

Maps *of* Meaning



Peter Jackson



MAPS OF MEANING

Maps of meaning' refers to the way we make sense of the world, rendering our geographical experience intelligible, attaching value to the environment and investing the material world with symbolic significance. The book introduces notions of space and place, exploring culture's geographies as well as the geography of culture. It outlines the field of cultural politics, employing concepts of ideology, hegemony and resistance to show how dominant ideologies are contested through unequal relations of power. Culture emerges as a domain in which economic and political contradictions are negotiated and resolved.

After a critical review of the work of Carl Sauer and the 'Berkeley School' of cultural geography, the book considers the work of such cultural theorists as Raymond Williams, Clifford Geertz and Stuart Hall. It develops a materialist approach to the geographical study of culture, exemplified by studies of class and popular culture, gender and sexuality, race and racism, language and ideology. The book concludes by proposing a new agenda for cultural geography, including a discussion of current debates about post-modernism.

Maps of meaning will be of interest to a broad spectrum of social scientists, especially social and cultural geographers and students of cultural studies.

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An introduction to cultural
geography

Peter Jackson



London and New York

First published 1989 by Unwin Hyman Ltd

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 0-203-42123-X Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-72947-1 (Adobe eReader Format)

ISBN 0-415-09088-1 (Print Edition)

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Foreword

The intellectual scene is changing fast. Concepts of place, space and landscape have become central to some of the most exciting developments across the whole field of the humanities and the social sciences. Where historians and anthropologists once studied individual actors and isolated communities, they now seek to place people in a shifting web of interdependencies which often stretches across the globe. Where economists and sociologists once constructed spaceless models of economies and societies, they now seek to account for the uneven development of capitalism and to make sense of the complex character of social life as it unfolds over space. Where political scientists once studied states as unitary actors or empty abstractions, they now seek to examine their territorial structures and to chart their changing involvements in inter-state systems. Philosophers and intellectual historians are alert as never before to the significance of ‘local knowledge’ and to the wider contexts in which their arguments move. And where human geographers once borrowed wholesale from other disciplines, they are now—as part and parcel of these changes—making major contributions in their own right.

Contours aims to introduce students to these extraordinary changes: in effect, to map the new intellectual landscape and help them locate their own studies within its shifting boundaries. We have tried to identify the most important issues, which are often the most interesting as well, to clarify what is at stake in the debates that surround them (without oversimplifying the arguments), and to illustrate what they mean in practical terms. In our experience most introductions leave the latest developments until last. These books mark a significant departure. They are written from the research frontier; they don’t duck the difficult questions and neither do they reserve them for some future discussion. These are testing times for the humanities and the social sciences on both sides of the Atlantic, and we don’t think there is anything to be gained by reticence of this kind. The ideas with which we are concerned in these books are of vital importance for *anyone* standing on the threshold of the twenty-

first century. Living in multicultural societies in an interdependent world, in which events in one place are caught up in rapidly extending chains of events that span the globe; depending upon an increasingly fragile and volatile physical environment whose complex interactions require sophisticated analysis and sensitive management; recognising that the human impact on the face of the Earth has become ever more insistent—we have no choice but to enlarge the geographical imagination.

Contours is different in another way too. It is the product of a continuing series of discussions between all the authors involved. These are not books by committee, and we have all written what we wanted to write. But our arguments have been hammered out, revised and defended in regular meetings; every chapter in every book has been discussed by everyone; and ideas have constantly sparked across from one book to another. The result has not been consensus—nor was it supposed to be—but our views have often been changed by our discussions and we have all gained an increased respect for the opinions and approaches of others. Certainly, each of us has a different perspective on a different field, and we do not all think (or write!) in the same way. But we hope that each of these books conveys something of the excitement we have felt at working together: and the fun too.

Derek Gregory
Vancouver, April 1989

Preface

Described by Raymond Williams as one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language 'culture' defies easy definition. Anthropologists have used the term in literally dozens of ways, while geographers have proved no more adept at reaching a common understanding. At its most deceptively simple, 'culture' refers to the artistic and intellectual product of an élite. More generally, it refers to a system of shared beliefs or a whole way of life. Rather than being a source of confusion, however, the very fact that 'culture' is a contested term is a vital key to its understanding. For 'culture' is not the safe preserve of an élite who dominate a country's major cultural institutions and define its 'national culture'. It is a domain, no less than the political and the economic, in which social relations of dominance and subordination are negotiated and resisted, where meanings are not just imposed, but contested.

