

# **THE IMPLICATIONS OF POSTMODERNISM FOR SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY: A DISCUSSION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis considers the proposition that postmodernism holds important implications for geography education. Whilst the 'postmodern turn' is well established in geography, and there is a growing literature that discusses the relationship between postmodernism and education, there have been few discussions of the implications of postmodernism for school geography. The Introduction positions the study within a tradition of 'critical geography education' and provides an outline of the thesis. Chapter 1 discusses the various ways in which 'place' is used in recent debates within geographical and social theory and points to the implications for geography education. It is argued that geography educators should understand place as a shifting, unstable, polysemous concept. Chapter 2 argues that the school geography curriculum can be read as a 'curriculum of erasure', and that the potential exists to incorporate other knowledges, other geographies into the curriculum. Chapter 3 points the need for geography educators to recognise that consumer and media culture enact a cultural pedagogy, and calls for the development of pedagogical approaches that build upon these informal knowledges. The chapter argues for the development of a critical media literacy within geography education. Finally, in Chapter 4, some of the arguments of the thesis are used to consider how curriculum planning can reflect the concerns of postmodernism. A brief Conclusion is provided, which suggests that geography educators can use the opportunities provided by the postmodern turn in geography and education to develop challenging forms of school geography.

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## INTRODUCTION: POSTMODERNISM AND SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY

This study is about the implications of postmodernism for what might loosely be called 'critical geography education'. Postmodernism is a term that peppers the literature of geography journals, jostling for position along with a whole host of '-isms', but, at the time of writing, there have been few discussions of postmodernism and geography education (but see Bale 1996, Edwards 1996, Morgan 1996, Huckle 1997). In a sense this is not surprising, since in the last decade the work of geography teachers has been concerned with delivering a state-sanctioned version of geography which is increasingly divorced from developments in the wider discipline. However, as I seek to demonstrate in this study, arguments surrounding postmodernism have important implications for those teaching critical geography in schools.

According to Anderson (1989) researchers need to account for the background and biases they bring to their inquiry and set out the social and political forces shaping the social world studied. I am a white man, teaching geography at a sixth-form college, who has spent the last four years engaged in part-time research in the field of geography education. Whilst I recognise the problems of identifying distinct paradigms within geography and education, I consider my work as a geography educator as concerned with the 'emancipatory interest' (Johnston 1986) and 'social reconstruction' (Walford 1981, Slater 1996). Since 1991, when I took up study on the MA course 'Geography and Education' at the Institute of Education, I have been interested in the implications of postmodernism for education and the 'new cultural geography'. I thus read postmodernism in the light of my understanding of what might be called critical geography education.

### Critical Geography Education

Critical geography education seeks to build upon the emancipatory potential of critical research in geography. As Peet and Thrift (1989:xii) put it:

"in a world where millions of people are dying in famines or war, where more millions live in acute poverty and fear, and where there is an ecological crisis of grave proportions, it is surely important to hold on to that emancipatory vision. Here, at the cutting edge of capitalism, much new thinking and ideological facework remains to be done".

Critical geography education has a long history, and involves a variety of viewpoints and approaches. However, since the rise of 'radical geography' (see Peet 1977 for an introduction) the work of critical geography educators within British schools has been based on a number of assumptions. These are set out below.

*The critique of positivism.* While the school geography curriculum and textbooks are dominated

by positivism and there have been moves to restore 'commonsense' approaches to teaching and learning, there has developed an extensive critique of positivism in both geography and education, and a major task for researchers in geography education is to explore the possibilities afforded by a postpositivist era (Fien and Hillcoat 1996).

*The importance of values.* A second development is that we increasingly recognise that our ways of knowing are unavoidably situated and partial. Neo-Marxist theories of schooling have pointed to the importance of ideology as something within which people live their everyday lives. Awareness of this has allowed geography educators to develop approaches to teaching and learning that are sensitive to issues of race and gender, and recognise the Eurocentricity of much geographical theory.

*The use of critical social theory.* A third development is an increased awareness of the importance of a critical social science. Based on developments in radical geography, teachers working within this tradition are likely to draw upon critical social theories associated with feminism, neo-Marxism and environmentalism to design lessons which encourage students to reflect critically on forms of development that meet social needs and promote environmental welfare.

*The development of empowering pedagogy.* An important element in critical geography education is the idea that the ways in which students are taught is at least as important as, if not more important than, what they are taught. In its broadest sense, pedagogy is the process where students learn to construct their identities.

Many critical geography educators would accept the idea, derived from neo-Marxist educational theory, that schools are 'disciplinary institutions' on the model of factory production lines, prisons, and psychiatric hospitals (Donald 1992). Schools are involved in social reproduction, and offer little potential for the production of alternative images of social reality in order to challenge dominant ideologies. Capitalist schooling is unlikely to provide the basis for the revolutionary transformation of modern capitalist society. Teachers and students are the 'bearers' of structures, which means that simply to enter a classroom is to inhabit a relationship based on inequality and power. This structuralist approach suggests that teachers and students may think that they are sources of meaning and action but in reality their behaviour is determined by deep, hidden forces. In schools there is a hidden curriculum that favours certain ways of behaving and encourages certain attitudes towards society. Structuralist approaches to school knowledge suggests that the curriculum, rather than being an unproblematic, politically neutral and innocent representation of reality, reflects the interests of certain dominant groups. Schools represent part of a larger structure that places people in particular roles (as geography teachers and students for example), making them subjects of a larger, powerful system.

Other critical geography educators would suggest that the structuralist view of the work of

geography teachers tends to downplay the ability of individual teachers and students to make their own futures. Structuralism suggests that schools are unlikely to be sites in which the personal, political and planetary are in any way significantly negotiated and constructively integrated. These teachers, working in and around the fields of World Studies, environmental and development education, and Futures education suggest that, rather than simply accept things as they are, individuals have the ability to be active and creative, making interpretations of the world and acting to change it.

From its early dependence on neo-Marxist approaches, critical geography education has incorporated ideas from wider currents of critical theory. Huckle (1993) has discussed Habermas's theory of knowledge-constitutive interests. Habermas suggests that humans have developed three categories of interest which shape their forms of knowledge. The technical interest relates to the control and management of the environment and leads to empirical and positivist knowledge. The practical interest in understanding and participating in society through communication leads to interpretive or hermeneutic knowledge. Habermas rejects these two forms of knowledge in favour of critical knowledge which serves the emancipatory interest. Critical knowledge is free from ideology and distorted communication. Huckle (1993) argues that such critical theory should inform all geography education that seeks to develop autonomous individuals. Unwin (1992) has shown how Habermas's knowledge-interests have influenced the study and teaching of geography. He suggests that technical interests based on the predictive power of empiricism and positivism represent orthodoxy in geography education, but this orthodoxy has been challenged by hermeneutic and critical interests based on the goals of understanding and emancipation (similar arguments have been made by Huckle 1983, Johnston 1986, Bartlett 1989, and Fien 1993). Unwin (1992:206-7) suggests the implications for teaching geography of Habermas's theory. First, Habermas's theory suggests that there is no such thing as an objective world of facts to be uncovered. What are commonly accepted as facts are actually socially constructed, and as a result students need to be offered opportunities to question the 'truths' they are presented with. Since the vast bulk of geography teaching involves the passing on of facts, there is a need to redirect the purposes of teaching. Second, Habermas's theory suggests that education must have as its goal emancipation rather than conformity.

This brief outline of the work of critical geography educators provides the background to this study. Whilst the influence of this work has been minimal in that it has generally failed to influence the practices of the majority of school geography teachers, this study seeks to develop that tradition by building on arguments associated with postmodernism.

### **The challenge of postmodernism**

According to Dear (1994) whose 1988 paper on 'The Challenge of Postmodernism' can be regarded as a seminal contribution to the development of postmodern geography,

postmodernism 'constitutes the most profound challenge to three hundred years of post-Enlightenment thinking' (1994:2). Dear usefully identifies three senses in which postmodernism is discussed:

(1) Postmodernism as *styles* of literature and literary criticism which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s before spreading to the fields of design, painting, photography, and, especially, architecture.

(2) Postmodernism as an *epoch*, denoting a radical break with the past (see for example, Jameson 1984, Smart 1993).

(3) Postmodernism as a *method* which revolts against the rationality of modernism, attacks the foundational character of modernist thought, and eschews the notion that there exist universal truths or 'grand narratives' of society.

The present study is largely concerned with postmodernism as *method* (or as I tend to call it, critique), though some of the works cited are concerned with the idea that we are living in a 'condition of postmodernity' or postmodern epoch. For my part, I am not convinced that Western societies have undergone such a 'radical break', and would argue that there is no obvious or easy relationship between postmodernism as epoch and postmodernism as method. The postmodern method can be seen as a critique of the limitations of modernism.

Halfacree (1997:76) wryly observes that 'it has now become something of a truism that the definition of postmodernism varies so much that it is itself postmodern !' This suggests that offering a once-and-for-all definition of postmodernism risks prematurely closing its meanings. However, Fraser and Nicholson (1988:86) provide a definition of the postmodern condition:

"The postmodern condition is one in which 'grand narratives' of legitimation are no longer credible. By 'grand narratives' Lyotard means...overarching philosophies of history like the Enlightenment story of the gradual but steady progress of reason and freedom, Hegel's dialectic of the spirit coming to know itself, and, most importantly, Marx's drama of the forward march of human productive capacities via class conflict culminating in proletarian revolution".

The reference to Lyotard (1984) is important here, for he has famously described postmodernism as displaying an 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. Such grand narratives have sought to ground knowledge in a search for unity or authority. Seidman (1994:299 ) suggests that:

"Central to postmodernity is the abandonment of any basis for claiming certainty or for appealing to universal standards of truth, goodness, and beauty".

Postmodernism challenges the claim that knowledge holds the potential to emancipate people. It rejects the idea that theory can mirror reality and adopts a partial, relativistic viewpoint that stresses that all knowledge reflects the interests of its producers. For example, Foucault argues that knowledge does not overcome relations of power but is in itself a form of power. Thus, whereas Habermas argues that rational knowledge will lead to 'enlightenment', Foucault argues that knowledge leads to the establishment of mechanisms of surveillance and control. Knowledge is translated into ethnocentrism, sexism, and credentialism. The troubled legacy of the Enlightenment is increasingly documented by geographers (Gregory 1994, McDowell 1992, Pile and Rose 1992) and educators.

