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cultural geography

CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY IS a subdiscipline of HUMAN GEOGRAPHY. The founding father of cultural geography in North America is Carl Ortwin SAUER, and most of the research in cultural geography from the 1920s to the beginning of the 1980s was carried out by cultural geographers walking in the footsteps of Sauer and the so-called Berkeley School. In this tradition, cultural geography is concerned with material facets of culture. On the agenda of the Berkeley School were cultural influences on, and shaping forces of, the transformation of landscape and the natural environment. In short, the role that culture plays as an agent of these changes.

In this respect, the American tradition of cultural geography of the 20th century was a dominating and highly influential one. Since the end of the 1970s, however, cultural geography in the anglophone scientific community took on a different face. Drawing heavily on British cultural studies, focusing on interpretative and empirical methods, and refurbishing social theory, cultural geographers of that time developed the so-called new cultural geography. The mere amount of studies and research that has been carried out until today under the banner of this new cultural geography, and also the colorful, true-to-life, and rich array of topics hosted by the discipline, made new cultural geography probably the most successful subdiscipline of geography throughout the last 30 years. This boom, the beginnings of which are often referred to as the cultural turn in geography, has changed the discipline fundamentally. Nevertheless, recently there has been a vivid, critical discussion about the shortcomings of these new cultural geographies, which is revolving around the topics of the dangers of a holistic culturalist approach and the dematerialization and the (missing) political potential of the new cultural geography.

THE NEW CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Turning away from environmental determinism and the regional tradition of the geography of his time, but drawing nevertheless on some aspects of both tradi-

tions, Sauer developed his own concept of cultural geography. Driven by an interest in historical processes and sequences and their influence on the natural environment, he was influenced to a certain degree by the German geographers Eduard Hahn and Alfred Hettner and the anthropogeographic tradition associated with Friedrich Ratzel, who was one of the first geographers to introduce the term *Culturgeographie* and an accompanying concept of cultural geography (as early as 1880). An important proof of this influence is the adoption of the concept of *Landschaft*, which Sauer took from German geography and then transformed it into his landscape concept, a central and meanwhile well-known feature of Sauerian geography.

Moreover, Sauer was influenced by American historical anthropology of his time. These and other influences led to the specific Sauerian strain of cultural geography where culture was the agent, space the medium, and the cultural landscape the result of human activities. According to Sauer, through time, culture influences and transforms space. Culture was thus regarded as the reason for the origins of certain landscapes.

Cultural geography conducted by Sauer and his followers of the Berkeley School circled around the whole array of human interventions and consequent transformations of the natural environment: domestication of plants and animals, the DIFFUSION of these domesticates, cultivation methods, and other artifacts of material culture and cultural practices, and their consequences for the transformation of the natural environment. These topics were studied from an explicitly ecological and rural, antiurban and perhaps antimodern perspective with a strong focus on folk and prehistoric cultures and native peoples. Geographical inquiry via observation, thus fieldwork and a critically distanced stance against theory and theorization of culture, was foundational in Sauerian cultural geography.

From the end of the 1970s on, however, Sauer's concept of culture was attacked by a new generation of cultural geographers. Representatives of this new school of thought (for example, Peter Jackson, James Duncan, and Denis Cosgrove are important representatives of the first generation of new cultural geographers) fiercely criticized Sauer and the Berkeley School. The traditional cultural geography was blamed for regarding culture as a fixed reality and, furthermore, for considering culture to be static and a superorganic entity. The critique went so far as to state that culture lowers individuals and human beings to the level of automates or Pavlovian dogs, who are passively forced



The spread and use of the English language is one example of cultural geography. Linguistics and literary studies, communication theory, and the recognition of the construction of meaning through language are part of the academic study.

into the dictatorship of culture. Drawing to a high degree on the findings of linguistic theory, and showing close affinity to critical social theory and the newly emerging field of Marxist-influenced British cultural studies, the new cultural geography developed a revised transdisciplinary concept of culture.

