

What was shaped by the natural environment geographical

[Environment](#), [Nature](#)



What is cultural geography and how has it evolved? The discipline of cultural geography has been around since the 16th century where geography was rooted in exploration and discovery. It went through three phases: Geography fabulous, Geography militant and Geography triumphant (Anderson, 2009, p. 14-15). The focus of this essay, however, will be on the explosion of cultural geography that occurred in the early 20th century and afterwards due to Carl Sauer's retaliation to Ellen Churchill Semple and her idea of environmental determinism (Peet, 1998).

Since then cultural geography has developed into three notable schools: Traditional cultural geography; Representational cultural geography and Non-representational cultural geography. The following essay will detail a brief history of cultural geography, discussing each school and how they define cultural geography as well as illustrating cultural geography's evolution through history. Before Sauer and traditional cultural geography was the geographical practice of environmental determinism. Ellen Churchill Semple developed the theory of environmental determinism after interpreting the works of Friedrich Ratzel and his ideas on the nature-culture relationship (Frenkel, 1992, p. 2). Semple popularised the view that society and culture was shaped by the natural environment/geographical location. She suggested that progress is the "increasing exploitation of natural advantages" (Adams, 2011, p. 5) and that more developed civilisations were better at using their natural resources/landscape and were therefore more 'evolved', justifying the imperialistic nature of America and Europe at the time.

Her views led to geography being legitimised as a subject as they supported commercial expansion and allowed the state to expand and exploit other nations as they believed they were more socially developed, therefore they could use the landscape more efficiently. Her views were problematic and are rarely used in modern cultural geography due to their connections with social Darwinism and imperialism, but she was a huge hand in getting geography recognised academically and led to the 'explosion' of cultural geography that was kick started by Sauer. Traditional cultural geography developed from the work of Carl Sauer and the Berkley school of Geography during the 1920's in direct contrast to Semple and Ratzel's work on environmental determinism. Sauer developed the view that landscape is shaped by human activity (culture); human ecological dominance affects the course of organic evolution (Peet, 1985, p. 328) opposed to the landscape leading to human evolution. Sauer sought to bring cultural geography back into the field as he believed that observation/empirical research was key to studying the relationship between the physical, material landscape and culture (Anderson, 2009, p.

19). This brought about the study of artefacts in the cultural landscape, studying the history of an environment by looking at the 'scars' left on the landscape by each cultural group. Sauer called the layering of cultural scars in the landscape 'palimpsests' as like a palimpsest landscapes are surfaces with multiple 'inscriptions' that build up over time (Anderson, 2009, p. 20). Sauer's approach to cultural geography is still widely practiced today such as in Rancho Santa Margarita, Orange County, California where land use

and presentation is the main focus for community life, with the city council legislating on appropriate behaviour/appearance (Ryecroft, 2017). Overall traditional cultural geography focuses on how humans shape the landscape both in a historical and modern context.

It can be argued that this approach to cultural geography is too focused on rural areas and cultural products rather than the processes that create the products (Keough, 2016). Traditional cultural geography is too critical of modern society and fails to see the value of urban culture.

Representational cultural geography was established in the 1960s in opposition to Sauer's work, it "emerged in an era where sign, symbol, and meaning in the landscape and the processes of cultural landscape creation became important considerations" (Keough, 2016). For representational cultural geographers humans were no longer the 'agents' creating landscapes but were the active producers of culture and its processes (Anderson, 2009, p. 27). Culture was no longer this invisible being controlling what people make, culture is people and what people do. The way representational cultural geographers see landscape is as a combination of both material (place) and mental (ideas), like a book people can interpret places as they please and often in different ways (Cresswell, 1996, p. 13) this explains the variation in culture across the globe as different groups of people have different views and ideologies.

The study of 'cultural place' led to the expansion of cultural geography as there were more objects of study, place could be urban, rural, metaphorical or film it didn't have to be a material landscape like before as they places are

formed by human ideas, symbols and meanings. They see culture as more fluid and dynamic; it can shift depending on social values and interpretation. This focus, however, on theory and the abstract could be argued to distract geographers from the importance of everyday actions in people's lives.

People do not go through life looking at the deeper meaning of landscape all the time, not all actions are thought through, not all aspects of culture are seen as 'symbolic'. Non-representational cultural geography looks at 'everyday geographies'