### Postmodern geographies

Dear (1994) suggests that although human geographers accepted the postmodern challenge thrown up by the use of the term 'space' in Jameson's (1984) seminal essay, in which he talked of 'hyperspace' and 'cognitive mapping', the traces of postmodernism were present earlier, as critical (or radical) geographers sought to refine neo-Marxist approaches. This position sees postmodernism as primarily a response to Marxist theory (see also Lather 1991), but O Tuathail (1996), taking postmodernism to signal the loss of Eurocentrism and history as a totalizing project, dates the 'postmodern disorientation of modern geography' to the publication of Yves Lacoste's *La Géographie, ça sert, d'abord, à faire la guerre* in 1976. With the publication of major treatments by Harvey (1989), Soja (1989) and Cooke (1990), geographers were increasingly drawn to consider postmodernism. Areas of study that were influenced by the 'postmodern turn' included: the cultural landscape, economic landscapes of post-Fordism, the problems of representation, the politics of postmodernity and their impact on feminist and postcolonial geographies, and the social construction of nature and environment. The first major treatment of postmodernism in a widely used introduction to geographical thought was provided in Cloke *et al.* (1991) who concluded that:

"...human geographers will increasingly come to recognise the gravity of the challenge that postmodernism as attitude poses to most conventional theorisations of the human world, and will begin to appreciate that a sensitivity to the geography of this world - to its fragmentation across multiple spaces, places, environments and landscapes - is itself very much bound up (and an impetus for) a postmodernist suspicion of modernist 'grand theories' and 'metanarratives'"(p.200).

Other introductions are provided in Unwin (1992), and Livingstone (1992).

### Postmodern education

Usher and Edwards (1994:24) argue that:

“Education does not fit easily into the postmodern moment because educational theory and practice is founded in the modernist tradition”.

Education has always been based on ideas of progress and reason that postmodernism seems to reject. Some versions of postmodernism would seem to be even less optimistic about schools as sites of resistance to capitalism. Schools are ‘disciplinary institutions’ tied up with a world of media hyper-reality and ideology. This would suggest that to search for liberating pedagogies and emancipatory politics is futile. There are no radical exits in a postmodern world of ‘banal education’. We are living in a world of mindless consumerism and endless advertising images. In such a world, the prospects for positive change are bleak. According to this view, even the politics associated with the green movement and the feminist movement are hopeless causes. Such forms of left-postmodernism suggest that teachers and students are basically dupes of media hyper-reality, and attempts to develop media literacy and other forms of social literacy in schools are doomed to failure. ‘Progressive’ educational developments associated with peace education, development education, feminist education and environmental education are written off as ineffectual. In short, teachers and students are caught within knowledge/power relations and there is little chance of significant change (Hutchinson 1996).

However, this characterisation of postmodernism-as-reaction can be contrasted with a postmodernism-as-resistance. Postmodernism-as-resistance has the potential to construct a vision of a pedagogy of race, class, and gender justice. It is used to challenge the modernist claim that there are essential ‘truths’ to be told about the world, and that there is an objective, knowable world that is accessible to all. Postmodernism-as-resistance has the potential to empower those people marginalized by race, class and gender to take back their histories, epistemologies and ways of making sense of the world (McLaren 1995).

This study is located at the boundary between emancipatory approaches to teaching and learning geography and the postmodern approaches that question the possibility of realising such goals. This tension runs through all the chapters in this study. The study is based on the belief that it will become increasingly difficult for geography educators to ignore questions about postmodernism in the future.

### Postmodern geography education ?

This study reflects the concerns of a geography educator who daily faces the challenge of making sense of the geography curriculum. The chapters that follow are informed by the postmodern critique. What this means is that I refuse to accept the claims to neutrality and the search for the ‘high ground’ of unbiased truth. I am afraid to say that I cannot live up to the ideal of the detached practitioner, employing ‘scientific methodology’ in order to impart correct geographical knowledge

to my students. Instead, I see all geographical knowledge as socially produced by people located by class, gender, race, sexuality and so on. This raises all sorts of questions about how to proceed in my work as a geography educator, since everyday I face students who want the 'truth' (as defined by examiners) and demand that I provide them with eviscerated forms of geographical knowledge. My solution to this dilemma is to engage in the 'deconstruction' of my work as a geography educator. What this means is that I have taken certain ideas and concepts such as 'place', 'the geography curriculum' and 'rurality' and read them alongside the literature of social theory, geography, and education. Thus, in chapter one, I show how there is no agreement as to how we understand 'places' in the postmodern condition. In chapter two, I read the geography curriculum as a 'curriculum of exclusion', highlighting the absences from dominant forms of school geography. This theme is developed in chapter three where I discuss popular culture as the 'other' of the geography curriculum, and call for a rethink of the content and pedagogy of the curriculum. Finally, I suggest how geography teachers can unravel our understandings of a common topic - in this case of rural England - and reconstruct that topic in order to multiply the perspectives and understandings that circulate in the classroom. These readings are presented as examples of an on-going engagement with a wide range of literatures in the belief that geography educators need to become intellectuals who contextualize, interpret, and create knowledge, always asking the question of what knowledge and for what purpose.

The remainder of this introduction sets out the major theme of each chapter.

### *A sense of place ?*

School geography plays its part in allowing students to place themselves in the world and gain a sense of perspective. In other words, school geography offers students stable representations or maps of meaning with which to make sense of the world. Pedagogy refers to the production of identity - the way we learn to see ourselves in relation to the world. For example, through the use of divisions such as 'developing' and 'developed' worlds, students learn to differentiate between 'them' and 'us'. They literally learn to place themselves in the world. Far from being a subject dedicated to describing innocently the world 'out there', in geography lessons places are given meanings which students can use to tell stories and define themselves. Thus place and identity are linked. The traditional story that students are taught is that they belong to an 'imagined community' - the nation. Thus students are taught British geography, they learn what is distinctive about this nation and its place in a world order.

However, the role of place in geography has recently assumed a new found importance. Books with titles such as **Place and the Politics of Identity** (Keith and Pile 1993), **The Question of Place** (Johnston 1991), and **In Place/Out of Place** (Cresswell 1996) testify to the importance of place. Similarly, the debates over the role of school geography in the curriculum have revolved around the role of teaching about places. This increased concern with the nature of



place comes at a time when there is a concern that places are being overwhelmed by changes in economic, social and cultural processes. One of the key arguments surrounding the postmodern is that our experience of place is undergoing significant changes in the wake of processes of globalisation and 'time-space compression', as the relations between the local and the global are constantly re-drawn, and such changes have implications for how we understand our place in the world. Rather than seeing places as clearly bounded and demarcated in time and space, there is a tendency to think about places as unbounded or at least having boundaries that are impermeable. In such circumstances, places 'are no longer the clear supports of our identity' (Robins and Morley 1993:5). Indeed some geographers have gone so far as to suggest that 'places do not exist in a sense other than culturally...[they] have no objective reality, only intersubjective ones' (Shurmer-Smith and Hannam 1994:13).

Chapter one is an attempt to outline some of the ways in which 'place' is conceptualised in debates within geography and consider their implications for school geography.

### *A world of others ?*

The 'revolution' in the late 1960s in higher education stemmed from a dissatisfaction with the narrowness of the subject dominated by positivist approaches and resulted in the emergence of alternative approaches such as humanistic geography, welfare geography and radical geography. These alternative approaches have influenced a minority of geography teachers. There is a strong tradition of ideology critique that questions the selective nature of the content of the geography curriculum. As I suggest in chapter two, this critical geography education was originally based on neo-Marxist theories of schooling, but later incorporated developments in anti-racist and anti-sexist education. The advent of the National Curriculum has made it more difficult to incorporate these perspectives in school geography, but recent developments in the 'new cultural geography' offer the possibility of developing new forms of critical geography education. Briefly, postmodernism rejects the idea that there is a straightforward relationship between the world and the words used to depict the world. This relatively simple idea has profound implications for the geography curriculum. Traditionally, the school geography curriculum has operated on the assumption of mimesis, which means that it is assumed to be like a mirror, reflecting the real world as it is. This is true even though there have been shifts in emphasis. In school geography the key shift has been from the 'capes and bays' and regional approaches which sought to provide accurate descriptions of particular places and features, to a more scientific approach based on the positivist search for generalisation. In all cases though, the concern was for the geographer to provide an accurate account of the world. In terms of the role of the geography teacher, these mimetic approaches suggest that there is a distinctive body of knowledge that makes up the geographic discipline which operates as the *curriculum-as-fact*. Even radical approaches to geography shared this concern with mimesis in their search for the real forces that underlie surface patterns.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s geographers have become interested in theorising about the ways in which we represent the world. Whereas previous approaches had assumed that there existed a fixed real world, external to the observer, which could be accessed by the geographer using appropriate methods, the 'new cultural geography' regards the world as a 'text'. Thus the landscape can be 'read' in exactly the same way as one might read a novel, or interpret a painting or film. The meanings of texts are not found in texts, but are produced in the act of reading. Thus different people, with different outlooks and experiences, will produce different meanings of the same text. In this situation, it is foolish to talk of the 'truth' or 'correct' interpretation. Our understanding is just one of many possible ways of understanding the text. This leads to the post-modern view that there is no privileged, superior way of looking at the world.

### *Consumer dreams ?*

Gilbert (1992), in a discussion of citizenship education in what he calls postmodern political culture, argues that if schools want to encourage young people to participate actively in society, they need to understand how the experiences of the young and their social location are represented to them by the cultures in which they live and those which they construct themselves. Dance, fast food, football, films and videos, TV, fashion, records and drugs all mark out the terrain on which young people construct their identities, yet contemporary schooling effectively treats the informal knowledges of youth culture as its 'other'. Postmodern culture is a consumer culture which points not only to the increased production of cultural goods as commodities, but also to the way in which the majority of cultural activities and signifying activities become mediated through consumption. Geographers have effectively ignored the 'geographies of youth cultures' (Skelton and Valentine 1998), and critical geography educators are likely to sympathise with McLaren's portrayal of a culture dominated by signs and images, in which young people seem unable to 'penetrate beyond the media-bloated surface of things, and dismiss concepts such as 'society', 'capitalism' and 'history' which are not immediately present to the senses'(1995:58).

However, in recent years, there has been a re-evaluation of the role of consumption and popular culture within cultural studies. Geographers have been involved in this movement and in chapter three I discuss the implications of this shift in thinking for geography education. In this chapter, the conflict between a neo-Marxist 'politics of distribution' and a postmodern 'politics of identity' is most explicit, and the chapter is intended to inaugurate a debate on these pressing issues.

