approaches to social questions. Harvey moves on to consider the relations between space and place, noting that "place" is a word with a plethora of mean-

ings and connotations and is indeed "...one of the most multi-layered and multi-purpose words in our language." (Harvey 1993:4) He goes on to look at the way in which places have adapted to the global economy in competing for investment from international capital by marketing attractive images of themselves. He expresses mixed feelings towards such developments and sees this development, in primarily Lefebvrian terms, as "cultural homogenization through diversification" (9) but concludes that such processes do not sufficiently account for "the strength of political attachments which people manifest in relation to particular places" (9). This leads him to the thinking of a philosopher whose work certainly relates to place but not to a Marxist perspective, that of Heidegger, careful quotation from whom provides him with support for his own argument about "time-space compression" in the postmodern world. Heidegger's emphasis on the importance of rooted place-based "dwelling" is regarded as significant but not sufficiently mediated by a realistic relation to developments in the world of international economics and the rest of the article seeks to find ways in which a more relational sense of place which negotiates the processes of the broader world can help to provide people with a meaningful sense of place which is not merely manipulated by the forces of international capitalism.

The collection of articles also includes contributions by a number of geographers and cultural theorists, including Meagan Morris and Dick Hebdige in the latter field and Neil Smith and Doreen Massey in the former. I want to focus here on Massey's contribution as an entrance into the kinds of areas she has been exploring and because she takes considerable issue with aspects of Harvey's approach. While concurring with much of what Harvey has to say, Massey questions the usefulness of a return to Heidegger in any form and to the characterization of place as "a source of stability and an unproblematical identity" (Massey;1993:63). She opts instead for "a progressive sense of place", the second half of the title of her article which in full reads *Power Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place*, and provides a now well-known characterisation of Kilburn, the area of London in which she currently lives, as illustrative. She notes that

Kilburn is a place for which I have a great affection; I have lived here many years. It certainly has "a character of its own". But it is possible to feel all this without subscribing to any of the Heideggerean notions of "place" which were referred to above. First, while Kilburn may have a character of its own, it is absolutely not a seamless, coherent identity, a single sense of place which everyone shares. It could hardly be less so. People's routes through the place, their favourite haunts within it, the connections they make (physically, or by phone or post, or in memory and imagination) between here and the rest of the world. If it is now recognized that people have multiple identities, then the same point can be made in relation to places... Second, it is (or ought to be) impossible even to begin thinking about Kilburn High Road without bringing into play half the world and a considerable amount of British imperialist history. Imagining it in this way provokes in

you (or at least in me) a really global sense of place. Third, and finally, I certainly could not begin to, nor would I want to, define it by drawing its enclosing boundaries. (65)

Massey concludes her article by referring to the increasingly influential work of the Indian sociologist Appudurai with his notion of various kinds of so-cioscape and calling for "a global sense of the local" (68).

A year after the publication of this collection, one of Massey's own shorter pieces produced over the years appeared under the title of *Space, Place and Gender* (Massey 1994). A version of the paper just referred to appeared under the title *A Global Sense of Place*, eliminating the more Marxist connotations of "progressive". The earlier essays in this book go back to Massey's own earlier work on regional development in Britain and her own highly influential major publication *Spatial Divisions of Labour*, which was reprinted with a substantial new final chapter the following year. The final section of the collection, though, focused very much on issues of space and place in relation to gender. One essay, entitled *Flexible Sexism*, launches a considerable attack on the still highly masculinist approach of big-name geographers such as Harvey and Soja as well as other well-known male academics in related fields such as Clifford and Jameson. Massey insists that this is not a matter of "sour grapes" but a sense that too much cultural geography still places too much emphasis on questions of power-economics and not enough on differences relating to gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Another stimulating and equally provocative essay takes to task the political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, probably the most influential theorists in the British context of relating a theory of political hegemony to that of the articulation of differing cultural perspectives and interests in the cause of a more genuinely emancipatory cultural politics, for continuing to valorise space over time in their approach. The approach she adopts is readily comparable to that of Soja in his *Postmodern Geographies* but covers a different area of political thought for reasons she has outlined in *Flexible Sexism*. Massey's work can then be abrasive but makes some very useful critical points and ones increasingly related to aspects of gender.

This brings us to the work of another female geographer, already briefly referred to, Gillian Rose and her more precise focus on gender relations in relation to the production of academic geographical knowledge in *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Rose 1993).

