

Editorial: Placing Space

Before the mid-seventies the notion of 'space' seemed to be the focal theme of philosophers, architects, geographers and geometers. It rarely featured as a central concept in the worlds of history and, arguably, sociology and (to include my own field) sports studies. Of course, there were exceptions but it remains the case that Edward Soja's suggestion that the 1980s had witnessed the "reassertion of space in critical social theory" was not seriously contested.¹ The emergence of a concern for 'space' was fuelled by the likes of David Harvey, Doreen Massey and Henri Lefebvre.² However, over what did space reassert itself?

In a recent collection titled *Spaces of Geographical Thought* the editors Paul Cloke and Ron Johnston include two chapters that situate 'space' against both 'place' and 'time'.³ In other words, they identify two binaries – space-place and space-time. So space (though not necessarily 'spatial science') reasserted itself against both the descriptive humanism of place and the historicism of time. The objective of Cloke and Johnston's collection is to destabilise these binaries. Why destabilise them? Because binary structures "establish relations of opposition and exclusion rather than sameness and interconnection between the two terms involved."⁴ Space-Place can be read as A/not-A, implying the presence, power, positivity and value of the first binary term. In contesting this position it has been recognised that several binaries have become blurred.

However, it can be argued that the notion of 'space' has always been blurred. Indeed, Michel de Certeau's definition of 'space' could easily be read as what many human geographers call 'place'. "Space is a practiced place", he writes. "Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers".⁵ This is exactly the opposite of common geographical reactions that see space being turned into place by its peopled-ness.

'Space' has often been seen as abstract whereas 'place' is concrete; space is open but place is enclosed; space is barren whereas place is peopled; space is general whereas place is particular; space is sterile while place has *genius loci*; space is big whereas place is small.⁶ It should be clear (or, rather, unclear) that 'space' is a problematic notion that today attracts multi-disciplinary attention.

The Marxist view is that every society and every mode of production produces its own space.⁷ Place, on the other hand, is a distinctive kind of space that is defined by the lived experiences of the people. Embodiment is central to place used in literature and geography and is often referred to as a “sense of place”.⁸ Places can be loved and treasured. While such a sentiment is often thought of as something ‘natural’, it may also result from the underlying structures of power or be part of the politics of identity.⁹ Related to space is ‘placelessness’ or the ‘non-place’, respectively popularised by geographer and anthropologist Edward Relph and Marc Augé.¹⁰ Placelessness is to space as topophilia is to place. As distinctive places are eroded they are replaced (respaced?) by anonymous, standardised places such as McDonald’s, malls and stadiums. However, such sentiments are fuelled by nostalgia and elitism as meaningful human encounters can surely happen in the most soulless of spaces.

The essays in this issue sensitively but perhaps unintentionally meld space and place. The small spaces that Foucault calls us to acknowledge in our research are graphically demonstrated in the pages that follow. The crib, where parent and child lie together, contains spaces crucial for the well-being of both. That such spaces are saturated with meaning for parent and child suggest that they are place-like. Placed perspectives, such as those discussed by Nālani Wilson in her piece on the decolonisation of Moloka’i Nui a Hina, a small Hawaiian island, attend to another well-known binary, the Global-Local in which today we find the local in the global and the global in the local (‘glocalisation’). From the tiny interstices of the crib to the global expansion of power, space is of immense importance.

This is also true for Su Ballard’s analysis of artist Susan Norrie’s “Enola”, a digital video installation. She suggests that time is slowed down to an eternal present to create a duration which includes both Hiroshima/Nagasaki and 9/11 as spatial boundaries and geographic borders are collapsed. In contrast, artist Adrian Cartwright considers his specific geographical locatedness or place as a night photographer looking up at the sky and seeing space, with all its connotations of immensity, time and energy. In her book review, Bridie Lonie argues that *Thinking Space: Critical Geographies*¹¹ bridges spatial, philosophical and social disciplines; as each theorist contributing to the volume thinks in terms relevant to geography because their work – although divergent – depend on concepts which are spatial in nature. Geography also translates into abstract sculptures through artist Andrew Last’s reflection of harmonic systems deployed in space as found in the world of plants and in the mathematics used to interpret them. And, where Willem Labuschagne reviews *Conceptual Spaces: The Geometry of Thought*¹² he considers cognition in terms of its geometrical, spatial configuration; while suggesting a spatial differential within cognitive science as a discipline, as it ranges across a terrain including psychology, philosophy, logic, computer science and linguistics.

How should space and place be represented? This issue is painted in broad strokes and includes a healthy blend of positivist approaches and presentations from the humanities on a common theme. Just as the topics range from the intimate to the global, the disciplines used to assess the topics come from a broad scope; while the inclusion of poetry and statistics between the covers of a serious journal serves to destabilise yet another binary – sciences/arts.

- 1 Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Thought* (London: Verso, 1989).
- 2 See John Agnew, "Space: Place," in Paul Cloke and Ron Johnston (eds), *Spaces of Geographical Thought* (London: Sage, 2005), 81-96.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Paul Cloke and Ron Johnston, "Deconstructing Human Geography's Binaries", in *Spaces of Geographical Thought*, Sage, 12.
- 5 Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117.
- 6 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).
- 7 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell), 1991.
- 8 The notion of 'topophilia' is usually associated with the work of Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974). However, the word was used much earlier by the English poet, WH Auden.
- 9 Gillian Rose, "Place and Identity: a Sense of Place", in Doreen Massey and Pat Jess (eds), *A Place in the World?* (Open University, Milton Keynes: Milton Keynes,1995), 98-105.
- 10 Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976); and Marc Augé, *Non-Places* (London: Verso, 1995).
- 11 Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (eds, London and New York: Routledge, 2000).
- 12 Peter Gärdenfors (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2000).

John Bale was trained as a human geographer and has degrees from the University of London. He has pioneered the geographical study of sports and is currently based at Aarhus University, Denmark.