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Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts edited by *David Atkinson, Peter Jackson, David Sibley and Neil Washbourne*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2005, 240 pp notes, refs and index, £14.95 paperback. ISBN 1-86064-702-2

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This is an excellent and long overdue reference work for students of critical cultural geography. The editors set out the critical spirit of the book from the outset and signal the relevancy of cultural geographical studies for understanding the dynamic complexes of the worlds we live in and, moreover, for challenging the ways in which we research and represent those worlds:

The excitement of cultural geography lies in the ways that meanings and social understandings are constructed, contested and negotiated, and in exploring the diverse ways these fuse and splinter around intersection notions of culture, place and space. It lies in challenging theoretical arguments that pervade the field and that throw new light on established ways of thinking geographically (p. xv).

This dual concern for writing the nuances of cultural geography and for questioning and disrupting conventional or essentialist ways of producing and presenting knowledges of space and culture is subsequently mirrored in all the contributions in the book. As Gearóid Ó Tuathail succinctly reminds us in his chapter on geopolitics, geography is after all “a geo-graphing, a form of ‘writing the earth’ that necessarily involves culture, discourse and power/knowledge” (p. 65).

There is much in this book for anyone interested in cultural geography and indeed more generally in social and political geography. The book is divided into three sections, each with between nine and eleven chapters. The first section, entitled ‘Space, Knowledge and Power’, reflects upon the ways in which our various

geographical imaginations narrate situated knowledges of our cultural worlds, and in doing so sustain particular intellectual categories of inquiry. In this spirit, Ulf Strohmayer in his discussion of post-structuralism sets up a problematic which all the contributors would appear to implicitly engage; that being how do we re-present the geographical world subsequent to our deconstruction of the power relations, prioritised knowledges and structures that shape it. Ola Söderström and Denis Cosgrove, in their respective chapters on representation and cartography, acknowledge the choices and implications of producing specific knowledges of space in terms of the inherent imbuing of power and reductionism in any given knowledge production – from conventional mapping to non-representational acts of meaning. Ian Cook also outlines the import of researchers' identities, practices and knowledge communities, as academic research “can only emerge out of them” (p. 22).

The more explicitly thematic chapters that follow in this section are concerned with articulating critical cultural geographies of ‘space, knowledge and power’ in a variety of contexts: Mike Crang explores the spatial practices of travel and tourism; Phil Hubbard outlines the usefulness of the concepts of ‘space’ and ‘place’ in cultural geography; Don Mitchell interrogates the production, commodification and conditioning of landscapes in capitalist societies; while Sally Eden demonstrates how the concept of the ‘environment’ continues to be “contested and re-presented through moral, cultural and political debates” (p. 62). Finally, in this section, Gearóid Ó Tuathail challenges us to think critically about the construction and uses of geopolitical knowledges of the world; Andrew Jonas and Aidan While signal the role critical cultural geography can play in critiquing how “governance projects [...] bring about coherence (or not) to society, economies and territories” (p. 78); and Suzanne

Reimer uses the notion of 'flexibility' to discuss broader issues of the individual, gender and citizenship in contemporary capitalism.

The second section presents a collection of chapters under the title 'Difference and Belonging'. The essays all engage with the notion of identity, with contributors emphasising in a variety of contexts how senses of identity are "defined, negotiated and expressed [...] relationally across boundaries of social inclusion and exclusion" (p. 89). Furthermore, in addition to demonstrating how different aspects of identity are socially constructed in various ways, the essays also collectively argue for a recognition of the mutually constituted dimensions of social identities; i.e. how any one dimension of identity (for example, race) intersects with other elements of identity (such as gender, age and sexuality) in any given spatial context. Robin Longhurst begins the section with a chapter outlining how over the last decade the body has come to the forefront of much research in critical cultural geography, with many placing it at the centre of inquiries into "spatial relations" and focusing on it as "one possible route to changing social, cultural and economic relations for the better" (p.94). Longhurst's essay, too, together with subsequent contributions by James Martin on identity and Peter Jackson on gender, points to the emergence of theories of performance and performativity in geographical research on identity in recent years; research that has laid bare the "discursive limits of identity construction" and triggered "waves of new research on the relationship between discourse and practice" (p. 90).