### *Teaching postmodern geography ?*

The final chapter attempts to bring together the strands of the previous chapter and illustrate how the postmodern critique of the geography curriculum can inform teaching and learning. The

chapter takes one approach to teaching about a particular type of place -rural England - and subjects it to critique, suggesting how new pedagogical approaches are needed if arguments about postmodernism are to be taken seriously.

The four chapters that make up this thesis make no claim to exhaust the possibilities of postmodern critique. They represent an attempt to reflect upon aspects of geography education in the light of developments in the wider discipline of geography. In doing so, the thesis can be read as part of a long-standing tradition in which geography educators read, interpret and selectively adopt perspectives developed in the wider discipline.

## CHAPTER ONE: CHANGING PLACES ? TOWARDS A POSTMODERN GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION

### Introduction

In his book *In Place/Out of Place*, Cresswell (1996) tells the story of an old school friend who questioned his choice of geography for advanced study on the grounds that it was merely a matter of 'commonsense'. Geography was the 'science of the obvious'. One of the most striking features of recent debates in human geography is the way in which 'place' can no longer be seen as 'commonsense'. Geography educators have responded to calls to revive the study of place in school geography in recent years. In part this reflects a broad recognition that the rise of the 'new', quantitative geography tended to stress the search for general laws, based on a scientific methodology of hypothesis-testing and modelling. School geography was increasingly organised systematically, and the old regional geography was seen to be outdated and unscientific. The 'new' geography was based on the belief that the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world, as characterised by universal laws and principles. Increasingly, however, it is argued that place must be restored to its central position in school geography.

Place is a 'hot' theme in the wider discipline too. The emergence of the so-called 'new' cultural geography has transformed the study of place. The new cultural geography sees places as socially constructed, and is concerned with the ways in which we think about and construct our knowledge of the world. Liz Bondi (1993:99) argues that the 'geographical metaphors of contemporary politics must be informed by conceptions of space that recognise place, position, location and so on as *created*, as *produced*'. Cresswell (1996) shows how place is implicated in the creation and maintenance of ideological beliefs. He outlines the ways in which the way places are socially-constructed is ideological. Places, landscapes and regions appear static and bounded. Places appear to have a life of their own. Cresswell notes that geographers themselves have often assumed a naturalness about their subject, for instance when they considered regions as preexistent entities to be discovered and described. Only relatively recently have geographers taken up the task of describing the ways spaces and places are socially constructed. Harvey (1996) is clear on this issue: he argues that place is a social construct and that the only interesting question that can be asked is 'by what social process(es) is place constructed ?'.

This chapter is concerned with the question of place in geography education. It is an attempt to highlight the diversity of approaches to the study of place and argues that this diversity should be extended to the teaching and learning of geography in schools. When calls are made for geography educators to study particular places using particular methods, we should be wary. What does it mean though, to talk of places as socially constructed ? I would suggest that geography educators need to be concerned with two aspects of the social construction of places. First, we need to recognise that places are constructed through the operation of a range of

economic, social, political and cultural processes that operate at a variety of scales, and are both internal and external to particular locations. Second, we need to recognise that in teaching about the way particular places are constructed by these processes, teachers are actively involved in the construction of representations of these places. This suggests that the social construction of places cannot be seen as an innocent process. There are always political choices to be made in teaching about places.

In order to illustrate this idea, I want to suggest that the type of social and educational analysis that is a feature of geography teaching cannot be divorced from everyday power relations. The core curriculum for 16-19 year olds requires that students study one manufacturing industry. A popular example covered in textbooks is the textiles industry. In planning a series of learning activities on the textiles industry teachers will have in mind a variety of concepts and places which they will use to illustrate the key features of the industry at a variety of scales. One place to start is to study the role of the textile industry in a city or region in a developed country. This might involve an analysis of changing levels of employment in the industry in a city or region, and explaining the reasons for these changes. In Britain for instance, since the early 1980s, in cities decimated by the decline in employment in the traditional heavy industries, small units of production began to appear. These were often run by Asian men, armed with redundancy payments and a steady supply of cheap female labour drawn from the immediate Asian community. This was a low-investment sector of the economy, requiring little space, a few sewing machines, an electronic cutter, and a press. From this initial starting point, students might study the structure of the industry, which is dominated by multinational corporations, and is global in scope, with hundreds of countries competing for the market shares of a small number of importing countries. Giant retailers increasingly produce their own private brand labels in many of these countries, by-passing the manufacturer, the union shop and domestic worker. In the US for instance, more than 60 percent of garments sold are imported (mostly from Asian countries). Runaway plants are to be found in the *maquiladoras* of the Caribbean basin. Subcontracting is a fundamental principle of such post-Fordist production, based on the principle of just-in-time flexible production geared to increasingly specialised niche markets. There have been complex agreements governing the operation of the clothing industry, marked by the ability of the industry (up to the Uruguay Round of 1994) to avoid many of the key rules of GATT regarding free trade. However, the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) which sought to manage the trade flow from developing countries to Western markets is now being slowly phased out. The post-MFA free trade order will intensify patterns established over the last three decades whereby each of the core regions will be serviced by low-cost labour regions. As industries in the Newly Industrialising Countries have matured, driving the cost of labour up, countries like Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan have successfully established assembly operations in the least developed Asian countries -Vietnam, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and China.

Through such study, students would certainly learn a lot about the economic and political processes that operate across the globe and have particular impacts on people in different places.

However, a series of lessons based on these ideas cannot be presented as innocent of politics or as telling the whole story about the textile industry. There are lots of ideas and aspects of the textile industry and its operations that are ignored. For example, the focus in this approach is on places and practices of production rather than consumption, with the effect that focusing, for instance, on the labour conditions faced by women workers in the industry risks seeing these exploited workers as existing only as producers and never as consumers themselves. The effect is to 'culturally deprive' these women and thus emphasise only their status as 'victims of capitalism', when in fact most of these women's lives may be based on noncapitalist social relations (McRobbie 1997; Gibson-Graham 1996). In addition, a whole series of other geographies tend to be ignored in geography lessons. Thus, whereas the approach outlined above focuses on the local, regional and global scales, there is hardly any discussion of the scales of the body and the home, even though the textiles industry is geared towards providing garments which serve to produce these scales (Longhurst 1995; Cream 1995). For example, fashion is all about the body - in terms of the way we think about the clothes we wear and our bodies, and about body shape and image. When the British 'supermodel' Kate Moss appeared on advertising hoardings graffiti appeared which said 'Feed me', a reference to her 'anorexic' look. The watch manufacturer Omega banned such thin models from its press adverts. Similarly, the scale of the home has been relatively neglected by geographers, though recently feminist geographers have unpacked the gender divisions of labour within the home. A recent advert for Ben Sherman shirts had the words 'Washing instructions' next to a youth with a shirt shouting 'Mum, wash my shirt', which raises important questions about issues of social reproduction in the home. Clothing can become the focus of conflicts between generations as arguments ensue over what is 'proper' dress. Similarly, fashion and clothing play important roles in the constitution of community. Geography lessons tend to ignore questions about who wears what and why, and the role of clothing in the construction of identities and so on. McDowell (1995) provides a fascinating case study of the importance of dress codes in the City of London. In his ethnographic account of the 'new wave girls' in an English secondary school, Blackman (1998) shows how dress-codes were used to distinguish between them and us and foster a distinctive group identity. It is also interesting to note the way fashion attempts to create certain forms of community. This raises important issues about the cultural politics of the textiles industry. For instance, in the US the clothing company Timberland recently published a series of advertisements that deliberately played on associations with whiteness, worried that its clothes were becomingly overly associated with Afro-American youth. On the other hand, Tommy Hilfiger, producing preppy-clean clothes has deliberately sought the 'black dollar' by paying black celebrities to wear the clothes in public and alter its designs to make them more hip-hop. In the city we have a concentration of capital and resources devoted to social production, consumption and administration. In terms of fashion and clothing this amounts to a concentration of choice - the Western city is characterised by an astonishing variety of outlets for fashion - from the magazine covers that line the shelves of newsagent, through advertising hoardings, street sellers hawking copies of the latest fashions, to exclusive boutiques with minimalist decoration - we should also remember that such places are

often important employers of a youthful, cheap, pliable and nonunionised labour force (Lowe and Crewe 1996). All these are important aspects of the textiles industry that are generally ignored in the geography curriculum, even though they have the potential to connect directly with the lives of young people (Bale 1996).

This set of examples is offered in order to make the point that geography teachers are not simply reflecting the world as it exists 'out there' in their lessons. Instead, they are involved in the active construction of the world. Planning a series of lessons on the textiles industry involves answering a whole set of questions about the scales at which the industry is to be examined, what social processes are to be emphasised, what (whose ?) knowledge is to be privileged and what is to be ignored, what language is to be used to represent these relations and so on. All this is before any attempt is made to make links between the various scales (see Neil Smith's 1993 discussion of the politics of scale). Such links may adopt a moral or ethical dimension. For instance, students may begin thinking about the relationship between the body and the global as expressed in the rise of ethical consumerism. This may involve buying only clothes that have been produced in conditions of dignified labour and where workers get a fair wage for their work, sending used or secondhand clothing to people overseas (bizarrely, the trend towards 'Ugly chic' marked by painfully thin models, and ragabond clothing has been praised for showing a solidarity with the poor and downtrodden !). Alternatively the scale of the community may be used as a resistance to forms of globalising influences through, for example, Oxfam's 'clean clothes' campaign or resistance to Disney's business practices.

What these accounts of the various scales from the body-home-community-city-region-nation-global suggest is that when we study a topic such as the textiles industry we are tapping in to a complex pattern of material, social and imaginative relations. It becomes difficult to separate them all out. Issues of race, gender, class and sexuality are wrapped up in them all, and prioritising one scale over the others, or one social process as being more important is a political choice. Teaching about places is never innocent of social relationships that reflect divisions of gender, race, and class (a point that informs all the chapters in this study). In what follows, I discuss some different perspectives on the nature of place which have recently been discussed in geography and the social sciences, and outline their implications for geography teaching. I make no claim to offer a comprehensive account of the ways in which 'place' is discussed. As Harvey (1996) points out, the term 'places' carries a surfeit of meanings. Thus there are words such as milieu, locality, location, neighbourhood, region and territory which refer to the generic qualities of place, terms such as city, village, town, megalopolis and state which refer to particular kinds of places, and other terms such as home, turf, community and nation which have strong connotations of place. All this means that the term 'place', which we are urged to put at the centre of our work in schools, is marked by a confusion of meanings. When geography educators talk about cultivating within students a 'sense of place', we need to consider what exactly is meant.