Rose's aim in this book is not simply to provide a history of feminist geography but to problematise the writing of geography and its predominantly and enduring "masculinist" (a term she appropriates from the writings of the French feminist philosopher Michele Le Doeuff) approach to the world. The book begins with following statement:

The academic discipline of geography has historically been dominated by men, perhaps more so than any other human science. (1)

Like Massey, Rose is not primarily motivated by a feeling of "sour grapes"

but by an investigation of the consequences of this historical development for both women and geography. She begins with an overview of the significance of feminist thinking for geography, emphasising, via le Doeuff, that this "masculinist" tendency is not a matter of mysogony but more one of unthinking exclusion. The first two main chapters of the book look at two predominant approaches to social geography in recent times, that of time-geography, including its influence on the "structuration theory" of the highly influential British sociologist, Anthony Giddens, and humanistic geography. The former is critiqued in terms of its primary emphasis on public space. Hagerstrand's influential approach to time geography follows the routes of individuals in a given area over a space of time and then considers how this affects the construction of social norms, an approach more fully developed by the sociologist, Anthony Giddens (Giddens 1984), as well as a number of British geographers.

Rose by no means dismisses the significance of this work but notes its considerable neglect of "private" space, its tendency to dichotomise the public and the private and the relative lack of attention to the feminine body and its much more traumatic and marked relation to predominantly masculinised public spaces. Women, Rose notes, are much less able, because of the patriarchal social conditions in which they operate, to efface their body and their sexuality as a given in public spaces in the way that men can. Geographers manage to "see" the world from the privileged vantage point of an "imaginary body" which is the "bounded" body of the male individual in modern patriarchal capitalist societies.

Much of Rose's argument here is derived, she notes, from the work of Carol Pateman and her critique of Habermas's enlightened but, as Pateman shows, considerably and oppressively limited "public sphere". Such arguments apply as much to questions of ethnicity and physical colouring as to gender, as Rose also notes. What in fact emerges from Rose's argument in this chapter is a problematization of the "truth of space" which distinctly resembles that of Henri Lefebvre, whom she does not actually refer to, though she does make far more specific points about the immediate problems associated with gender in relation to both social space and academic geographical writing than does Lefebvre. She does however pay attention to the work of feminist geographers in the field of time-geography, noting

...their implicit references to a feminized realm of mothering and bodies, of blood spilt for love and in violence, of passion, desire and hate, in order to reveal the specificity of time-geography. The aim of that elaboration of time-geography's Other was to mark the unproblematized universal spaces and bodies of time-geography as masculine (and white and straight and middle-class)... (40)

Humanistic geography, with its strong emphasis on the felt significance of place is seen by Rose as less positivistic and more open to feelings. Place, nonetheless, tends to be characterised as an unknowable female other, a near mystical presence which language can never fully grasp and distinctly feminine in nature. Thus place becomes a nurturing female other or (m)Other (59) and the task in this context for feminist geographers is to distinguish between Woman

and women who do not necessarily conform to their place in such a masculinized perspective.

This initial encounter with specific recent strands of geographical thinking leads Rose to a more generalized consideration of the geographical imagination and its implications for feminine thinking and to a review of ways in which recent feminist thinking has challenged binary oppositions between Nature and Culture, Same and Other. She notes an oscillation between a desire on the part of geographers to come as close as possible to the places they encounter and a fear controlled by a tendency to objective distancing, most evident in the more positivistic elements of the discipline.

A further chapter deals with the approach of geographers to landscape and the problematics of an again predominantly masculine gaze, developing the Lacanian perspectives of writers like Laura Mulvey and Jacqueline Rose. She notes John Berger's well known observations on the relationship of ownership to painting in his book *Ways of Seeing* (Berger 1972), which relates ownership not only to land but to women's bodies as in the figure of the reclining, naked nude and notes that female geographers have been less prone to sweeping voyeuristic gazes over the landscape and more open to a detailed sensuous relationship to particular parts, seeing this as part of a re-working of the masculinist gaze.

Her penultimate chapter deals with studies of women in the workplace, noting the contributions of Massey, who while still tied into a considerably masculinist Marxist perspective began to open up questions of gender positioning in her studies of regional variation in the geography of work patterns in the British context. Again a major consideration here is the way in which studies of women's experience in the workplace and their traditional role as home-builders and maintainers begins to break down boundaries between a masculine public and a feminized private space.