Alastair Bonnet, Robert Wilton and Mark Johnson in their chapters explore respectively the normative constructs of whiteness, (dis)ability and sexuality in contemporary society: Bonnet outlines how "whiteness continues to reified as a racial and cultural norm" (p. 111); Wilton challenges us to think about how assigning

“meaning to disability and bodily difference plays a key role in shaping the spatial arrangement of social life, and vice versa” (p. 115); and Johnson argues that while studies of sexuality have traditionally re-inscribed “the hegemonic status of heterosexuality”, this ‘norm’ is being increasingly “subjected to similar processes of analysis and deconstruction to that which has been perceived as ‘Other’” (p. 122). Later in the section, Tim Cresswell uses the notion of ‘moral geographies’ to prompt us to “analyse the taken-for granted relationship between the geographical ordering of the world and ideas about what is good, right and true” (p. 132); Darren O’Byrne reviews how in contemporary society discussions of citizenship must “take into consideration the possibility of multiple citizenships and allegiances in a world in which the nation state is only one of many possible sources of identification” (p. 139); and finally David Atkinson, in his appraisal of heritage in the present, argues that “fixed, essentialist representations of heritage at delimited heritage sites look set to endure” for a variety of reasons, including especially the commodification and tourist consumption of neatly delineated senses of place. (p. 147).

The third and final section of the book, entitled ‘Borders and Boundaries’, is concerned with both the “changing realities” of how societies are organised around boundaries from “the local to the global”, and with the “reshaping of geography’s theoretical terrain, partly in response to perceived changes in the material world” (p. 153). David Sibley opens the section by using the example of the advent of panic rooms to discuss contemporary private/public socio-spatial relations. He argues that the emergence of panic rooms points to a much broader “psychogeography where public space is viewed negatively as a source of disorder and contamination”, which attests to “the failure of people to cope with social and cultural difference and the failure of states to eliminate economic inequality” (pp. 155, 158). Neil Washbourne

uses the example of globalisation to offer a timely reflection on the general reluctance or failure of cultural geography to theorise “general or public narratives”, which the postmodern ‘crisis of representation’ frequently dissuades. He makes a cogent case for our researching “the development of planetary (strategic, pragmatic) universalism in the variety of spheres in which it operates”, and for our developing “new theoretical categories to grasp global interconnectedness via concrete empirical analyses in relation to general narratives of the present” (p. 166). Washbourne’s concerns are echoed in Steven Flusty’s examination of postmodernism. Acknowledging the critique of postmodernism from the perspectives of Marxism, feminism and spatial science (due to its undermining “both resistance to the status quo *and* the status quo itself”), Flusty nevertheless contends that postmodern human geographies “hold open the possibility of effectively opposing the most deeply embedded of oppressive power relations, and consciously enacting alternatives” (pp 172, 173). Alison Blunt develops this notion in her subsequent discussion of colonialism and postcolonialism, arguing that postcolonial geographies “challenge and critique understandings not only of colonialism but also of the need to decolonise geographical knowledge” (p. 180). The relevance of postmodernism and postcolonialism, then, for cultural geography lies perhaps in the engagement with “new geographies that stimulate new kinds of intellectual inquiry” that prompt critical readings of both the past and the present (p. 154).