## Approaches to the study of place

In the discussion which follows, there are five ways in which places are conceptualised:

1. Place as a clearly defined, bounded space which is characterised by a degree of cohesion and commonality. People living within such places have a clear identity and 'sense of place'.
2. Places as the product of capitalist accumulation. These processes of economic accumulation determine the character of the place.
3. Places as essentially 'placeless'.
4. Places as multiple and fragmented.
5. Places as sites of social and cultural contestation, where people are responding to change in an effort to re-figure their identities.

There are obviously overlaps between these different conceptualisations of place, and different ideas about place may be found in the same classroom or programme of study. The purpose is to make the basis on which we talk about places transparent, in order to encourage debate and discussion.

*(1) Place as a clearly defined, bounded space which is characterised by a degree of cohesion and commonality. People living within such places have a clear identity and 'sense of place'.*

In his address to the Geographical Association in Southampton in April 1996, Dr Nicholas Tate urged geography teachers to teach a distinctly 'British' geography. He suggested that while geography lessons should encourage a global sense of identity in relation to environmental issues, this should not prevent students developing their sense of national identity. Tate argued that:

"A world of social and geographical mobility, frequent job changes and family breakdown is a world in even greater need of those things that bind people into distinctive communities" (quoted in Times Educational Supplement, April 19th 1996).

Tate expanded on these comments in an article in the **Times Educational Supplement** (April 19th 1996). He argued that 'we have heard relatively little about purposes of education that relate to the way in which it can contribute to social cohesiveness, to maintaining, transmitting, and if necessary rebuilding a sense of community'. Tate sees education as a vehicle through which a sense of identity with the local community is to be promoted:

"Most people spend most of their time in and around the place where they live. Many people, despite increased mobility, still do not move very far from where they were brought up or, if they do, form close attachments to the other parts of the country where they have settled".



In the face of increased social mobility, high rates of family dissolution, the disappearance of the once taken-for-granted 'job for life' and the perceived threat to the nation-state from economic globalisation, local attachments or a local sense of place can play a key role in helping individuals cope with the changes they experience. According to Tate, this sense of local identity has three main elements: a sense of the distinctiveness of a particular place, a sense of identification with that place, and a sense of belonging to a community with shared purposes. In this sense, geography education has a part to play in a wider project of social integration.

In talking about a 'sense of place', Tate's comments appeal to geography teachers, who have often defined the specific role of geography education as cultivating an appreciation of a 'sense of place' in children. However, there is a tendency to treat terms such as 'locality', 'place' and 'community' as neutral and transparent, when in fact such terms are highly contested. Tate's arguments are in part based on a fear of people having little or no attachment to locality, in effect being 'placeless', an argument reminiscent of Richard Hoggart's **The Uses of Literacy** (1957). Hoggart's book was a reflection on his working-class childhood in Leeds, and an important theme was the gradual disappearance of authentic working-class culture under the influence of the mass media. Against this, Hoggart emphasised the deep sense of belonging to the local area that was created by a shared class background, resilience in the face of hardship, and a geographically limited set of social activities. The same concern is found in the writings of Raymond Williams. In his novel **Border Country** Williams (1973) deals with the processes whereby places bound together through tradition and human connections are re-created and destroyed by an increasingly mobile capitalism (Harvey 1996). Cresswell (1997:373) notes that Williams's 'moral geography is one of mobile threats to rooted struggling communities'. Tate's concerns with locality, community, nationhood and sense of place echo the work of other writers and are of direct concern to geography teachers who are urged to develop within students a 'sense of place'. Tate presents a sense of place that he believes appropriate in the contemporary era of globalization.

Whilst Tate's comment suggest that he thinks there is a single, simple relationship between people and locality, geographers have come to recognise the complex ways in which places and identity are linked. For example, Gillian Rose (1995) in an essay on the links between place and identity, outlines three ways in which emotions about places can be linked to the notion of identity. First, it is possible to identify *with* a place, to feel that you belong to that place in that you 'feel at home'. She cites the geographer Relph, who claimed that 'to be human is to know your place'(Relph 1976:1 in Rose 1995:89). Rose notes that strong feelings of identification with a place may occur at a variety of scales, from the home to the local, region and nation, through the supranational scale (Europe, for example) to the global. Second, it is possible to identify *against* a place. People can establish their sense of place and who they are by contrasting themselves with somewhere they feel is different from them. She illustrates this using the example of Said's (1978) **Orientalism** which shows how European perceptions of 'the Orient' were used to establish a

moral distance and enable a sense of what was 'the West'. Third, a particular sense of place may be felt to be *irrelevant* to identity. Thus, it is often argued that it is difficult for people to feel 'European' because this might be less important than feeling 'English' or 'German'. Again, it may be difficult to feel much about a place if you are a stranger there.

Rose's account suggests that senses of place can be complex, and implies that we need to think carefully what is meant by claiming to teach for a sense of place. Rose points out that a sense of place may be articulated through a variety of sources, ranging from novels, paintings, music, films, adverts, the built and farmed environments, and everyday conversations. Students will likely have different senses of place, some will be intensely local, others may be simultaneously local and global. Some will have their identities wrapped up in a sense of belonging to a particular place, while others may have a sense of place established through a contrast with a place considered foreign. Different students will undoubtedly have different interpretations of the same place, and given the range of possible ways of having a sense of place, what attitudes should teachers have towards 'sense of place'. Tate's comments at the Geographical Association suggest that his understanding of it appears relatively unproblematic. Tate seems to understand a 'sense of place' as somehow natural, accessible to everyone, and desirable. He does not consider the way in which sense of place may be constructed or explained. He seems to adopt the view that wanting to belong to a place is a natural human attribute, that there exists what is sometimes called the 'territorial instinct' or intrinsic attachment to locality or place. This type of explanation tends to naturalize people's 'need' to belong. Against this, social and cultural geographers would argue that a sense of place is constructed by and in relation to underlying structures of power, in the same way that geographers have increasingly realised that there is no such thing as 'scale', other than as a social construction (N. Smith 1993).

In his speeches and articles Tate has persistently returned to the theme of 'belonging' and 'nationhood', and the call to teach a distinctively 'British geography' follows in the wake of calls to put the English language, literature and Christianity at the centre of the school curriculum. Ken Jones (1997) has discussed Tate's vision of cultural politics in an essay about the question of nation and tradition in the school curriculum. To make his argument, Jones presents a piece of writing from a year-10 student in a North London school, as part of her autobiography for a GCSE assignment:

*"My mother explained to me what happened on the day when I was born:*

*'When I was pregnant with you, I went for six months to another village in Batman. Its called Kozluk. On the night you were born your father went to your uncle's house to sleep, because the farm was a bit far from our house, and in the morning the sheep were going to market and he was going to get up early...*

*'And you were born on that day-correctly, in the middle of that night. And someone went to tell your father that you had been born and you were a girl'.*

*My father explained what happened when that man arrived there to tell him that I had been born:*

*'I slept and I saw my mother. I never saw her in my life because when I was born she died, because of me. I killed her and that's why I hate myself, a bit. She said. "Your daughter Yuksel is born today. She's going to be a nice girl, and you have to look at her very nicely. You should think that she is me". And when the man came to tell me that you were born, I said before he spoke, "It's a girl". And I forgot about everything - about farm, sheep and myself. And I am still calling her mother because of my mother who said, "You have to look at her as me", and I am doing that..."*

This is a startling and powerful piece of writing, and it is very *geographical*, in that telling the story of the events surrounding her birth links Yuksel closely to the notion of home. From the narrative we can infer a certain kind of society. The retelling of family tales serves to link the youngest generation to family histories, so that the daughter is seen as the very image of the grandmother. The telling of tales, the belief in the truthfulness of dreams, and the economic patterns of agricultural and village life, suggests a 'traditional' society.

But this reading of the text is only a partial one. The events that led to Yuksel writing this piece in a North London school are linked to one of the greatest social and demographic changes of the post-war period, as millions of peasants have become city dwellers, either in their own countries, or in the large cities of the West (Hobsbawm 1994). The type of communities depicted in Yuksel's account have not been recreated in the cities, where the migrants, on the whole, lack jobs, stable homes and legal rights. As Jones points out, in Yuksel's case, it is the second reading that best tells the story of her life:

*"She is Kurdish, from Turkey. Her farm was burnt by soldiers and all the animals were killed. Her father was imprisoned for two years; he was tortured. He left for London, and the status of a refugee. Later, Yuksel and her mother joined him. In doing so, they left traditional society, probably for ever. 'I never asked to come here', Yuksel wrote, but she does not think she can go back"(Jones 1997:152).*

These experiences can be considered as linked to processes of globalization. Yuksel's cultural experience is hybrid: it includes her family, her memories of Turkey and the stories she was told. It also includes pop videos, some knowledge of Marxist texts, debates about the meaning of Islam, marches against asylum laws, and romance. And against this, Yuksel and her friends are to face a cultural form- the National Curriculum- that is to integrate them, and provide them with a sense of

place based on 'Englishness'. How far can such a project meet the needs of students such as Yüksel ?

Jones then turns to the cultural politics of the position espoused by Nicholas Tate. Tate is concerned with the protection of stable identities and cultures, particularly those of the nation-state, in a world where economic globalisation, the communications and information revolution have the potential for undermining these identities. Education has the potential to act as a bulwark against these changes. Jones (after Giddens 1994) considers Tate to be a 'neoconservative' who accepts the existence of the capitalist order, but who is concerned that it is leading to destruction of the traditional symbols and practices on which a meaningful social life depends:

"Neoconservatives, therefore, set themselves the task of establishing or bolstering practices and institutions which can provide cultural and social defences against the continuous upheavals of economic life. Central to this work, in the view of many neoconservatives, is the attempt to establish authoritative, nation-centred value systems"(Jones 1997:153).

Jones' argument helps us to make sense of Tate's concern with teaching a 'British Geography'. It can be seen as part of his wider project to establish a 'common culture' whose features are strongly Anglo-Centric. All children in England must have English language at the centre of their curriculum, they need to be introduced to the English literary heritage, to English history, to Christianity, and now, to English or 'British' geography. In all this Tate is mindful of the forces that are serving to undermine the notion of 'Englishness' and worries about the rise of cultural relativism.