Rose concludes with an examination of the "paradoxical space" that women occupy, simultaneously marginalised and central, focusing especially on ways in which women find themselves in oppressive and victimising spaces but also on ways of writing geography, including a style of writing which will enable a less distancing, objectifying and masculinizing production of geography, social space and subjectivity.

A male geographer who has produced comparable observations and investigations is David Sibley, notably in his celebrated and highly accessible *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (Sibley 1995). Using the work of social anthropologists and psychoanalysts or psychoanalytic theorists such as Mary Douglas, Melanie Klein and Julia Kristeva, he explores the way in which various social groups are excluded through a process of "abjection" which distinguishes the clean and pure from the dirty and defiled.

His approach begins with a considerations of feelings and the body, looking, with the help of relevant psychoanalytic theory, at the ways in which individuals and eventually whole cultures distinguish between the good and the bad and the anxieties surrounding the border between self and other, not merely in terms of social grouping but in terms of bodily waste.

Sibley's discussion moves into an examination of images of cleanliness and dirt in education and to the social and cultural stereotyping of "naturally" dirty minority groups such as gypsies, Jews and blacks and to the way in which societies structure boundaries in less obviously racist terms. The second half of the book looks at the way in which certain kinds of unwelcome knowledges can also be similarly excluded by dominant social or academic groupings who decide what is and is not acceptable knowledge within a given discipline.

A more complex but highly interesting study which pays specific tribute to the work of geographers like Rose and Sibley, who have highlighted the significance of feelings, the body and the projection of constructions of the self onto the ordering of societies, is Steve Pile's *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity* (Pile 1996). Here Pile focuses in more detail on the work of Freud, Lacan and Lefebvre in order to look at the way in which subjectivity and social space interact. The first part of the book presents a survey of approaches to self and environment in twentieth century geography.

The second part looks in detail at the way in which Freud and Lacan produce their own psychological topographies in mapping relations between self and other. The final part focuses on the way in which Lefebvre's theories of social space interact with those of the two psychoanalysts. This leads into a general discussion of the way in which the relation between social space and subjectivity has become a major issue for late twentieth century cultural theory and a consideration of the views and perspectives of major cultural theorists such as Jameson, Deleuze and Guattari or Meaghan Morris. The crucial issue for Pile remains that of otherness as dramatised in Lacan's famous and paradoxical aphorisms about the tragically divided nature of human subjectivity.

In the last part of his book he focuses on that which for Lacan embodies the constitutive and frustrating gap which always produces frustration in human relationships—"You do not see me from the place I see you"—a statement which obviously challenges the objectivity of any given mapping of the "place" of anyone or any grouping in any given situation. The result is a spatial cultural politics of greater uncertainty and a willingness to listen longer before speaking, to consider, to adapt the words of Deleuze in relation to Leibniz, the truth of perspectivity rather than the perspective of truth. Pile himself concludes his book with a section using Lacan's aphorism as its heading but taking as its subject a mediation on Frantz Fanon's problem in locating his own social subjectivity as a black colonial under a white imperial gaze, torn between identification with and rebellion against the dominant social regime in *Black Skin, White Masks*. He concludes by suggesting that

Fanon's dialectics end up disrupting his analysis, crossed lines of identification and desire stretch out to positions he was not able to countenance. The cognitive map of powerful, certain political action crumbles into dust at the edges of the Empire of Reason. Maybe political positions are not to be discovered in the passive, fixed, undialectical spaces of absolute certainty, but in the place of psychodynamics. (Pile 1996:256)

So far I have dealt with developments in British cultural geography which while exploring significant issues in the relation between social organization, justice and difference on the one hand and conceptualisations and reproductions of social and "natural" space on the other, have focused on considerably theoretical issues. There is however a now considerable related literature examining more specific aspects of daily life and the part space plays in them.

Pile's own book begins with an examination of a ruling by the European court on gypsies and the threat posed to the English way of life by such a ruling in the view of the popular newspaper *The Daily Mail*. Many British cultural geographers have, though, produced work relating to relatively mundane aspects of everyday life or to areas of experience in which spatial considerations can be seen to play a significant role. In most of these cases, considerations of multiple social identities and ways of mapping different levels of experience play a significant role.