Anne-Marie Fortier, in her chapter on diaspora, outlines amongst other things the relevance of the rhizome metaphor in challenging “ideas of cultural homogeneity” and the uncomplicated ascribing of cultural consciousness simply to location (p. 183). She demonstrates how seeing conversely a “rhizomorphous pattern of diasporic dispersal” opens the way to recognising that “[m]emory, rather than territory, is the

principal ground of identity formation in diaspora cultures, where ‘territory’ is de-centred and exploded in multiple settings” (pp. 183, 184). Katharyne Mitchell’s subsequent chapter on hybridity charts how the concept has long been used as a “trenchant critique of modernist binaries and normative assumptions based on age-old notions of separation and linearity” (p. 192). She concludes that if “theorised as a process, and grounded in actual material relations and contexts, hybridity is apt to remain an important and useful theoretical concept, a potential space within which transformation can, and does, occur” (p. 192). The challenge for critical cultural geography of disrupting conventional normative binaries in writing and understanding the world is also taken up by Steve Hinchliffe in his exploration of the long-debated “divisions and relations between natures and cultures” (p. 194). He uses the example of laboratory science to argue that if we can’t understand the laboratory material as either one of culture or one of nature, then another possibility is to imagine that it’s a product and participant in a lively network” (p. 197). Nick Bingham develops this argument in his chapter on the concept of ‘social-technical’. He uses the example of the recent proliferation in both the academic and public arena of debates centred around the internet and GM foods to outline how the concept of ‘social-technical’ can usefully serve to overcome the falsehoods of technological determinism and blur the boundaries between the social world and the technical world. Bingham also echoes recent calls for ‘re-materialising’ cultural geography, in the aftermath of a ‘cultural turn’ that sometimes steered too far away from the objects of our study. We should, he claims, give “material things the attention that they deserve” (p. 200). Finally, the book is brought to a close by Judith Tsouvalis’ discussion of how the ‘cyborg’ metaphor (often invoked in conjunction with other metaphors such as the hybrid, third space, paradoxical space and the nomad) has been used increasingly in cultural

geography to “transgress boundaries” by destabilising “taken-for-granted” dualisms such as nature/culture, physical/human and organism/machine, and by “undermining and disrupting constructions of ‘pure’ and clearly bounded identities” (pp. 207, 210).

Given the limited scope of the book, it is understandable that certain themes of key interest to critical cultural geographers would be overlooked, such as leisure, music and film. However, a more unfortunate omission is the recurring lacuna of an explicit discussion of ‘visual cultures’ in cultural geography. Given the inherent ‘visual’ nature of geography, introducing students to the work of Gillian Rose, James Ryan and Joan Schwarz, for example, and prompting their deconstruction and reading of the diverse and unconventional ‘archives’/‘artefacts’ of the worlds we live in would certainly have added to the book’s central theme of “de-centring knowledge” and “thinking critically about cultural geography” (p. xvi). A separate chapter on ‘policy’ issues and how critical cultural geographers can, and arguably should, intersect with/in the public sphere would also have added to the work. Finally, after reading the book, I was left with a slight feeling that the fluidity and hybridity of the worlds we live in might have ‘collectively’ been overstated somewhat. In trying to escape the restrictive lenses of modernity and all its normative binaries and boundaries, perhaps critical cultural geography has occasionally swung the pendulum too far; to the detriment of interrogating those ‘moments’ in the modern world when ‘visions’, ‘policies’, ‘ideas’ and ‘identities’ become essentialised and bounded, whether that be in sport or more worryingly in immigration policy or in war.

Notwithstanding these comments, the book is a veritable achievement. I have always found it difficult to recommend any one book as a coherent starting point for students embarking upon an undergraduate dissertation in cultural geography. This book is an excellent beginning, and I think it will prove particularly useful in this

context. As useful as *The Dictionary of Human Geography* is, this *Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts in Cultural Geography* offers the student of cultural geography so much more, yet importantly in the same accessible style, despite the complexities of the more sustained arguments presented. An underlying aspiration of the book is to “raise questions that are central to human well-being, but that are also political” (p.viii). This aim is realised with passion by all of the writers, and the collective result is a medium through which I think students will be encouraged and inspired to connect to, research and write both critical and humane cultural geographies in diverse spatial contexts and from a variety of theoretical positions.