Tate's call for a return to teaching for a sense of place based on a known, close-knit locality is simply one possible response to the globalised conditions in which we all live. Tate appears to call for a sense of place that assumes that places are characterised by their separateness, by the fact that boundaries can be drawn around them and that people's identities can be seen as grounded in such places. In fact Tate's approach to the study of places comes closest to the way in which most textbooks and syllabus guides conceptualise place. Since the decline of regional geography in the 1970s, places have been studied mostly in relation to themes studied in physical, human and environmental geography. It is rare for geography syllabuses to specify places to be studied. Most often places are studied as case studies to illustrate the themes that are being studied. Healey and Roberts (1996) summarise the advantages and disadvantages of this approach. Students can study a variety of places at a range of scales from all over the world, and this can lead to greater general knowledge of the world. In addition, teachers can build into their teaching any special interests or links developed with particular places. However, this approach can lead to students studying places at a fixed spatial scale, such as a small scale study of a shanty town or a regional study of a rainforest. This means that students are unable to see the links between the local, regional and global scales. Also, places tend to get studied only as

illustrations of particular themes. For instance, India for population change, Brazil for rainforest destruction, California for high-tech industry. In such circumstances, the complicated relationships between political, social, economic and cultural processes is lost.

Aside from questions of the appropriate coverage of places, there are issues of how place is conceptualised. Since place is seen as a physical concept - a differentiated segment of the earth's surface- Tate can call for geography teachers to teach about Britain as an unproblematic reality. This is a form of 'empiricism' that accepts that places exist and is content to define and describe them. It implies that the task for geographers is to come up with ever more accurate, detailed and realistic pictures of the world. Harley (1992) has argued that one of the effects of the development of more sophisticated digital cartography and geographical systems is to strengthen positivist assumptions. This is apparent in Walford and Haggett's (1995) deeply depressing reflections (for this geography teacher) on geography in the twenty-first century, in which they imply that more sophisticated ways of mapping the world can by-pass all the awkward questions raised in the last thirty years by critical geographers. Harley's work is a useful antidote to such thinking because it reminds us that the portrayal of places as standardised and homogenous can be seen as a process of 'normalisation'. Thus the concern to describe the main features of places such as transport networks, leisure facilities, and places of work suggests that this is all that is really important about places, effectively excluding other ways of seeing or representing the world.

In summary, Nicholas Tate's call for a more distinctly British geography can be seen as one possible response to the increasingly globalised conditions in which nation-states such as Britain find themselves. Tate's analysis suggests that our sense of place, of who we are, is in danger of being eroded, and that the education system can be used to foster that sense of belonging needed in a world of constant flux. For many writers (and I would suggest Tate is one of these) these changes have produced 'a feeling of disorientation, a sense of the fragmentation of local cultures and a loss, in its deepest meaning, of a sense of place' (Massey 1992:7).

*(2) Places as the product of capitalist accumulation. These processes of economic accumulation determine the character of the place.*

Whilst Tate seeks to understand places as natural (organic), bounded, clearly defined entities, radical geographers have understood places as the product of processes of capitalist accumulation. In **The Condition of Postmodernity** (Harvey 1989), the Marxist geographer David Harvey has written about the transformations of space and place associated with the advent of postmodernity. **The Condition of Postmodernity** is a study of the relationship between representations of space and time and the material practices of capitalism. Harvey dates a sea-change in the political economy of advanced capitalism in 1973 ushering in a shift from an older regime of accumulation based on Fordism to one based on flexible accumulation. According to

Harvey, this new regime is characterized by flexibility with respect to labour processes and markets, products and patterns of consumption. It is marked by a move away from assembly-line production to smaller-scale 'just-in-time' production, and there is greater mobility of capital as firms switch production to zones of easier labour control. Other features of this regime include mergers, the increasing centralisation of ownership, intensified rates of innovation and the increasing autonomy of banking and finance capital.

None of this is particularly surprising. After all, capitalism is well known for its periods of what Schumpeter (1942) called 'creative destruction'. What makes this latest transformation of capitalist social relations so disturbing is the intensity and depth of this new burst of 'time-space compression'- the speeding up of global processes so that the world feels smaller and distances shorter. As Harvey describes it:

"As space appears to shrink to a 'global' village of telecommunications and a 'spaceship earth' of economic and ecological inter-dependencies- to use just two familiar and everyday images- and as time horizons shorten to the point where the present is all there is, so we have to cope with an overwhelming sense of compression of our spatial and temporal worlds"(Harvey 1989:240).

Harvey makes clear the material consequences of these changes by noting that whole landscapes have had to be destroyed in order to make way for the creation of the new landscapes of accumulation. He identifies two primary responses to time-space compression. The first is an interest in the 'Enlightenment project of universal human emancipation in a global space bound together through mechanisms of communication and social intervention'(p.271). The emphasis here is on unity, similarity and generalisation. The other response resists such unifying spatial practices, stressing instead themes of fragmentation and diversification. This version emphasizes the uniqueness of place in the face of homogeneity. Harvey notes that:

"The more global interrelations become, the more internationalized our dinner ingredients and our money flows, and the more spatial barriers disintegrate, so more rather than less of the world's population cling to place and neighbourhood or to nation, region, ethnic grouping, or religious belief as specific modes of identity"(1996:246).

From this perspective, the rise of local place-bound identities since the 1960s can be linked with the latest round of time-space compression as capital has increasingly adapted itself to exploit the qualities of mobility and fragmentation. It has been well documented that Harvey regards these place-bound identities as politically problematic (Massey 1994, Gregory 1994). Though they may start out as oppositional movements, they soon become part of the very fragmentation that capitalist firms organised within a regime of flexible accumulation can feed upon. In the confusion of time-space compression, there is a crisis of identity:

"Who are we and to what space/place do we belong ? Am I a citizen of the world, the nation, the locality ?"(Harvey 1996:246).

An analysis that can be read alongside Harvey's account of the condition of postmodernity is Frederic Jameson's (1984) essay, 'Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism' which provided the touchstone for a postmodern geography. He argues that from the 1960s the world economy entered the age of late multinational capitalism, in which multinational corporations have come to dominate the world economy and capitalism has become established on the world stage. The sheer economic power of these multinational corporations is organized and transmitted by economic means, and enables a form of almost instantaneous communication. This allows commodities to circulate at ever faster rates with the help of the mass media, which operates as a giant machine generating a desire for commodities. For Jameson, these changes have led to the emergence of a new spatial order, in which the old tensions between city and country, core and periphery have been replaced by the suburb, the shopping centre, and the freeway - a form of shopping centre capitalism designed to stimulate consumption. Jameson argues that the cultural form that dominates this era of late capitalism is best described as 'postmodernism'. He suggests that these economic shifts have led to changes in the way people experience the world. A 'new-fangled man' has appeared who is lost in a web of 'communication without end'. Jameson observes the loss of coherent human expression marked by the 'loss of affect' or feeling for 'others', the loss of interpretive skills that allow people to unearth the deeper meaning or truth behind an image, sign or action, and a loss of historical perspective which has logic or meaning. Instead, history is reduced to a collection of images whose purpose is to aid commodity production by acting as sources for present-day copies. According to Jameson, this postmodern culture reduces the capacity of people to be critical. In a world of electronic media, we have more information, but less knowledge. Information soundbites stand in for knowledge, so people plunder history for images, pasting and sticking, and making collages. People are losing their older senses of perception, and as a result, are losing their sense of place in the world. It is in this context of disconnection and confusion that Jameson calls for 'new cognitive maps', for a cartography that will allow people to 'begin to grasp our positioning as individual or collective subjects' (Jameson 1984:88).

Jameson builds his account on the Marxist scheme of Mandel (1975) as seeing postmodernism as the cultural dominant of late capitalism, which has replaced the cultural modernism of monopoly capitalism, for in making this analysis Jameson reveals his commitment to a 'surface-depth' model of society. In postmodernism, this critical distance has been lost. Jameson's depiction of postmodern culture is similar to that of the French social theorist Jean Baudrillard (1988a) in highlighting the overloading of signs and images, which has given rise to a depthless world of simulation where the gap between the real and the copy has been effaced. But whereas

Baudrillard sees no escape from this world and thus advocates pushing it to its extremes, Jameson wants to draw back from it and explain and criticize it from his Marxist perspective.

In both Jameson and Harvey's accounts, we get a sense of the postmodern feeling of depthlessness and fragmentation and instantaneity that accompanies globalisation (or in Harvey's terms 'time-space compression'). Other commentators make similar observations. For instance, Thrift (1994a) argues that the dominant 'structure of feeling' in the late twentieth century is one of 'mobility'. In this structure of feeling the modernist sense of progress is lost. Both Jameson and Harvey appear to have a sense of feeling overwhelmed by the speed and power of the late capitalist world. They speak of a disorientation and bewilderment at the cultural manifestations of postmodernity. However, there are some problems with these visions of late capitalist society. These accounts are very much a 'view from the top'. They are deeply pessimistic in that they tend to see consumers as being in the thrall of commodity capitalism, as the victims of mass culture. A second problem is that although Jameson and Harvey pay a lot of attention to the way in which space serves in the reproduction of modern capitalism, they fail to see space as an arena of contest and conflict. A final problem with such accounts are their pessimism and alienation. At times these accounts of postmodern society are so totalising and the outlook so bleak that there appears to be no possible way out. Both Jameson and Harvey are worryingly blind to new forms of politics that may be emerging in late capitalism. In the end, as Fred Pfeil (1988:264) so eloquently puts it, the reader is left with the feeling that there is nothing left to do but wait 'to catch the next Kondratieff wave'. Reed (1992: 155) also reminds us that while all of us may be caught up in the webs of postmodern cultural dominant, some of us may be less tangled up than others ('webs are, after all, traps riddled with holes'). Harvey rails against fragmentation and pines for the simple narrative of historico-geographical change that 'must surely be our goal'. He recognises that there are different perspectives on the world, but suggests that the task is to show how these visions can be seen as part of a grander whole. Harvey suggests that his theory is an accurate and valid representation of the capitalist world (another influential account of this story is provided by the geographer Ed Soja in **Postmodern Geographies** (1989)).

