

Culture space and place cultural studies essay



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DANIEL BROWNLEE Students MUST submit this form with coursework and complete all details in Section 1 School of City and Regional Planning COURSEWORK REPORT (Not to be used for presentation coursework) Section 1 (to be completed by student)

Student Number:

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Module Code and Title:

CP0221 CULTURE, SPACE AND PLACE

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2

Coursework Title:

" HOW GEOGRAPHERS STUDY CULTURE LARGELY DEPENDS ON HOW THEY UNDERSTAND THE TERMS ' CULTURE', ' PLACE' AND ' POWER'." CRITICALLY DISCUSS THIS STATEMENT USING EXAMPLES.

Date Due:

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Date in:

Module Leader:

DR JON ANDERSON Section 2 (FOR STAFF USE ONLY - complete all or part depending on the nature of the coursework) ASSESSOR'S COMMENTS

MARK AWARDED:

A) SUBSTANCE B) STRUCTURE C) STYLE AND PRESENTATION D) REFERENCING E) KEY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

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" How geographers study culture largely depends on how they understand the terms ' culture', ' place' and ' power' ". Critically discuss this statement using examples.

Culture has been interpreted in many different ways over the years due to its polyvocal nature (Shurmer-Smith 2002) and difficulty in defining, and these multiple interpretations have influenced how geographers study culture.'

Traditional' cultural Geography took place between the 1920s and 1970s and Carl Sauer and the Berkeley School were the forerunners. Sauer challenged the doxa of environmental determinism and took intellectual insight from anthropology to establish a new interpretation of culture. This interpretation was illustrated in Carl Sauer's The Morphology of Landscape (1925) and stated that " environmental determinism had pretty much got it backwards" (Mitchell 2000, p. 21) and culture was the agent creating landscapes (Sauer 1963, p. 343). Culture and history were seen as intertwined in landscape and over time the cultural landscape becomes extremely complex. At every introduction of a different culture in an area, that cultural landscape then

becomes rejuvenated or a palimpsest is created, where a new landscape is superimposed on remnants of an older one (Sauer 1963, p. 343). Pieces of cultural landscapes that remain are therefore given cultural value. For instance, Rome still has its architecture from Ancient Rome. This era of cultural geography also stressed the importance of description, inventories of material things and wanted to highlight outcomes not analysis of means and processes. This meant that culture was under-theorised and according to Sauer culture was an unopened black box. Then in the 1980s cultural geographers turned away from 'traditional' cultural geography as it was overly empirical nature, had no theoretical sense of what culture actually was and it was an unexpected black box which needed to be opened. Instead geographers turned towards humanism, feminism, social and cultural theory, and 'post' theories for inspiration. (Anderson 2010) These paradigms stimulated the Cultural Turn and how culture was understood in this 'New' or representational geography. Culture was no longer interpreted with these superorganic notions of Sauer and agency was with humans themselves. Humans were the active producers of culture. Culture was seen as a process of human practice. In this interpretation, the study of culture was about a dynamic mix of what people make, how they make it, and the effects its products have (Anderson and Gale 1999). If culture is solely what people do, then different cultures are purely the differences in what people do. Representational cultural geography also had a different approach to material manifestations of culture than Sauer. Culture was now seen through symbols and their significance and there was a focus on the role these play in the constitution of 'reality' and 'knowledge of reality' (Barnett 1998, p. 380). Cultural products were seen to have meanings attached; they became

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material objects embodying a feeling or a meaning. For example, the statue of liberty is seen as a symbol of American hope and freedom. This is known as culture as 'text' and was a way of approaching landscape in this representational cultural geography. Cosgrove and Jackson (1987) argue that theorising about landscapes as configurations of symbols with significance leads inevitably towards styles that are more interpretive than morphological. This interpretive approach depicts the metaphor of landscape as a 'text' to be interpreted as a social document. Aitken (in Flowerdew and Martin 1997, p. 198) argues that the landscape in this new cultural geography is something that is inscribed with a range of meanings by various social groups. Landscapes therefore have become signs or symbols that we read every day-they tell us how to behave, where to smoke, when to walk and what we should be doing in certain areas. It was up to cultural geographers to study the meanings of these 'texts', theorise about the meanings attached to them, the politics underpinning them, and how these were (re)produced. Representational cultural geography, however, was met with critique which can be categorised into two: theories and things. Both of which were said to be overemphasized. Duncan (1980) argues that representational geography has become preoccupied with theories. He claims that the new theoretical vocabulary has led to geographers living in their own 'wordy world' (Thrift 1996) and have therefore distanced themselves with a loss of an understanding of the real world. Furthermore, Price and Lewis (1993) argue that this fixation with theory has led many cultural geographers to be more concerned with interpreting ideas than engrossing themselves in practical matters. Things are also said to have been overemphasized. Greenhough (2004) argues that there has been an