Two examples of this approach would be two anthologies, one dealing with an area of obvious relevance to the geographer, the countryside, the other less obvious, and more obviously related to social anthropology, namely, eating habits. Both of the collections of essays I want to briefly consider have a clear structuring principle. *Contested Countryside Cultures: Otherness, Marginality and Rurality* edited by two rural geographers, Paul Cloke and Jo Little (Cloke & Little 1997) seeks to update a somewhat idealised, pastoralised view of the countryside. The essays included in the collection follow a pattern now familiar to practitioners of cultural studies, focusing on specific elements of social and cultural identity. These include religion, ethnicity, generation (including childhood, youth and old age), sexuality, financial level and forms of cultural representation.

In *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat* (Bell & Valentine 1997) adopt a structural principle first posited by the American geographer Neil Smith (Smith in Bird et al. 1993) of six "scales" of spatial experience: body, home, community, city, region, nation, globe in order to consider how, why and where we eat what we do. The book has a relatively light hearted form of presentation but also includes a series of "boxes" which simply reproduce the views and comments of interviewees, a technique increasingly apparent in much social and cultural anthropology, which allows the reader to focus as much on what the "objects" of study have to say as on the perspectives of the writers themselves. This highlighting of the human referents of the study seems to tie in with Pile's notion that researchers need to listen, and to present that listening to others, as much as to speak and produce theories, again there is an interesting problem of representation, boundaries and balance involved. In another anthology, also co-edited by Valentine, *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures* (Skelton & Valentine 1998), Doreen Massey, in an essay entitled *The Spatial Construction of Youth Cultures*, finds fault with this structuring principle;

...social relations which constitute space are not organised into scales so much as into *constellations of temporary coherence* and among such constellations we can identify local cultures set within a social space which is the product of interrelations and interconnections from the very local to the

intercontinental. This is a view of social space which recognises its enormous complexity and which refuses prematurely to tame it into any hierarchy of neatly ordered boxes labelled urban, regional, national. (125)

This may be true, though one wonders what prompts the need to be so aggressively dismissive of a structuring principle which may be of use in some circumstances (Massey is, in this context criticising Neil Smith rather than Bell and Valentine who make it quite clear that they find the structure useful rather than some form of objective truth). The dialogue between objectivity and perceptivity would seem to be continuing in this respect.

My final candidate for consideration in what, it should be emphasised, is no more than a partial and introductory survey in developments in British cultural geography, is the work of Nigel Thrift. Thrift is a geographer who has published extensively over the last twenty years and whose grasp and incorporation of related sociological and philosophical theorising is particularly impressive. At the same time his commitment to empirical research has been equally significant. In an introduction to a recent collection of some of his better known work (Thrift:1996), Thrift observes that his "obsessions" have been fourfold; the folds in question are time-space, "the sensuousness of *practice*" (Thrift 1996:1), the subject, and agency. Such an observation indicates a strong connection to the work of Giddens and aspects of structuration theory in the earlier part of his career.

Here I want to focus briefly on aspects of his later work, which has focused more precisely or noticeably on geographies of increasingly sophisticated technology and communication and on demystifying the awesomeness of some of their effects as portrayed by writers like Frederic Jameson. During the 1990s Thrift produced a number of papers on the modern international financial system often in collaboration with Andrew Leyshon, partly with the intention of challenging the notion of an increasingly inhuman state of affairs which is not susceptible to critical academic analysis by writers other than specialised economists. His intention is not to support such a system and many of the papers by Leyshon and himself, collected in a volume entitled *Moneyspace* (Leyshon & Thrift 1997) are concerned with looking at the related rise and problematics of the new service class and socio-geographical implications, not all of them positive by any means, in the British context. One of his main intentions, though, as indicated in one of the best known essays, *A Phantom State? International Money, Electronic Networks and Global Cities* is to suggest that

...in contradiction to the story of an abstract and inhuman international financial system, there is another story to tell, of an international financial system that has actually become *more* social, *more* reflexive and *more* interpretive since the breakdown of Bretton Woods. (Thrift 1996:214-15)

and that those geographers who

...have pronounced that the rise of electronic communications will produce an "end to geography" will need to think again. (215)

In an even more interesting essay, *Inhuman Geographies: Landscapes of Speed, Light and Power* (Thrift 1996) which first appeared in an equally stimulating collection of essays related to developments in rural geography (Cloeke et al. 1994), Thrift combines Raymond Williams' concept of "structure of feeling" with the more philosophically speculative analyses of cultural theorists and philosophers like Donna Haraway and Gilles Deleuze to examine the historical development of a modern landscape increasingly transformed by developments in technology and electronic communication to produce a structure of feeling where "mobility" is the crucial adjective to be applied.