Arguing with constructivism and post-structuralism, culture was considered to have no ontological base, that is, to have no fixed reality. Instead, culture was considered to be the context for human action and interaction. Culture was seen as a set of relations that influence and, in part, determine how we live our lives. Multifaceted meanings and interpretations—in short, the plurality of cultures and heterogeneity of cultural processes—was emphasized.

Linguistics and literary studies, communication theory, and the recognition of the construction of meaning through language set the theoretical stage on which all material and nonmaterial facets of culture and also landscape were considered as “texts.” By way

of semiotic analysis, real and symbolic landscapes were interpreted in terms of symbolic content or the role for symbolic exchange. Different, multiple ways of seeing, experiencing and ascribing meaning to space were as much on the agenda of new cultural geography as was the role that cultural processes play in the construction of identities.

COMPLEX SHIFTS

Furthermore, space theories fueled the new cultural geography’s view that landscapes, places, and spaces are under permanent social construction and transformation. These were the complex shifts in cultural geographic thinking after the cultural turn. With it, the ways of doing cultural geography had to be equally revised. As a consequence, the methodological focus of cultural geography changed, and it has become an increasingly empirical and interpretative subdiscipline drawing a great deal on discourse analyses and qualitative methods.

This shift in cultural geography was also fueled by questions for the social and political relevance of the subdiscipline. Matters of social justice, the concern with issues regarding ethnic minorities, subcultures, and “the other,” challenging fixed and essential notions of race or nation and gender and, furthermore, a concern with postcolonial and power-resistance issues were on the agenda.

CULTURE WARS

The so-called culture wars on questions of dominance or on issues of the power of representation, as well as struggles over the power of the production of meaning, have been of special interest for cultural geographers. Space, culture, and power were the three points on which the canopy of new cultural geography was unfolded. To the same degree, cultural geography has been recognizing the importance of contemporary, urban, and popular culture (both production and reception), the practice of the everyday life, and the subjective experience and perception of space.

Moreover, there has been a growing concern for the workings of mass media on space or for the construction of space, and on various kinds of representations in television shows, film, literature, or music. From all this, it can be easily seen that a huge range of topics and issues entered the stage of cultural geographic research: film, books, food, music, advertising, religion, heritage, tourism, transnational networks and cultural transformations, sexuality, and so on have become the subjects of geographers' efforts to research matters of culture and the production of space.

CRITIQUE OF NEW CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

In recent years, however, there has been a considerable amount of critique of some aspects of how the new cultural geography has been practiced. This critique, put up for discussion by critical geographers with affiliations to Marxist and neo-Marxist thought (for example, Don Mitchell and Clive Barnett), basically considered new cultural geography as a victim of its own success. The critique is highlighting the dangers of a hegemony of the cultural, of the notion that “culture is everything,” and that in the doctrine of culturalism, nothing exists outside of cultural meaning. This culturalism, it is argued, weakens the political power of cultural geography.

A focus on everything that is in one way or another cultural is accompanied by a drift away from the study of exploitative economic systems of production. It is stated that although the focus on cultural politics is ex-

plicitly favored by new cultural geography, it is now in danger of being drowned by the mere number of all kinds of studies in new cultural geography. Often, it is argued, these studies are nothing more than a mere descriptive cataloguing of anything that is cultural, without explaining the complexity and multilayered characteristics of culture or cultural differences.

The accusation of arbitrariness of the themes and ways of doing new cultural geography has also been discussed. Moreover, it has been stated that a fast codification and a new orthodoxy of “the cultural” by new cultural geography has pushed away the radical character of the subdiscipline. Critical voices amplified the warning echo of a renewed version of culture as the superorganic entity of the Sauer era, which could be heard in the noise made through and around the new cultural geography.

The questions from these critical voices are connected to a plea for a thorough examination of the inner workings of culture—that is, of what culture is—and of the question about who reifies this culture—that is, what are the power relations, who oppresses, and who dominates and exploits in the realm connected to culture and its (re-)production?

Another point of critique regards the dematerialization of cultural research, that is, the turn away from the real needs and topics of the everyday toward the treating and reading of virtually everything as a more or less abstract cultural “text.” It is suggested that this might blunt the cutting political edge of cultural geography that is so urgently needed for the concrete improvement of the everyday life of people.