This book employs a more expansive definition of culture than that commonly adopted in cultural geography. It looks at the cultures of socially marginal groups as well as at the dominant, national culture of the élite. It is interested in popular culture as well as in vernacular or folk styles; in the urban as well as the rural; in contemporary landscapes as well as relict features of the past. Drawing on the literature of cultural studies and social theory, it introduces a variety of new perspectives on the geographical study of culture besides the landscape approach to which cultural geographers (particularly in North America) remain so devoted, still under the thrall of Carl Sauer and his influential 'Berkeley School' (see Ch. 1).

The achievements of the 'Berkeley School' notwithstanding, its continuing influence throughout human geography conceals a number of deficiencies inherent in Sauer's approach to culture. Chapter 2 considers these problems and proposes a materialist alternative, taking its inspiration from Raymond Williams' studies in cultural criticism. Williams' work sought to clarify the relations between culture and society by employing the Marxist categories of ideology and hegemony (reviewed in Ch. 3). The next four chapters exemplify

the application of a cultural studies approach to some contemporary issues in human geography concerning class and popular culture (Ch. 4), gender and sexuality (Ch. 5), 'race' and racism (Ch. 6), and language (Ch. 7). The book concludes by sketching an agenda for cultural geography (Ch. 8), based on the notion of cultural politics advanced in the introduction.

Rather than trying to be comprehensive in its approach to cultural geography, the book provides a preliminary survey of some major themes. To take just two of the most obvious omissions; there is little discussion of advertising or the media, despite their pervasive influence and the existence of innovative geographical work in this field (Burgess & Gold 1985); and there is only passing reference to the geography of religion despite recent attempts to clarify the theoretical foundations of this particular branch of cultural geography (Levine 1986). With the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the growth of the 'electronic church' in the United States, and continuing sectarian struggles in Northern Ireland, the contemporary significance of religion and its geographical expression can scarcely be exaggerated. But with relatively few exceptions, including some important studies of 'territoriality' and residential segregation in Belfast (Boal 1969, Boal *et al.* 1977), there has been little innovative work by geographers in this field.

The book is also heavily weighted towards British and American examples where most of my own research has been based. These are the societies with which I am most familiar and one has to start somewhere. But the absence of other parts of an increasingly interdependent world should not pass without comment. Indeed, at one level, this book is an attempt to deal with my own place in the contemporary world, writing as a white, middle-class man, working in a privileged though increasingly beleaguered profession and living in the capital of what was once the heart of Empire. I hope, at least, that readers will not infer that British and American examples predominate because they are assumed to be inherently superior or more important than any others. If social science teaches us anything, it should be an enthusiasm for cultural difference and a willingness to see that our own society represents just one way of doing things among a wide range of possibilities. Every study in cultural geography is, at least by implication, a comparative one and we should, wherever possible, be explicit about the problems that such relativism entails.

By taking a few themes, this book attempts to illustrate the potential for a revitalized cultural geography, drawing on theoretical developments in cultural studies and social theory and informing that work with a more sophisticated geographical sensibility. To some extent, then, this book is an extension of my earlier work with Susan

Smith which sought to explore some of the theoretical foundations of contemporary social geography (Jackson & Smith 1984). But it is novel in its attempt to retheorize culture and to suggest new ways of approaching that concept geographically. I will argue that geography is not merely incidental to cultural variation, relevant only to the explanation of diversity, but that it is fundamental to the very constitution of culture. If social processes do not take place on the head of a pin, then we need to take spatial structure seriously, not least in the production and communication of meaning that we call culture.