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unnecessary fascination with the language of the word and with the politics and practice of representation. Thus cultural geographers run the risk of forgetting the language of the world and "silencing other languages and intelligences we use to engage with the world" (Anderson 2010, p. 31). Representational geography forgets about the about processes and 'things' we can't grasp. This critique has inevitably led to a 'more than representational' or a 'non-representational' approach to the field, where attentions are drawn back to experiences, practices and feelings that are beyond or before representation. Simpson (2010) argues that it is important to note that non-representational theory is not in fact an actual theory, but more similar to a style of thinking which values experiences, feelings and practice (Thrift 2000), rather than the 'things' that constitute the world. It is therefore also best thought in the plural as non-representational theories (Lorimer 2008). This plurality is seen in the experimental nature of the approach. For instance, cultural geographers have explored dance (McCormack 2003), musical performances (Wood and Smith 2004), engagements with nature (Szersynski et al. 2003), sensory affects (Rodaway 1994), and artistic expression (Kaye 2000). This approach is motivated by the attitude of 'let us try it!' (Nietzsche 1974) rather than 'let us judge it' (Deleuze 1997), thus providing an open-ended account of the world. However, as Thrift (2004) stresses representation is still partial but does not incorporate all of cultural life. This highlights the problem with non-representational cultural geography. It assumes that we can escape the world of representation. Yet, whenever the language of the world is mentioned, the forces of representation are present and therefore it is impossible to apply non-representational cultural geography to culture

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without representation, they both go hand in hand. We cannot "represent that which lies beyond the scope of representation" (Davidson et al. 2005, p. 11). Place is crucial to the understanding of culture, as Anderson (2010) highlights, "Cultural life does not take place in a vacuum" and "if space is where culture is lived, then place is a result of their union" (Lippard 1997, p. 10). Culture takes and makes place. It changes, transforms, fashions, what that place is like and how we think about it. Therefore, depending on how we look at place determines our outlook on culture. In understanding place it is crucial to understand the concept of traces. According to Anderson (2010, p. 5), "Traces are marks, residues or remnants left in place by cultural life". They therefore bond cultures and places together, influencing the identity of both. Traces can be both material and non-material and the on-going composition of these cultural traces or the locale (Agnew and Duncan 1989) is part of what constitutes place. Furthermore, Sennett (1990) argues that in places, that belong to no one (or everyone); people constantly want to leave a trace of themselves. This can be seen in the cultural trace of graffiti. In everyday actions, purposefully or not, traces are made that take and make place. As traces interlink, cultural orders and geographical borders are created which define and control the identity of place (Anderson 2010). This ordering and bordering creates traces that are either 'in place' or 'out of place' (Cresswell 1996). This interpretation of place means that every cultural act or cultural group is seen as either 'in place' or 'out of place' and cultural geographers should study if and why that cultural group or act is 'in place' or 'out of place'. For example, in 2010 three young men were accused of performing jihad terrorist training in a park in Blackburn (Mirror 2010). This act was deemed to be 'out of place'; however, children running

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around a park is seen as 'in place'. This interpretation of place creates the right and proper, whilst also creating the discrepant, and deviant for certain cultural groups. Moreover, it means that places can be divided and segregated, or related and united (Anderson 2010). Cultural geographers see these orders and borders as providing an identity, a perception of whom and where we are and more significantly gives us a sense of place (Agnew and Duncan 1989) or a sense of belonging. However, places and therefore sense of belonging are not always fixed and can also be seen as dynamic and evolving. This is because traces can combine from distant and local places, as well as from the past and present, where borders are crossed and orders change. This means that places are perceived as on-going arrangements of cultural traces, constantly changing, they are "never stabilised, normalised, sedimented or structured [rather] they are always in a process of dynamic unfolding and becoming" (Rose 2002, p. 385). Consequently, Anderson (2010) argues that, places are not 'nouns', not fixed solid things but 'verbs', they are doings, and are continuously active. The relationship between place and globalisation best illustrates this idea. If place is seen in a postmodern view as a process then Globalisation is natural and is just another agent that has changed place and sense of belonging, however, if place is seen as fixed, then diversity and globalisation are a threat as place and sense of belonging to that place are seen to be changing. It is clearly apparent how vital place is to culture. In taking and making place various cultural groups generate a range of traces that have the effect, purposefully or not, of arranging, managing, shaping, and transforming places in accordance with their belief agendas and political values (Anderson 2010). As Maxey (1999, p. 201) writes, the cultural world "is produced through the acts each of us engages