The versions of this story about the ways in which places are washed of their authentic character (Zukin 1991) and identity in the wake of the machinations of global capitalism have the advantage of correcting a major problem with Tate's notion of place in that they see places in their global context, in a world-economy that respects no political borders. Jameson, Harvey and Soja stress changes in the nature of places in the face of shifts in the world economy. In fact, Harvey suggests that **The condition of postmodernity** was an attempt 'to see how far postmodernism can be understood simply by relating it to the new experiences of space and time generated in response to the political-economic crisis of 1973' (Harvey 1996:245). The clear message for geographers who want to understand the nature of places and the changes that are impacting upon them is to look no further than the political-economy of late capitalism, everything else tends to distract from the real causal processes. For example, Harvey (1993) discusses the case of the small town of



Hamlet, North Carolina, where a chicken-processing plant was run by a company in the 1980s. It was organized on Fordist lines, with mass production, and low cost workers. North Carolina is part of the 'Broiler Belt' where agricultural incomes are dominated by the industry, and in some states, the industry is the leading employer and producer of wealth. The working conditions in the industry are poor. Salmonella contamination is a danger, pollution is a problem, and conditions of production for the animals are appalling. In September 1991, the Imperial Foods plant at Hamlet caught fire. Many of the exit doors were locked. Twenty five of the 200 workers were killed and a further 56 were seriously injured. Subsequent investigation by journalists revealed that workers were paid wages that were below the official poverty line, but lack of alternative opportunities meant that any kind of job was better than no job.

Harvey points out that North Carolina actively promotes itself to investors through touting its low wages, a friendly business climate and 'right-to-work' legislation that keeps the unions at bay. This 'friendly business climate' is reflected in not enforcing laws on occupational health and safety. The Hamlet plant had not been inspected in 11 years in operation, and there were no fire extinguishers, no sprinkler system, and no safety exit doors. Harvey reflects on the significance of this case. First, this is a *modern* industry whose employment conditions rival Karl Marx's chapter on 'The Working day' in **Capital** (published 1867). Second, the example reminds us of the industrial restructuring occurring in small-town settings in the United States which have left behind an isolated industrial reserve army which is vulnerable to exploitation. Rather than the flexibility supposedly associated with post-Fordist production, conditions in these places are essentially pre-Fordist. Third, the example draws attention to the dismantling of many of the traditional working-class forms of power. New investment in rural and small-town settings is seeking out nonunionized and pliable work forces.

Harvey advocates an education that makes clear the oppressive social relations that characterize capitalism in its regime of 'flexible accumulation'. His account would suggest that the best response from an educational point of view would be to develop a critical form of education that would allow students to get a sound historical and theoretical understanding of the political, economic and social forces that shape human geography. The emphasis would be on the economic and political systems that provide the major forces operating in the contemporary world. An example of this approach is provided in Huckle's **What We Consume** project (Huckle 1998) which attempts to reveal the economic and social relations that underpin production. Huckle's work reminds geography educators that beneath the surface appearances of everyday life, there are deeper forces at work that structure our experiences. The task for a radical geography education is to reveal these forces, to introduce students to theoretical concepts and ideas that will allow them to make sense of the world. A neo-Marxist geography education would suggest that the best response to the dislocation and fragmentation wrought by 'time-space compression', which has led (some) people to worry about their sense of place, is to abandon the search for place and develop a better understanding of space. Harvey is worried about the retreat into pre-

modern place-bound identities associated with the contemporary era, as illustrated by the apparent rise in xenophobia and a reactionary politics of place as people search for old certainties. The important thing is to reveal the underlying processes that determine economic landscapes. A concern with other dimensions of social life, though interesting, diverts attention from the really important processes. This argument has been made by educators such as Cole and Hill (1995), who argue against what they see as a tendency among some educators to abandon the explanatory accounts provided by Marxism in favour of difference. Harvey strongly defends the validity of Marxist analysis (what he calls an 'historico-geographical materialist analysis').

### *(3) Places as essentially 'placeless'.*

The notions of place discussed so far have expressed their concern about the ways in which changes in the contemporary world are undermining our ability to locate ourselves in time and space. However, there are other accounts that, though sharing much of the analysis of the causes of these changes, see them more optimistically. These would include Baudrillard (1988) and Lyotard (1984) who advise us to revel in the diversity and ephemerality of the postmodern condition, and have abandoned the hope that we can discover a deeper meaning, reason or order to the world. Scott Lash and John Urry (1994) in their book **Economies of signs and space**, state that, 'Disorganized capitalism disorganizes everything. Nothing is fixed, given or certain..' (1994:10-11). Lash and Urry (1987, 1994) have provided detailed accounts of the way in which our experience of space and time is changing. They propose a threefold periodization of capitalism. In nineteenth century 'liberal' capitalism the circuits of capital more or less operated on the level of locality or region. In the second phase of 'organized' capitalism, money, capital, commodities and labour came to circulate increasingly on a national scale. The advanced Western economies experienced the appearance of the large bureaucratic firm as commodity markets, capital markets and even labour markets took on a national significance. In the latest stage of 'disorganized' capitalism, this circulation increasingly takes place on an international scale. Thus, money, capital, commodities and people circulate over routes of greater and greater distance, but with increasing speed and frequency. Lash and Urry (1994: 2-3) argue that this transformed political economy is both 'post-Fordist'- in that it succeeds the era of mass consumption and production- and postmodern :

"The faster circulation of objects is the stuff of 'consumer capitalism'. With an ever quickening turnover time, objects as well as cultural artifacts become disposable and depleted of meaning. Some of these objects, such as computers, television sets, VCRs and hi-fis , produce many more...signs... than people can cope with. People are bombarded with signifiers and increasingly become incapable of attaching 'signfields' or meanings to them.. people are overloaded by this bombardment of the signs of the city, people become blase. In this sense, of increased profusion and speed of circulation of cultural artifacts, postmodernism is not so much a critique or a

radical refusal of modernism, but its radical exaggeration. Postmodernism hyperbolically accentuates the process of increased turnover time, speed of circulation and the disposability of subjects and objects”.

This admittedly vertiginous statement shows a concern with the loss of critical distance and loss of temporal and spatial bearings. However, Lash and Urry are much more optimistic about the possibilities all this affords.

**Economies of Signs and Space** (1994) sketches the outline of an emerging society of signs and space, where signs increasingly replace things, and objects -both people and images - are caught up in a ceaseless worldwide flow. This globalized economy of signs and space leads to the ‘emptying out’ of meaning from objects, and the declining influence of traditional social structures (such as the nuclear family, organized religion , class) and their replacement by information-communication structures. However, Lash and Urry are not unduly worried by these shifts, for alongside the ever increasing velocity of flows of objects and people, they point to a heightened ‘reflexivity’ or self-consciousness amongst the populations of disorganized capitalism, to the point where it is creating new possibilities for social relations in many areas of life. No longer hidebound to ‘tradition’ or the restrictions of class, gender or race, people in the postmodern world of disorganized capitalism are now impelled to constantly reconstruct and reinvent themselves. The trick of living in these circumstances is the ability to negotiate an ever increasing number of choices. Postmodern consumer culture requires people to be semiotically skilled or sophisticated in their meaning- making abilities. Lash and Urry (1994:55) say that it :

“is not that the inflation of images leads to an inability to attach meanings of ‘signifieds’ to images, or even the triumph of spectacle over narrative. It is instead that the speed at which we attach meanings to signifiers has and will greatly increase”.

What this implies is that we can all revel in the ‘new times’. The postmodern juggernaut can be ridden, and it is both possible and morally acceptable to enjoy the ride without too many regrets for the identities we have lost along the way. This experience may be profoundly dislocating, leading some people to attempt to escape into a more ‘solid’ past, but on the whole this is not too great a price to pay. Social relations are more fluid and riskier (a key motif of debates in social theory, see Beck 1992) and released from the constraints of time and space. For Lash and Urry, people are not to be seen as passive victims of the so called ‘three minute culture’. Their account is unashamedly upbeat. They recognise that there will be ‘reflexivity winners’ and ‘reflexivity losers’, but do not dwell upon the losers too much. Quilley (1995) argues that this rhetorical device draws the readers in because they - as part of the professional middle class - are likely to recognise themselves as ‘reflexive’ individuals, freed from the constraints of traditional social structures and having access to a world of cultural possibilities. But, Quilley

asks, how widespread is this reflexive disposition ? Lash and Urry seem to suggest that the resources for reflexivity are increasingly available to all and that reflexivity is an emerging cultural dominant. Less optimistically, we might read Ritzer's (1993) **The McDonaldization of Society** in which he argues that the fast-food chain McDonald's is part of a wider set of socio-cultural changes that take rationalization, atomization and individuation to new levels. The McDonalization process can be observed in whole areas of social and economic life, including credit cards, plastic cutlery, telephone chat-lines, mass teaching and tabloid newspapers. In stark contrast to Lash and Urry's optimistic account, the imperatives of efficiency, predictability, control and qualification lead to Ritzer's account to pacified and de-humanized workers and consumers.

In terms of the concerns of this chapter, what does Lash and Urry's account suggest about people's sense of place in the emerging 'economies of signs and space' ? Their focus is on the impact of global economic transformations on individuals, in terms of individual forms of consciousness and individual behaviour. Taylor *et al.* (1996: 7) say that :

"At every level.. individuals are left to adapt to the void in what was their working world, their identity, their community and their social life, but in particular local contexts".