Although in one sense this book is a solo effort, it is also the product of collaboration with a team of highly supportive colleagues. Publication of this volume inaugurates a series that was initiated by Derek Gregory, goaded into action by Mark Cohen, and brought to fruition by Roger Jones. Other members of the team also deserve thanks for providing a congenial yet critical writing environment: Morag Bell, Felix Driver, Roger Lee, David Livingstone, Graham Smith, Nigel Thrift and Peter Williams. Paul Richards provided inspiration at the start of this project while Denis Cosgrove dissuaded me from overhasty publication. I also benefited from designing and then teaching a new course on cultural geography at UCL with Jacquie Burgess and Hugh Prince. In the course of writing this book I enjoyed a particularly productive winter quarter in the United States in 1987 on a teaching exchange with the University of Minnesota and Macalester College in Minneapolis-Saint Paul. Thanks especially to David Lanegran (who instituted the exchange) and to Helga Leitner, Eric Sheppard, and members of the reading group that met in Eric and Helga's house. Many people have been generous enough to read and comment on earlier drafts of this book or to respond to seminar and lecture presentations. They include Bob Catterall, Hugh Clout, Andrew Crowhurst, Tim Cresswell, Richard Dennis, Peter Goheen, Jane Jacobs, David Ley, Jo Little, Miles Ogborn, Lisa Popik, and David Ward. Special thanks to Sarah Whatmore who read (and re-read) sections of the manuscript, often under pressure. Conferences at UCL, UBC and Phoenix, Arizona all helped clarify my ideas as did visits, near the end of the project, to Adelaide and Sydney. The maps were expertly drawn (or redrawn) by Lauren McClue, and Nina Laurie gave valuable editorial assistance. Thanks to all concerned, including those students who have heard all this before. Despite their assistance, any remaining defects are my own responsibility.

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Acknowledgements

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MAPS
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Introduction: maps of meaning

The current transformation of cultural geography is taking place as a result of its dialogue with social geography and cultural theory. Until recently, its range was limited to the interpretation of historical, rural, and relict landscapes, and to a static mapping of the distribution of culture traits, from barns and cabins to field systems and graveyards. Emerging from its antiquarian phase, cultural geography has begun to assume a more central position in the current rethinking of human geography. Cultural geographers are now experimenting with a range of new ideas and approaches, their aversion to theory now firmly overcome. These developments have drawn extensively on contemporary cultural studies and on other theoretical developments across the social sciences. But the traffic has not all been in one direction: there is now at least the potential for repaying this debt by informing cultural studies with some of the insights of social and cultural geography. This book surveys some of the most significant recent developments in cultural theory and outlines the agenda for a theoretically informed cultural geography. This reorientation involves a growing convergence of interests between those with an historical interest in the evolution of geographical landscapes and those with a contemporary interest in cultural studies and social theory.

Though much of the 'new' cultural geography remains wedded to the idea of landscape, the approach adopted here emphasizes *the plurality of cultures* and the multiplicity of landscapes with which those cultures are associated. It rejects a unitary view of culture as the artistic and intellectual product of an élite, asserting the value of popular culture both in its own terms and as an implicit challenge to dominant values. Culture emerges as a domain in which economic and political contradictions are contested and resolved. This does not mean that the cultural is reduced to its political and economic determinants. Neither does it mean that culture can be dismissed as ephemeral: a residual category left unexplained by more rigorous analyses of political economy. Rather than analyzing each of these domains in isolation, it puts the relationship between culture and

society at centre' stage, insisting on the relative autonomy of the cultural and exploring its specific intersections with the political and economic. This involves a shift in emphasis from culture itself to the domain of *cultural politics* where meanings are negotiated and relations of dominance and subordination are defined and contested. Rather than separating 'culture' from 'polities', therefore, this book is concerned with the extent to which *the cultural is political*. As many of these ideas have emerged from cultural studies, a brief survey of developments in that interdisciplinary field provides a useful starting point.

An introduction to cultural studies

The postwar revival of cultural studies in Britain began with the work of two eminent cultural critics: Richard Hoggart, the author of *The uses of literacy* (1957) and a tireless champion of popular (working-class) culture; and Raymond Williams, a Marxist Professor of Drama at Cambridge who, in his many works, consistently emphasized the connections between culture and society (Williams 1958). Their work was developed by members of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, under the directorship of Stuart Hall, now at the Open University.¹ The Centre undertook work in a variety of fields, from language and media studies to the analysis of race and gender. Characteristic of their work was an emphasis on ethnography (detailed qualitative fieldwork) as well as on the development of theory, and an intellectual practice that emphasized collective work over individual scholarship.