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with every day. Everything we do, every thought we have, contributes to the production of the social world." Each of these acts is a demonstration of power. Simplistically, therefore, power can be defined as the ability to act. As a consequence we all have a certain level of power; we can all leave traces in places. Traditionally, however, power has been considered as more than simply the power to act. Power has been traditionally considered as the power to influence others, to change what they do and where they do them (Weber 1994, Marx 2003). To exercise power in this sense, you can alter culture and transform places; you have the 'transformative capacity' (Foucault 1980, 1984). Cresswell (2000) argues that this 'transformative capacity' is the ability to transform the traces of others with the intention to achieve premeditated objectives. We all have a degree of power, nevertheless the power to transform how we think and act, and thus the power to create culture and place, has the overriding significance and not all of us have this. In every act that is made by a single person or a group there are always geographical implications (Anderson 2010). Orders are created, borders are put in place and traces are made. "Space is...the stuff of power" (Thrift 2000, p. 274) and it is only with geography and the taking and making of place, that power becomes noticeable, is exercised and has consequences. Power is therefore at the base of cultural geography, creating, stabilising and destroying orders and borders. The fight over space is consequently a result of cultural battles and space is also the vehicle of these battles. It is in place that power lives and exercised. Geographers by studying place can interpret power struggles and recognise who has the power to transform place and thus culture as well. However, as mentioned previously this power is not had by all and one interpretation of power is that

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it can be understood as a dyad of domination and resistance. The groups that do have this power are said to have the hegemonic 'dominating power' and the ones that don't have the 'resisting power'. Power can be understood as either dominating or resisting (Sharp et al. 2000). A dominating power attempts to control or force others. It can be material, symbolic or psychological and is articulated through social, economic, political and cultural relations and institutions, such as, patriarchy, racism and homophobia. This dominating power can engender inequality and affirm the interests of a particular culture at the expense of others to produce a hegemonic cultural doxa. In this way culture is always seen to be played out with a dominating power. This dominating power can legitimate the cultural world. It can have the power to define or the power to represent common sense. For instance, the dominating power defines the name of new buildings or what new nations should be called. This dominating of one cultural group over another can also be seen as colonisation (Fenster and Yiftachel 1997). External colonisation is where a foreign or invading state is the hegemonic power. For example, British invaded Australia and oppressed the aboriginals in an attempt for their culture to become the orthodox. Colonisation can also be seen as internal. This is the conflict between a state and a marginal culture within a nation. For instance, the state orders public space saying that skateboarders or hoodies are out of place in town centres, or the fact that homeless people are seen as out of place at central station in New York (Cresswell 1996). Conversely, power can also be interpreted as resisting power. This is the intentional seeking to oppose, challenge and dispute acts of domination (Anderson 2010, p. 60). Resisting power looks to change the traces of the dominating powers and destroy the cultural orthodoxy. It can

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come in many forms. On a small scale, examples would be not stopping at a red light or littering in public, both can be seen as purposefully violating cultural and geographical (b) orders. Resisting power seeks take and make place in a different way than that intended by the dominant. Resisting power can also be on a large scale too. The hegemonic value and meanings of place can be undermined and tested through resisting groups taking and making place through rallies, marches, demonstrations or revolutions. For instance, the anti-capitalist protesters used the space outside St. Paul's cathedral for their Occupy London camp, altering the use and meaning of this place to resist the dominating power of capitalism (BBC 2012). The black panthers salute at the 1968 Olympics by Tommie Smith and John Carlos was an act of oppressed African American resisting power against the dominating power of racism (Adams 2008). This example showed how the hegemonic use and meaning of the Olympic podium space was challenged. The same could be said for the resistance Rosa Parks showed when she refused to give her bus seat up for a white man in Montgomery, Alabama during the civil rights movement (BBC 2005). The ideals behind the dyad of resisting and dominating power are not always consistent. Dominating groups may not react to intentional transgressive activity and allow resistance to take and make place by unorthodox means. This may seem like a weakness, however, in the long term this is not the case. This activity is known as 'carnavalesque' (Cresswell 1996). This is the "temporal suspension, both ideal and real" of the conventional (b)orders or cultural society (Bakhtin 1984, p. 10). The carnival is a time when the dominating power licenses dissent and does not pay attention to deviancy, so that their doxa is the hegemonic power in the long run (Anderson 2010). This carnivalesque says something about the

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strategy of the dominating power. On one side, Anderson (2010) argues that possibly it is a mechanism that allows for a temporary letting off of steam that means that (b)orders would not be fully challenged in the future. On the other hand, as Shields (1991) argues, this strategy can be much more. They can provide the presentation of an alternative idealistic social arrangement, better than the previous one, which may lead to further transgressive traces and a much bigger issue. In conclusion,