Whilst it may be the case that the world Lash and Urry describe represents the 'leading edge' in the current restructuring of global capitalism, it must be questioned how typical it is. Lash and Urry's optimistic view of post-Fordist/post-modern societies can be seen as asserting the global unimportance of place (Taylor *et al.* 1996). Place-bound identities and lifestyles are associated with an earlier era of 'organized' capitalism and Lash and Urry are prepared to throw away much of what counts as tradition in order to revel in the multiplicity of signs and space. Disorganized capitalism is increasingly a consumer society of signs and space in which the information and communications structures of consumer society come to replace the social structures that previously shaped people's lives. The notion of *reflexive modernization* is central to Lash and Urry's account. The shift from organized capitalism to disorganized capitalism is marked by the shift from simple modernity to reflexive modernity. Capital now circulates over longer distances and greater speed and increasing distances, and production comprises of both post-industrial goods with a primarily cognitive content, and postmodern goods with a primarily aesthetic content. It is these goods and services, with their informational content, that are replacing the social structures of organized capitalism as the primary determinants of social life. People are no longer tied to 'tradition' or the restrictions of class, gender or race. Instead, people in the postmodern world are faced with the task of constantly reconstructing and reinventing themselves. In order to be happy, they are forced to choose. This idea is perhaps best summed up in the concept of 'lifestyle' as fluid and changeable, formations of identity produced through self-reflexive consumption and disembedded from stable social networks. Lifestyle is something we make, we choose for ourselves out of the overdose of images thrown before us. The theory

of reflexive modernization suggests that a key aspect of modern societies is that people are able to monitor and evaluate their society and its place in the world, both historically and geographically. The more that societies modernize, the greater the ability of increasingly knowledgeable subjects to reflect upon their social conditions of existence. The postmodern era has seen the spread of aesthetic cultural capital to wider groups of people, so that aesthetic 'expert systems' such as film, tv, poetry and travel come to be important mediators in the regulation of everyday life. Aesthetic reflexivity involves using the images and symbols operating at the level of feeling and cemented around judgments of taste and distinction about different natures and different societies. Lash and Urry see this form of 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism' as coming to constitute a cultural dominant, replacing an earlier form of 'cognitive emancipation'. Aesthetic cosmopolitanism involves adopting a stance of openness and a willingness to take risks, it involves an ability to reflect upon and judge aesthetically between different natures, places and societies, both in the present and in the past.

What sort of education does this imply ? Lash and Urry stress the emergence of an 'increasingly reflexive human subjectivity'(p.3) , and although there is a 'structure of flows' that underpins the economies of signs and space (after all, tv programmes, films, videos and international travel are all commodities of global capitalism), the opposing process of reflexivity means that the 'institutions of the new information society' can be challenged by the 'large number of men and women who are taking an increasingly critical and reflexive distance' concerning those institutions. In other words, although images, sounds and narratives may be the commodified intellectual property of the capitalist cultural industries, they also open up spaces and provide materials for the aesthetic critique of those industries. People play with these signs in a superficial way, revelling in the fact that they are artificial, opaque and depthless. They resist de-coding to reveal a deep meaning or truth. Lash distinguishes between the modernist cultural mode which is 'discursive', involving a literary and didactic sensibility, and which involves levels of understanding and knowledge in distinct spheres of art, literature, music, film and so on. In the 'discursive' mode consumption involves distance from and reflection upon everyday life. In the postmodernist cultural mode which Lash (1990) characterizes as 'figural', there is an audio-visual sensibility which is non-didactic, readily accessible', playful and frequently irreverent. Different media overlap and lose their distinctiveness, and consumption is characterised by immersion in pleasure and fantasy. The features of Lash's 'figural' mode include: the desire of the individual as central to urban life, with an emphasis on a form of expressive individualism; a concern with the 'event' or spectacle, whereby literally 'anything goes'; the privileging of the sign or image as a mode of gaining access to the 'truth', which is understood aesthetically rather than cognitively.

Thus, the argument is that postmodernity ushers in more open and fluid social identities, rather than the traditionally fixed identities of the modern period. The question I want to consider here is: how far does the school geography curriculum reflect this self-reflexive tendency ? Presumably, the postmodern curriculum would revel in the diversity and ephemerality presented by the

postmodern condition. However, this hardly describes much present day education. Hartley (1997:63) suggests that:

“Even a subject like PE, arguably very close to body-beautiful hedonism and image-awareness, is disliked, especially by girls, for it connects little with their consumption of postmodern culture. And it is not that they are all unfit. Some dance and rave, for pleasure, the real thing, emulating the perfect bodies that are associated with the advertisements. But all of this is far removed from the structured regimes of school-based PE. This is no syllabus of desire”.

In this statement Hartley is suggesting that school subjects fail to connect with the looser, freer cultures in which young people grow up. He challenges Lash and Urry's view that agency is increasingly set free of structure. This is almost certainly true of the geography curriculum, where there is very little sign that postmodern culture finds its way into lessons. For example, a topic such as leisure and recreation would appear to offer a way of bringing young people's everyday experience of consumer culture into the classroom, yet geography lessons serve to reduce the topic to the impacts of leisure and tourism on the environment and the effective (modernist) management of these impacts. The products of consumer culture are rarely found in geography classrooms other than as props for teaching some pre-packaged empirical knowledge (see chapter three for a discussion of popular culture in school geography). Whilst current forms of geography education remain securely rooted in the modernist quest for 'serious' knowledge, at the level of pedagogy, it may be possible to recognise some of the implications of the shift towards a 'figural' or aesthetic reflexivity. If Lash and Urry are right, this mode is becoming the cultural dominant in postmodern societies, having originated in the consumption practices of a distinct section of the 'professional or new middle class', and now becoming more widespread. Importantly, reflexivity is becoming a central part of work practices (especially in leading edge sectors such as advertising), and institutions such as education. Usher and Edwards (1994: chapter.10) have linked the rise of postmodernism with forms of experiential learning. The sensibility of the new middle classes is marked by a tension between the oppositional and popular, by the breaking down of the barriers of high and popular culture, art and everyday life. The lives of the new middle classes are marked by a desire for learning through experience, 'giving priority to experience as the mediator through which meaning is constructed, and the demand for new experiences and new meanings'(p.191). For this reason, experiential learning sits comfortably in the postmodern moment, and it is not surprising that the importance given to experiential learning in the 1980s coincided with the ascendancy of elements of the new middle classes to positions of cultural and educational power. The links between the aesthetic reflexivity and experiential learning can be seen in the central tenets of experiential learning. First is the idea of the relativity of knowledge, where a greater equality of status is given to knowledge from a wide variety of sources, including everyday life. Knowledge is not something that exists, out there, but is constructed. The role of teachers is thus reformulated. Instead of being seen as sources of

truth or knowledge, teachers are to be facilitators of knowledge. Bauman (1987) speaks of the shift from legislators to interpreters. Second, there is the attack on the canons of high culture and the increased valuation of learning derived from popular and mass culture. Third, there is a shift from the discursive (word) to the figural, and immersion rather than detached interpretation. Book learning becomes less important as experience becomes a resource for learning, learning is through doing, and there is more emphasis on audio-visual resources. Fourth, there is a shift to the view that there is no single judgment point of what is 'right' and 'wrong' learning. Everything depends on the 'positionality' or 'situatedness' of the individual and what he or she brings to the experience of learning and takes from it.

#### *(4) Places as multiple and fragmented.*

One important feature of the accounts of place outlined so far has been their claim to tell a more or less complete picture of what is happening to places in the contemporary era. However, there exists a body of writing about place that seeks to portray places as having less clearly defined endings, and open the possibility that there are other ways of imagining place. In order to illustrate these ideas, I will focus on the recent writings of the geographer Doreen Massey. In an influential series of essays (collected in **Space, Place and Gender**), Massey (1994) has interrogated the notion of 'time-space compression' as represented by David Harvey and Edward Soja. The most critical of these is 'Flexible Sexism', an extended argument about the unexamined masculinism implicit in Harvey and Soja's work. Massey suggests that the structure of feeling characterized by disorientation and dislocation is 'assumed to be the universal, and that view is white, male, heterosexual, Western'. She argues that there are problems of a 'deep economism' in these accounts and says that :

"It is not only capital which moulds and produces changes in our understanding of and access to space and time...Ethnicity and gender, to mention only the two most obvious other axes, are also deeply implicated in the ways in which we inhabit and experience space and place, and the ways in which we are located in the new relations of time-space compression" (Massey 1994:164).

Massey is arguing that the type of grand social and economic shifts associated with what has been variously called 'postmodernism', 'post-Fordism', and 'time-space compression' are experienced differently by different people in different locations (both physical and social). For instance, she notes that much of the writing about these issues stresses the novelty of the new sense of dislocation. But this is very much a 'First World' take on things. For the inhabitants of all countries around the world colonized by the West, the experience of immediate, destabilising contact with 'foreign' cultures has a long history. Also, Massey notes a tendency to overgeneralize accounts of 'the experience of postmodernity' and thus decontextualise and flatten out all the significant differences between the experiences of people in different

situations, who are members of different social and cultural groups, and who have access to different forms and quantities of economic and cultural capital. For some people there may be great opportunities for interconnectedness and thus a greater sense of postmodernity or time-space compression. However, for other people, horizons may be narrowing. Massey speaks of a highly complex and uneven 'power-geometry' of time-space compression:

"different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections of capital and commodities"(Massey 1994:149).

Massey identifies three groups with different experiences of time-space compression. First, there are those in control of the processes of time-space compression. This group tends to be overwhelmingly white, affluent and male. These are the jet-setters, busy sending faxes and e-mail, holding international tele-conferences. They are the people controlling the distribution of cultural goods such as films and the news, and making deals in international currency transactions. They tend to live in exclusive parts of global cities that are wired to social technical networks and secured from other parts of the city. Second, there are those who move or communicate a great deal but are generally not in control of these flows. An extreme example would be the case of refugees making a break for the border. Finally, there are those who are on the receiving end of time-space compression or are excluded from it. Included in this group are people without access even to a telephone or to personal computers. These groups tend to include people of low socioeconomic status, low educational attainment and the computer illiterate. Thus Massey identifies the paradox of simultaneous globalization and localization or as Dear (1995:27) puts it, for some, the 'time-space prism closes rapidly to become a time-space prison'. The increased freedom from the confines of place as a result of heightened mobility for some may lead to the disempowerment and relative exclusion of others.

Having argued for the complexity of the phenomenon of time-space compression and warned of the dangers of emptying it of its social content, Massey argues for a more 'open' sense of place or a 'progressive sense of place'. She argues that there is nothing inherently reactionary about the identification with place. It is the nature of the identification process that determines the politics of place :

"Is it not possible for sense of place to be progressive: not self-enclosing and defensive, but outward-looking ? A sense of place which is adequate to this era of time-space compression" (1994:147).

In Massey's account, places are not to be seen as unique because of their long internalised histories but by the fact that they are constructed out of a 'particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus' (Massey 1994:154). Rather than thinking about places which have boundaries around them, places can be thought of as the



meeting place or nodes in networks of social relations, where these social relations are understood to take place over a larger scale than what we happen to define as that place. The advantage of this type of thinking is that it allows a sense of place :

“which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local” (Massey 1994:155).