Hall's colleagues at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies have provided a working definition of culture as the level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life. Culture refers to 'the way, the forms, in which groups "handle" the raw material of their social and material existence' (Clarke *et al* 1976, p. 10). Elaborating slightly on this, 'culture' refers to the codes with which meaning is constructed, conveyed, and understood. Significantly, authors at the Centre employed a geographical metaphor to describe this process, and one that is singularly appropriate to the theme of this book: cultures are *maps of meaning* through which the world is made intelligible.² Cultures are not simply systems of meaning and value carried around in the head. They are made concrete through patterns of social organization. Culture is 'the way the social relations of a group are structured and shaped: but it is also the way those shapes are experienced, understood and interpreted' (*ibid.*, p. 11).

Cultures therefore also involve relations of power, reflected in

patterns of dominance and subordination. Dominant cultural institutions, such as the BBC or the *New York Times*, Henley Regatta or Royal Ascot, exert a subtle and pervasive influence on the lives of many thousands of people, establishing a 'preferred reading' of local and national circumstances. This is not to imply that the state imposes 'social control' in a direct or sinister manner. Rather, it suggests that dominant views are most effective if they become 'naturalized' as part of everyday common sense. The concepts of ideology and hegemony are therefore central to cultural studies, referring to the processes through which dominant meanings are imposed, negotiated, and registered.

Hall and his colleagues continue to suggest a way of dealing with the plurality of cultures that exist in any complex society such as contemporary Britain. Cultures, they argue, are ranked hierarchically in relations of dominance and subordination along a scale of 'cultural power' (Clarke *et al.* 1976, p. 11). Subordinate cultures frequently appropriate material resources from one domain and transform them symbolically into another: the Crombie overcoat and razor-cut of the Skinhead, for example, exaggerate and transform the symbols of working-class respectability as stylized items of protest and insubordination. 'Rituals of resistance' of this kind are a staple of contemporary cultural studies (Hall & Jefferson 1976, Hebdige 1979). Tracing the material circumstances in which such transformations occur (see Ch. 3) is one of the central tasks of a theoretically reconstituted cultural geography.

This book combines some of the most important ideas from cultural studies with some recent developments in human geography, seeking alternative approaches to the geographical study of culture from the traditional obsession with landscape. Alternatives include the 'society and space' debate (with its eclectic mix of structuration theory, realist philosophies of science, Marxism, and time-geography); the concept of spatial divisions of labour; and the theory of uneven development (see Ch. 8). These ideas have already made a considerable impact in economic and social geography while cultural geographers, with their steadfast aversion to social theory, have remained relatively immune from them.

Culture is too important a domain to be left to the specialist in cultural geography. If geographers are to make the most of recent developments in social theory, for example, they require a more sophisticated theory of culture. For culture is not only socially constructed and *geographically expressed*. Following the much heralded reassertion of space in critical social theory (Gregory & Urry 1985, Soja 1989), it must also be admitted that culture is *spatially constituted*. To take some examples from the following chapters, it

will be shown that gender relations are differently constituted in different labour markets (see Ch. 5); that racism takes a different form in different localities and at different times, changing shape according to changing historical and geographical circumstances (Ch. 6); that the emergence of San Francisco as a Mecca for gay men and the development of gay politics in that city has a clear spatial basis and a precise territorial form (Ch. 5); and that the shifting boundaries between public and private space in 19th-century London and New York gave rise to serious problems of 'social control' (Ch. 4).

These examples are all concerned with the politics of culture. The next section develops this theme and speculates on the importance of the political context in explaining the current resurgence of interest in cultural studies among geographers and other social scientists.

Cultural politics and the politics of culture

That the cultural is political follows logically from a rejection of the traditional notion of a unitary view of 'culture', and from a recognition of the plurality of cultures. If cultures are addressed in the plural (high and low, black and white, masculine and feminine, gay and straight, urban and rural) then it is clear that meanings will be contested according to the interests of those involved. Consider the following attempts to define a national culture, the first from T.S.Eliot, the second from Hanif Kureishi. For Eliot, British culture 'includes all the characteristic activities of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin-table, the dartboard, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar' (Eliot 1948, p.31). For Kureishi, the list would be radically different and would include: 'yoga exercises, going to Indian restaurants, the music of Bob Marley, the novels of Salman Rushdie, Zen Buddhism, the Hare Krishna Temple, as well as the films of Sylvester Stallone, therapy, hamburgers, visits to gay bars, the dole office and the taking of drugs' (Kureishi 1986, pp. 168-9). Far from confirming Eliot's fears about the homogenizing tendencies of 'mass culture', Kureishi's list suggests that local, urban, and regional cultures are more distinct than ever, reflecting their changing social geography. The tension between 'high' and 'low' cultures identified in Eliot and Kureishi also exists between those who fear that regional cultures are being eliminated by the globalizing tendencies of capital accumulation (Peet 1986) and those who champion the active capacity of subordinate cultures to resist and subvert those tendencies, celebrating the persistence of 'cultures

of difference' (Clarke 1984). The 'geography of culture' is itself a contested terrain.