Nevertheless, as substantial as these critiques may be in showing actual and potential pitfalls of contemporary cultural geography, they can also be regarded as very valuable contributions for refining our understanding of culture and another step toward the reconsideration and further development of cultural geography.

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cyclones

CYCLONES ARE HAZARDOUS weather conditions distinguished by extreme blasts of wind moving in a circular pattern. Cyclones generally appear over tropical waters; however, some are able to reach land, where they inflict significant damage on buildings and communities.

Cyclones can be placed into categories such as hurricane (Western Hemisphere) and typhoon (Eastern Hemisphere). The categorization assigned to a cyclone is dependent upon where it originated. Wind speeds in cyclones can surpass 100 mi per hour (160 km per hour). Tropical cyclones with milder conditions are known as tropical storms.

Cyclones build over tropical seas. Heat gives cyclones their energy. Consequently, the ocean over which a cyclone forms must be warm. Other conditions required for a cyclone include a rapidly cooling atmosphere, a minimum of 300 mi (500 km) distance from the equator, and a slow vertical wind not exceeding 23 mi per hour (37 km per hour). This vertical wind is the product of differences between winds in the lower and upper portions of the atmosphere. The major contributor to the formation of a cyclone is a disturbance in the form of a thunderstorm or group of showers.

When all of these factors come together, conditions are right for a tropical cyclone. However, cyclones are spontaneous; a minute variation in one variable can be the difference between a hurricane and a thunderstorm.

Known as the “eye,” the circular area in the center of a cyclone has an environment quite different from the area it surrounds. Calmness and a light breeze characterize the eye. Temperatures and air pressure are normally higher, and the sky is generally very clear.

Strong cyclones can cause damage ranging from crop destruction to the total devastation of buildings, depending on the severity of the cyclone. Cyclones become most dangerous as they hit land and spawn tornadoes, which are formed when tropical cyclones begin to lose their power. The major variation between trop-

ical cyclones and tornadoes is their size. While the diameter of a tornado is measured in meters, the diameter of a tropical cyclone is measured in kilometers. One of the most destructive cyclone-spawned tornadoes in the United States caused around \$100 million worth of damage to the Austin, TEXAS, area in 1980.

Besides property damage, cyclones (and the ensuing tornadoes) cause death. Objects lifted from the path of the extreme wind are flung about as high-speed projectiles. In 1964, 22 people were killed by a tornado that hit the LOS ANGELES area in CALIFORNIA.

Meteorologists have come a long way in the forecasting of tropical cyclones. In their forecasts, they gather information from the global numerical weather prediction model, which is also used by many meteorological centers, to aid them in producing accurate warnings. The World Meteorological Organization has created Regional Specialized Meteorological Centers (RSMCs) that issue warnings to nations, which then issue warnings to the public.

Warnings are issued when a cyclone is likely to affect communities within 24 to 48 hours. The warnings include a forecast that predicts which communities may be affected, severity, movement, etc. depending on how severe a cyclone is, residents may be asked to take certain precautions or even evacuate the possible affected area.

CATEGORY WARNINGS

Cyclones are divided into five categories determined by wind speeds, with category 5 being the worst cyclone of all. A category 1 warning is issued when wind gusts are less than 77 mi per hour (125 km per hour). A category 2 warning is issued when wind gusts are from 77 to 105 mi per hour (125 to 169 km per hour). When winds are from 106 to 139 mi per hour (170 to 224 km per hour), a category 3 warning is issued. Category 4 is when winds reach speeds from 140 to 173 mi per hour (225 to 279 km per hour). The most destructive of all is a category 5 cyclone with winds faster than 174 mi per hour (280 km per hour).

In order to avoid confusion when tracking the development of these storms, cyclones are regularly named. The naming of cyclones began during World War II when meteorologists in the U.S. armed forces unofficially named the cyclones giving them female names. During the early 1950s, tropical cyclones that formed in the North ATLANTIC OCEAN were named from the phonetic alphabet. In 1979 the U.S. National Weather Service used both male and female names. When an exceptional cyclone occurs, its name is taken