

BOOK REVIEWS

KEY THINKERS ON SPACE AND PLACE By Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin and Gill Valentine (Eds.). London: Sage Publications, 2004.

Key Thinkers on Space and Place is the third book in Sage Key-series publications, coming after *Key Concepts in Geography* and *Key Methods in Geography*. Essentially, it is an encyclopedia for some of the important figures in Human Geography (not necessarily geographers) who, according to the editors, contributed significantly to the discourse about the concepts of space and place in the second half of the 20th century.

The book is divided into four main parts: (1) A Synthetic Introduction, in which the editors give a theoretical-historical overview of the different ideas, concerning the role of space and place in contemporary diverse domains of life, that are reflected in the works of the selected key-thinkers. These ideas range from positivism, phenomenology and structuralism to the various kinds of postmodern thought; (2) An alphabetical list of entries (key-thinkers) that contains (for each entry): (a) biographical details and theoretical context; (b) spatial contribution; (c) key advances and controversies; and (d) major works and references; (3) a glossary of terms with reference to relevant entries; (4) an index.

From many perspectives it is a well-organized guide to some of the most important figures in human geography of the second half of the 20th century. However, there are few bothering matters. One of them is the absence of important thinkers: geographers like Entrikin, Peet, Bird or Relph; and on the other hand Jammer – which is probably one of the most important authorities concerning the concept of space. The second is the lack of a concisely organized continuous discussion concerning the differences between the approaches mentioned within the reviews.

But, while these are relatively minor problems, it seems that the major problem that casts a shadow over this guide is that it misses the main real dispute concerning the nature of space. This controversy is between the opponents of absolute space and those of relative space. Its application to geography is, accordingly, the dispute between Special and General Geography. In the light of this problem, it is obvious that the differences between most of the thinkers in this guide simply do not really exist.

Unfortunately, and in an unjustified manner, it is still assumed that the victory of relative space over absolute space is perfect. However, this open question about the nature of space, which undoubtedly requires a wider and deeper discussion, should

not totally be ignored even here - within our short and narrow review. Its repercussion upon the nature of geography is tremendous, and it is becoming even more intensified as long as philosophy and physics fail to resolve it.

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SPACES OF DEMOCRACY: GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CITIZENSHIP, PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION By Clive Barnett and Murray Low (Eds.). London: Sage, 2004.

Human geography has been playing a central role in the debates about globalization, neo-liberalism, anti-capitalism and multi-culturalism. Yet, the debate over democracy, as an idea arguing that politics should be in the hands of ordinary people, is relatively absent from human geography. It is not that the field of human geography has nothing to add to democracy: concepts such as deliberative policy or public participation are rooted in democratic processes, and both have emerged by planners and environmentalists – two fields which are nourished by geography. Geographers, on the other hands, usually ignore applied policy, i.e. the processes of decision making which are rooted in interests, political bureaucracy and institutions. They have also ignored closer examination and detailed analysis of political philosophy and its relation to applied fields. Consequently, geographers, and mainly radical geographers, have underpinned the normative presuppositions of democratic politics, as well as its ideas of what is just, what is good, and how best to bring good, without bringing these ideas into question.

This claim sets the rationale behind the volume on Spaces of Democracy, which grew out of sessions at annual meetings of American and British geographers at the University of Sussex and at Pittsburgh, both in 2000. In these meetings an attempt was made to explain the disconnection of critical human geography from the concerns of political philosophy and democratic theory. Barnett and Low, the editors of the volume, identified three points that separate between geographers and democratic theory: first, *liberalism*, a concept which is central in democratic theory and democratic institutions in the West, has a problematic status in geography. Liberalism is currently identified with one tradition best presented by Hayek, which seeks to restrict the scope of decision-making for the performance of free markets and personal liberties. This understanding of liberalism, known as 'neo liberalism', sets the resource for left-critical discourse, in which radical geographers are engaged, over liberalism in general. Furthermore, geographers call to transcend state-centric views of politics and to think about possibilities of organizing politics differentially, while liberalism and democratic theory are rooted in state-centric views.

This problem leads to the second point which separates geographers from demo-