In advocating a cultural politics, one cannot ignore the politics of culture. The present reformulation of cultural geography should therefore be situated in its immediate political context. What is there about the current politics of fiscal retrenchment, privatization, and economic recession in Thatcher's Britain or Bush's America that might be relevant to a revival of interest in cultural studies? Why have such phrases as 'enterprise culture', 'Victorian values', and 'moral majority' gained such sudden salience? Is the age of the yuppie and corporate culture, of urban heritage and rural nostalgia, of football hooliganism and inner-city rioting, a response to national economic decline (as Wiener 1981, Walvin, 1986, and Hewison 1987 each maintain)? Or does it not also represent the growing confidence of the 'consumption classes' and the increasing alienation of the impoverished and despairing 'underclass', each with its own distinctive geography? An understanding of contemporary national culture clearly necessitates an appreciation of these changing political and economic contours.

The contours of contemporary culture include a paradoxical mixture of trends towards the general and the particular. On the one hand is the widespread emergence in the high street of international fast food stores, like McDonald's and Pizza Express, and their equivalents in clothing and other commodities. On the other hand is the attempt to match every new product to increasingly specific market 'niches'. The fields of 'commodity aesthetics' (Haug 1986) and 'life-style advertising' (Mort 1988) have emerged to provide ways of differentiating consumers from one another, maximizing the appeal of each new product by associating it with an appropriate life-style while simultaneously emphasizing the consumer's individuality and personal taste. A similar paradox applies to the new technology with its tendency simultaneously to liberate and enslave. Some people decry the insidious way in which the new technology colonizes new domains, with cable TV and satellite dishes bringing an endless succession of standardized images into the home. The personal stereo, the video, and the word processor have likewise blurred the boundaries between work and leisure, public and private space. But others argue that new technology provides users with the potential to get 'inside the machine' (Chambers 1986) to produce new audio-visual combinations, personalized programming, a fresh montage of sounds and images.

Contemporary music provides an example of both tendencies. Its populist, democratizing potential is present in the endless reworkings of dub and talk-over, cutting and mixing, scratch, rap and hip-hop (Hebdige 1987). But it can also be seen as a threat to more 'authentic' forms of musical production—anyone with a turntable, a cassette

recorder or a DX-7 synthesizer can be an instant musician. The new technology also threatens to overwhelm its audience with a cacophony of sounds and images, as frustrated viewers endlessly switch TV channels by remote control or via the fast-forward and reverse buttons on their VCRs. It is not so much that technology dictates a particular pattern of social relations, but that its reception is socially and culturally mediated. As Chambers argues, it is part of the post-modern condition to find ourselves 'walking a narrow line between the enlargement of meaning and the peril of it breaking down and evaporating altogether' (1986, p. 199). But it is also a familiar cultural reaction to the advent of new technology as 19th-century reactions to the 'mechanical poison' of photography attest (*ibid.* p. 72).

As these brief examples show, the politics of consumption are rarely straightforward. For white, middle-class teenagers, listening to the Bhundu Boys or to the latest Bhangra band can seem more like 'musical tourism' than a genuine expansion of musical consciousness. For the history of black music is a history of exploitation and appropriation. The cultural politics of 'Band-Aid' or 'Graceland' are even more complex: did they raise people's consciousness in the West and increase Third World emancipation or were they an extremely sophisticated form of self-indulgence, voyeurism, and exploitation? These political tensions within contemporary culture are part of the current debate about post-modernism and the confusion of meanings that attend it. Every message is capable of multiple readings. Every account bears the impress of multiple authors; and no single intention can be inferred. These political dilemmas lift post-modernism above the epiphenomenal and demand that it is properly conceptualized as a social process, periodized in terms of production as well as consumption (Zukin 1988a).