As with his writing on modern financial cityscapes Thrift's approach is characterised by a determination to apply a careful and comprehensively researched historical geography of such processes with the intention of grounding such developments within the framework of a critical interpretive analysis which makes apparently inhuman processes susceptible to human management and intervention on the part of more than a small group of specialists.

In some ways it might be argued that Thrift still belongs to a somewhat "heroic" group of male social geographers determined to map the whole of the world, a category of which feminist geographers such as Massey and Rose might be critical, but his interventions have the clear purpose of making very large and technically complex areas of human experience accessible to an audience which does not have the time or ability to explore them in such detail. Advances in technology and communications are clearly a crucial part of twentieth and particularly late-twentieth century human experience and Thrift's project is clearly one of informed demystification in relation to the awesomely alienating postmodern sublime portrayed (equally usefully, if perhaps somewhat more melodramatically) by writers such as Jameson.

In conclusion, then, a number of general points might be made about developments in British social and cultural geography, particularly during the last ten years. Firstly, as an article of this kind indicates, it has become much more visible to a wider range of disciplines as both "culture" and "space" have become increasingly wide-ranging and complexly contestable terms in Western societies as the century draws to a close and the global cultural economy becomes increasingly perceptible as a single related entity, if one which has a multiplicity of manifestations. Much of British cultural geography still bears and willingly carries the traces of a Western oppositional Marxism, wary and critical of much of the ultimate emancipatory value of many social, cultural and technological developments during the last twenty-five years. At the same time the influence of predominantly French-inspired theories of difference as well as psychoanalytic theory of both Anglo-American and French origin has played an increasing role and both of these developments have brought cultural geography into a closer relationship with cultural studies in terms of its exploration of the shifting and complex nature of boundaries, the situatedness of knowledge and the multiple nature of social and cultural identities.

On the one hand, much cultural geography has developed an increasing awareness of the role of writing in geography and the relation between dis-

courses, power and knowledge as applied to a discipline which has tended to see itself, and in many ways still does, as an empirical science. On the other hand, that very background of a tradition of empirical science has produced a precision and attention to detail often lacking in some of the more theoretical approaches in cultural studies. Finally, there would seem to be an increasing tendency, again perhaps linked to the emphasis on popular culture in cultural studies, to produce more accessible and popular forms of writing and analysis which are becoming increasingly available to a wider audience. The danger here, of course, is over-popularisation and lack of sufficiently meaningful and perceptive content. This is to be, perhaps, over-sceptical though timely commentaries, in relation to developments in cultural and media studies, such as those by writers like McGuigan (McGuigan 1993) and Tester (Tester 1994) need to be borne in mind in relation to a desire to simply make geography more popular at any cost.

Generally speaking, however the contribution of geography to cultural studies in the British context in recent times seems to have been both helpful and stimulating and a useful extension to more established historical perspectives.

WORKS CITED

- Bell, David & Valentine, Gill (1998). *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat* (London: Routledge).
- Berger, John (1972). *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- Bird, Jon et al., eds. (1993). *Mapping The Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London: Routledge).
- Cloke, Paul & Little, Jo, eds. (1997). *Contested Countryside Cultures* (London: Routledge).
- Cloke, Paul et al. (1994). *Writing The Rural: Five Cultural Geographies* (London: Paul Chapman).
- Giddens, Anthony (1984). *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press).
- Harvey, David (1990). *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry Into The Conditions Of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Harvey, David (1993). "From space to place and back again: reflections on the condition of post-modernity", in Bird et al. (1993).
- Lefebvre, Henri (1991). *The Production of Space* (English trans. of *Production de l'espace*) (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Leyshon, A. & Thrift, N. (1997). *Moneyspace* (London: Routledge).
- Massey, Doreen (1994). *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press).
- Mc Guigan, Jim (1993). *Cultural Populism* (London: Routledge).
- Pile, Steve (1996). *The Body and The City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity* (London: Routledge).
- Rose, Gillian (1993). *Feminism and Geography* (London: Routledge).
- Sibley, David (1995). *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (London: Routledge).
- Skelton, Tracey & Valentine, Gill (1998). *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Culture* (London: Routledge).
- Soja, Edward (1989). *Postmodern Geographies* (London: Routledge).
- Tester, Keith (1994). *Media, Culture and Society* (London: Routledge).
- Thrift, Nigel (1996). *Spatial Formations* (London: Routledge).

