

Reviews

Spatial Infiltration: Geography, The Media and Popular Culture

Reviewed by Craig Sutherland and Keyan G Tomaselli

If France colonised the world through structuralism, Britain's weapon was cultural studies. The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' (BCCS) emphasizes resistance, struggle and domination within broader social structures. Their theories have spread to the most unlikely disciplines: literature, history, sociology, politics media studies, and even accounting.

Though geography has, since the late 1960s, spawned its quota of Marxists such as David Harvey who seems to reorientate the discipline every time he writes a book, the discipline's adoption of CCS has been much more problematical. The three geographical CCS practitioners seem to be John Eyles, and Burgess and Gold. Eyles's 'Popular Consciousness, Morality, Locality' covers everything at once, ending with examples of applications which owe their analyses less to CCS than other to approaches. Though there is nothing wrong with his paper, it does not distill out the relevant themes or concepts for a geographical application, nor does it suggest how geography and town planning might benefit from CCS. Eyles's later book, *Qualitative Methods in Human Geography (Polity)* edited with David Smith does focus some of these concepts.

It was with some excitement then, that we discovered Geography, the Media & Popular Culture. Ten of its contributors are geographers, one a planner and one an economist. The book inserts itself into a twin hiatus in geographical studies: ideology and the media.

An excellent introduction on 'Place, the Media and Popular Culture' is offered by the book's editors. But the ideas expounded in the introduction are rarely and/or erratically carried through in the chapters that follow. The expectation of specifically geographical insights on culture and ideology is thwarted by a slightly disguised positivism in concert with a hegemony of the text.

The editors state that various schools of cultural studies exist but do not explain the concepts they use. For example, the paragraph attempting to clarify Gramsci's concept of hegemony tells us what a 'valuable concept' it is rather than suggesting how and where it can be used in geographical work (p.26).

The second chapter, 'Television in the Third World: A High Wind on Jamaica' by Gould and Lyew-Ayee provides an insight into the ideology of television programming and the 'values' that are expressed in different kinds of programmes. 'Third World' countries like Jamaica are dependent on foreign material. Most of the article is empirical, giving a run-down on the history of Jamaican Broadcasting without proper contextualisation, as well as a sophisticated commentary on programme content. The critique of foreign-made (mostly American) TV programmes is pitched at a level that seems to have a theoretical basis in psychology. It thus lacks a critique of American capitalism/imperialism and its ideological apparatuses. A linking to critical cultural studies methodologies is not at all evident here, although they attempt to link into 'Marxist' communication theory at one point (pp. 39-40). This discussion concerning 'radical' communication seems to revolve around the question of *whether* an alternative critical approach to studying television programmes should be developed, but does not go any further!

Chapter 3, 'The Changing Concept of Place in the News', by Susan R Brooker- Gross analyses the impact and growth of technology on news gathering and processing techniques during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of one United States newspaper - the Cincinnati Inquirer. The article shows how over time and changes in technology, news gathering from areas that were once 'too far away' become easier with advances in communication technology.

'Natural Hazards in Novels and Films: Implications for Hazard

Perception and Behaviour', concentrates on how 'natural hazards' such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, etc are depicted in Hollywood films. The essay is descriptive with little critical analysis or an understanding of genre theory. Perhaps a reading of the political economy of the film industry so as to explain why 'sensationalism' is so prevalent in these films would have provided the authors Liverman and Sherman with a greater insight. The sub-section 'images of human response'(p. 93) concentrates on the psychological effect of the inaccuracy of the portrayal of human reactions to natural disasters on some films.

Bob Jarvis's 'The Truth is Only Known by Guttersnipes', has as its central theme how commercial rock music portrays the city. The article, however, requires a greater concern with the political economy of the music industry to contextualise a complex dynamic. Also he does not distinguish between British and American music which even in the commercial rock field has a different experience, history and tradition.

Co-editor Gold's chapter on 'Film Visions of the Future City, 1919-39', provides insights into how the 'film industry' portrayed the futuristic city during the 1920s and '30s. He discusses 'high' and 'low' culture (without adequate definition and criticism) in terms of how he can relate them to the architectural designs of future cities these films portray. The study, however, fails to grasp the fundamental dynamics of the capitalist system whose accumulation imperative is the dominant factor in the future construction of the built environment.

Young's Chapter on Granada Television's portrayal of the 'English Landscape Documentary' quotes Raymond Williams and Antony Giddens (p. 145) as part of his introduction but he does not connect their ideas into the later section on how landscapes are portrayed on TV. This is the only chapter that has somewhat of a 'rural' focus. The paper provides some interesting insights and information that is quite unique in that the author has attempted to link the ideology of the 'landscape' programmes with the context of rural industry and the imperatives of capital in those areas.

'Racism, Nationalism and the Creation of a Regional Myth: the South States after the American Civil War' by Silk and Silk starts off with the line 'this paper represents a Marxist approach towards...(p. 165) is well structured with the authors connecting most of their theoretical framework to their later, mostly empirical analysis. They use a Gramscian emphasis to develop a picture of the

ideology of racism that prevailed after the Civil War and the forces and factors that shaped it.

Burgess on the 'Press, the Riots and the Myth of the Inner City' concentrates on how racist themes are perpetuated via the British press. She examines causation drawing on Barthes on myth, Gramsci on ideology and hegemony, the Glasgow Media Group on distortions in the media, and Stuart Hall's ideas on news values. The empirical details are well researched and provide convincing proof on the myth of the 'inner city' as existing as an alien place from 'normal' white middle class suburbs and their environments and culture.

Susan Smith's article on 'News and the Dissemination of Fear' is similar to Burgess but her framework (drawing on Robert Park) curtails her analysis somewhat. The paper does, however, provide interesting reading.

Overall, the book is a positive step by geographers interested in the media, cultural studies and spatial theory. Some chapters represent good attempts to come to terms with concepts such as ideology and hegemony for a more appropriate understanding of the factors shaping the built environment.

The task that remains is to inject cultural studies concepts with geographical insights and to develop these in an interdisciplinary manner. Thus ideology, for instance, could be examined not only as a class phenomenon, but as a process which may be spatially differentiated in terms of urban form, industrial location and urban/rural relationships.

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