As an extension of this argument about the politics of contemporary culture, it is no coincidence that the current revitalization of cultural studies is taking place at a time when various aspects of Britain's cultural diversity are under threat from an increasingly intolerant and authoritarian government. The last couple of years have seen gay rights under attack from proposed changes in local government legislation; women's rights to legal abortion have been threatened with severe curtailment; anti-racist initiatives have been jeopardized by events in Bradford and Manchester; and educational freedom has been completely redefined by the abolition of tenure, accusations of political bias in schools, and the imposition of a common national curriculum. Similar trends can be discerned in the United States with the rise of the 'moral majority'; the renewed virulence of racism (at Howard Beach in New York, for example, and on university campuses throughout the country); the devastating effects of the AIDS crisis on the gay

community; and the repeal of the Equal Rights Amendment in many states. Significantly, too, in such a depressing political climate, many of the most optimistic developments have occurred in the field of cultural politics. The progressive agenda of Jesse Jackson's 'Rainbow Coalition', for example, has sought to define common ground between blacks and Hispanics, lesbians and gay men, urban and rural poor, and other oppressed groups.

For some Marxist writers, however, the current revival of interest in cultural studies is interpreted as a diversion of intellectual energy away from the more pressing questions of political-economy. Formerly radical authors stand accused of abandoning their commitment to radical social and economic change, substituting a softer cultural analysis for the harsher realities of class struggle. Such an interpretation can be applied to David Harvey's recent attack on urban studies, accusing its practitioners of 'a marked strategic withdrawal from Marxist theory', 'an abrogation of scientific responsibility' and 'a caving in of political will' (Harvey 1987a, pp.367, 376). Harvey's refusal to abandon the 'tough rigour' of dialectical theorizing is paralleled by Neil Smith's hostile critique of recent locality studies, with their sensitivity to 'regional cultures', in which he detects a dangerous 'empirical turn' (Smith 1987a). These interventions have led to a reconsideration of the politics of social and cultural theory, a theme which must be central to any redefinition of the field of cultural geography.

But there is nothing inherently conservative about cultural studies, even among those who choose to examine 'élite' sources, as Raymond Williams' work proudly attests (Eagleton 1988). While cultural studies may be dismissed by some people as a reactionary diversion, to others it offers an important domain for political debate, having provided new grounds for collective struggle. Cora Kaplan's work provides a model here, suggesting that struggles around cultural definitions of gender and race have generated much political energy during the 1980s (Kaplan 1986, p.6). But neither Greenham Common nor the Brixton riots have eclipsed traditional forms of class struggle. Traditional struggles have simply been expressed in other ways and with unpredicted consequences. For example, a 'typical' working-class confrontation, such as the 1984-5 miners' strike, had significant 'cultural' effects, not least in challenging the persistence of patriarchal gender relations.

One area in which culture may provide a haven for political reaction is in the scope it affords for imprecision and circumlocution. Debates about racism and anti-racism, for example, can be defused if they are represented as debates about 'multi-culturalism' where attitudes are less polarized and where the liberal demand for tolerance and fair play obscures deeper questions of inequality and racism.

The—current preoccupation within cultural studies with the analysis of language, discourse, and text, as opposed to the analysis of social action, lends itself to similar abuse. Sensitivity to language can be a good guide to political commitment, however. There is a world of difference, for example, between those who employ the liberal vocabulary of agency, context, and interaction, and those who prefer the more radical language of structure, power, and struggle. A sensitivity to the politics of language (see Ch. 7) is therefore a central component to any reworking of cultural studies in human geography.

To summarize, this book attempts to reformulate a theory of culture around the current *reapprochement* between social and cultural geography. It suggests that cultural geography must be contemporary as well as historical; theoretically informed yet grounded in empirical work: sympathetic to other conceptions of human geography rather than focused exclusively on landscape; and concerned with a range of cultures and with the cultural politics that this implies. Cultural geography can no longer be dismissed as ‘a celebration of the parochial’ or ‘a contemplation of the bizarre’ (Gregory & Ley 1988, p. 116). As a serious intervention in the culture of modernity, the ‘new’ cultural geography has an insistent critical, political edge. This book is a contribution to that critique.

Notes

- 1 The development of the Centre, from the ideas of Hoggart and Williams, through Thompson, Gramsci, and linguistic structuralism, to the ‘impact of the feminisms’ and the need for more ‘concrete studies’ is described in a stimulating essay by Hall (1980a). A similar genealogy is traced by Chambers (1986, Ch.11).
- 2 Chambers (1986) also uses a variety of geographical metaphors, intending to provide ‘a map of popular culture’, a ‘horizontal reading associated with maps’ and a guide to ‘the geography of the imagination’ (a phrase also used by Davenport 1984). Hebdige (1988) goes even further in this direction, charting a ‘cartography of taste’, ‘mapping out’ sub-cultural styles and ‘imagined territories’, detailing ‘stylistic terrains’ and ‘invasions of symbolic space’.

Chapter one

The heritage of cultural geography

Cultural geography is in urgent need of reappraisal; its conception of culture is badly outdated and its interest in the physical expression of culture in the landscape is unnecessarily limited. In trying to find a way round these problems, this book argues for a more expansive view of culture including its less tangible aspects such as those embodied in symbolic forms and in everyday social practice, and it explores a range of geographies besides those that focus exclusively on landscape. Before proceeding to introduce these new approaches, however, this introductory chapter reviews the current stasis of cultural geography by providing a critical survey of its origins and development, particularly in North America, where it is shown to have been the product of one particular school (the 'Berkeley School') and one remarkable man, Carl Sauer.

The chapter discusses the intellectual context of Sauer's work, including his liberal borrowing of concepts and ideas from the anthropologists Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie. His espousal of a 'super-organic' approach to culture is criticized and his inordinate influence on later generations of cultural geographers is traced. Finally some alternative conceptions of culture are introduced, to be discussed at length in subsequent chapters. Adoption of these alternatives involves a complete rethinking of cultural geography in which a convergence with social geography can be anticipated (Jackson 1980). The chapter begins, though, by demonstrating how the current stasis of cultural geography has arisen from its attachment to an outmoded conception of culture, inherited from the work of Carl Sauer and his colleagues at the Berkeley School.

The Berkeley School and its legacy

In the United States, 'cultural geography' is virtually a synonym for 'human geography', including several aspects of the subject that would be thought more appropriate to economic or social geography as they are currently practised in Britain. Introductory courses in cultural geography are taught to large classes of students, including many who have no intention of becoming geography majors. For many such students, it is their only contact with academic geography, the more so as geography is not commonly taught as a separate subject in high school. Several undergraduate textbooks have been designed for this market (e.g. Spencer & Thomas 1973, Jordan & Rowntree 1982, de Blij 1982). Insofar as they approximate the coverage of human geography in the British sense, their scope is correspondingly large. But in their definition of culture and its expression in the landscape, they seem excessively restrictive, as much in what they leave out as in what they include (cf. Norton 1984). Their content and approach owes much to the influence of Carl Sauer who, with the possible exception of Vidal de la Blache in France (Cosgrove 1983), occupies a unique place in the history of cultural geography.¹

Carl Sauer (1889–1975) dominated North American cultural geography throughout his lifetime and particularly during his years as head of the influential Berkeley School, a position which he assumed at the age of 33 and which he held until three years before his retirement in 1957. At that time, as one of Sauer's students has remarked, geography at Berkeley was still less a department than an individual (Parsons 1979, p.9). During his time at Berkeley, Sauer supervised some 40 PhD theses, the majority on Latin American and Caribbean topics, conveying to all his students his firm belief in the need for first-hand field experience and for learning the language of the people being studied. A monolingual PhD was for Sauer a contradiction in terms (Sauer 1956a). Many of Sauer's graduate students went on to hold senior academic posts in their own right. Through them, Sauer continued to influence a second generation of American geographers.

Sauer was twice president of the Association of American Geographers (in 1941, and again in 1956), a position that gave him the opportunity to make a number of influential statements on the nature of the discipline.² In 1941, Sauer spoke on the nature of historical geography, protesting against its general neglect by his American colleagues. Geography in the United States was a native, Midwestern product, he argued, and its development was a faithful reflection of this fact, dispensing with any serious consideration of cultural and historical processes. Sauer argued for a broad definition of the subject of geographical inquiry, fiercely opposing all forms of academic pedantry, and deploring those who

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