Massey's 'progressive sense of place' has a number of features which appear quite different from that favoured by Nicholas Tate. First, it avoids seeing places as static. Thinking about places as the articulation of social relations means that they are processes, not frozen in time. Second, there is less concern with drawing boundaries around areas. Instead the linkages to the 'outside' are stressed, and the idea of immutability and fixity of place is undermined. Attention can be paid to the social-constructedness of places. Third, places are seen to have multiple 'identities': they are full of internal conflicts. Massey gives the example of London's Docklands, a place where there are obvious conflicts about interpretations of its past, present and future. Fourth, Massey recognises the importance of the uniqueness of place. Globalization does not bring with it homogenization. Places are unique because of the distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations. Massey's work represents a significant contribution to debates about what constitutes an appropriate 'sense of place' for the contemporary world. Against writers such as Tate, who wants to draw boundaries around places and stress the differences between 'them' and 'us', focusing on what is unique about places, Massey stresses the way that such unique places are produced through a myriad of social relations that are not bounded, and that far from having singular fixed identities, places are full of internal contradictions and differences (the implications of viewing places in this way is discussed in chapter four, using the example of teaching about 'rural places'). In an oft-quoted statement, Massey shows Kilburn High Road in West London is the product of these social relations, linking the global and local, and the past and present. Bhatt (1994:152) has recomposed this example for any street in London:

“An 'Indian' restaurant here, run by a Bangladeshi family whose relatives may have been recent flood victims in Bangladesh, an East African newsagency there, part of a national chain run by a family of refugees from Uganda, descendants of indentured Indian labourers, whose immediate fortunes are bonded into the recession of the British economy and the actions of the German Bundesbank, and whose children are spoken to by an African-American expressive culture. Overhead, a plane carries (if she is lucky) a Somali woman, who has lived in border refugee camps for several years, and who may seek housing in Camden, the housing officer perhaps being the son of a Jamaican woman who arrived in Britain in the 1950s to work on the buses. In another street, a heterosexual black man visits an AIDS project, staffed by gay men who were inspired to establish the project through the political activism of American groups”.

Massey reminds us that there is more than one story to be told about the world, and that, appealing as they may be, the accounts of postmodernity found in the work of Harvey, Soja and Jameson are in fact partial and contain many silences. A similar point is made by Julie Graham (1992:397) who remarks that 'the story of post-Fordism is on its way to becoming the preeminent narrative of capitalist development, at least on the left, in the English-speaking world'. Virtually all theorists participating in debates about the economic transformations associated with postmodernity adopt the basic features of this narrative. However, from a critical feminist perspective, theories of Fordism and post-Fordism offer a 'totalizing' account of capitalist development, the effect of which is to ignore other aspects of social life. Telling the story of capitalist development from an 'objective' viewpoint means that people who are excluded from mass consumption, paid employment, capitalist class processes, and even citizenship are marginalized because their experiences fail to fit in with the emphases of the narrative.

Massey is concerned with the question of the future of place in the face of globalization. She suggests that there is a tendency to think of places as being based on a settled community, a locality with a distinct character. However, in the face of globalization: 'Do individual places still have their own distinctiveness within 'the global village'?' (1995:46). Massey warns against the types of thinking that want to suggest that places have a 'single, essential identity' that derives from their internal histories, and the desire to draw boundaries that separates one place from another. This tends to lead to a reactionary conceptualisation of place. Instead, Massey stresses the openness of places:

"Places can therefore be conceptualized as formed out of numerous social relationships stretched over space. And many of these social relations link places together. Places, represented in this way, are thus *not* isolated from each other, each with its own internal history. Their very characteristics are formed, in part, through their links with one another." (1995:59)

Massey is trying to tell more open stories about places (and part of her aim is to challenge the masculinist tendencies of Marxist geographers such as Harvey and Soja), and this has some possible implications for geography education. Following Massey's argument, school geography would focus on the wider social processes and experiences which originate mainly from outside the particular place in question. Understanding the specificity of a place such as Kilburn High Street would mean that students would need to consider questions of Irish nationalism, English and Muslim identities and something of the relations between these to groups, the role of global capital and communications. In an essay on the 'spatial construction of youth cultures', Massey (1998:125) describes the social relations of power that are involved in the simple act of wearing an item of clothing:

"When, say, young people in Guatemala sport clothing marked clearly as 'from the USA' (or-ironically - with an 'American' logo and trademark emblazoned upon it but in fact quite likely made in Guatemala, a T-shirt quite likely sewn up by the mother of the Guatemalan kids themselves) they are tapping into, displaying their knowledge of, their claimed connection with, that dominant culture to the north".

Massey notes that there are complex social relations of power at work here that are both economic and cultural, and that are to do with the subordination of the Guatemalan culture and economy to the greater power of the USA. She goes on to say that for a middle class white youngster in the USA to wear the brightly coloured textiles of Guatemala:

"has a very different meaning and embodies and expresses very different social relations. It may be that Guatemalan textiles are seen as 'exotic', as tapping into the otherness of a (perhaps rather romanticised) vision of 'unspoilt' indigenous culture. At its worst this can be read as the children of the relatively wealthy 'West' brightening up their lives by tapping into less powerful and less 'modern' cultures -the 'Third World' as exotic decoration. And yet again it could be far more than that. Many lines of cultural connection around the world are expressions in one way or another of solidarity or of a desire to belong to something believed in. An awareness of Central America among US youth might extend to solidarity with its people's resistance to persistent US intervention"( Massey 1998:125).

Massey calls for a mapping of this complex of cultural influences and the different kinds of social relations and social power they involve and express. Her comments suggest that a very simple act such as wearing an item of clothing ties us in which complex cultural and economic geographies. The task for geography educators is to develop pedagogies to teach the 'openness of place'.

In a similar vein, Graham has produced work which seeks to undermine the 'totalizing' accounts of economic geography associated with Marxist political economy. She uses the concept of 'overdetermination' which holds that every event or structure is multiply caused, where those causes themselves are in turn multiply determined. The implication is that there is no final or essential cause of anything. Whereas Marxist accounts privilege class as the final and essential cause of events, Graham's version of post-Marxist economic geography is concerned to trace the overdetermined set of causes of geographical phenomena. In a recent book written with Kathy Gibson (J.K. Gibson-Graham 1996) Graham develops the theoretical and empirical implications of her method (geography educators who are teaching about the 'global shift' might start with the discussion of this idea in chapter 6 of the book). Geographical accounts that practised 'overdetermination' would make explicit their partiality because of the impossibility of representing every cause, they would emphasise that society is in a constant flux, and that any event or process can be understood in a multiplicity of ways, and by rejecting single causes, would stress the existence of differences rather than the search for sameness in a structured world.

(5) *Places as sites of social and cultural contestation, where people are responding to change in an effort to re-figure their identities.*

One of the key issues in developing a critical human geographical education is to consider how actual people in actual places experience the postmodern, globalized conditions they find themselves in. Ien Ang (1996) has noted that there is a need to go beyond the sweeping generalizations and platitudes that surround the term 'postmodern' and ask how it manifests itself in 'the concrete texture of our daily lives'(p.2). She notes the tendency to see the 'postmodern condition' as a matter of fact, a 'homogenized, one dimensional and increasingly global reality'. Modernity is supposedly replaced by postmodernity as the Enlightenment project based on belief in the possibility of a world organized around the principles of truth, universal reason, and rationality is replaced by an alternative set of beliefs. Ang's answer is to see postmodernity as a realisation of the epistemological limits of those principles - what Lyotard (1984) famously called the loss of master narratives- so that to live in the postmodern world means having to cope with the knowledge that the promise of modernity to deliver order, certainty and security will remain unfulfilled. Ang quotes McRobbie (1994:22) who says that living in the postmodern world is to live 'within the cracks of a crumbling culture where progress is in question and society seems to be standing still'. The question that interests Ang is *which* culture is crumbling, for *whom* is progress in question, and *when/where* does society seem to be standing still ? These questions suggest the need for a more nuanced understanding of what it means, concretely and empirically, to live in a culture that can be described as 'postmodern'. In **Reworking Modernity: Capitalisms and Symbolic Discontents**, Allan Pred and Michael Watts (1992) make a significant attempt to answer these questions. In their analyses of the contours of late capitalism they cover much of the same ground as Harvey, Jameson and Soja. However, whereas in these accounts we see little of the actual lived experience of people in actual places, Pred and Watts focus on the global-local responses to multiple capitalisms. They stress that the introduction of new investments and new technologies and labour processes in a place cannot be seen as a matter of physical flows of money, capital and management, but also have a cultural dimension:

"For the workplace practices and social relations associated with new forms of capital cannot be confined to the abstract, cannot avoid being directly lived and experienced, cannot avoid being given meaning-filled expression by thinking and feeling"(Pred and Watts 1992:xiii).

Their insistence of focusing on the symbolic negotiation of multiple capitalisms represents an important advance. Pred and Watts argue that the 'history of capital accumulation has been synonymous with the processes of uneven development, with the constant emergence, realigned interaction, and transformation of local capitalisms'(p.xiii). These local capitalisms have a material component- in the form of the movement of inputs, outputs, money, information and

people between the local and nonlocal- and also a symbolic component - in new ways of thinking, acting and feeling, in new types of ways of living. Pred and Watts are interested in the :

“cultural articulations that accompany processes of capitalism accumulation as they unfold under geographically and historically specific circumstances” (p.xiii).

The task is to ‘simultaneously apprehend’ the global and transnational forms of capitalist accumulation and the symbolic forms, the local discourses and practices through which capitalist processes of commodification, mass production, and exploitation are experienced, interpreted and contested. In other words, the links between the local and the global, the cultural and the economic are to be examined. Places have their own ‘distinctive historical geographies, [their] own time-space structuration’ and that whilst there is no need to recognise the ‘hard contours of capitalisms ‘inner contradictions’ and ‘laws of motion’”, to date, in the postmodern geographies produced by theorists such as Soja (1989) and Harvey (1989):

“there is little in the way of people, communities, networks and struggles: in short, the socially differentiated experience of, and response to, globalisation”(Pred and Watts 1992:14).

Pred and Watts’ project is useful in its attempt to highlight the reworking of modernity. People do not meekly accept the imposition of new forms of economic relations. They resist, rework and refashion existing social practices. They try to live with contradictions, or adapt new ideologies to existing belief systems. In short they come to (uneasy) terms or accommodations with global capitalisms. What is missing in the accounts provided of postmodernity are the ‘maps of meaning’ (Jackson 1989) people carry around with them in negotiating the political and economic landscapes of global capitalism. Pred and Watts are attempting to ‘breach the hard edges and contours of capitalist accumulation *culturally*’ (p.192). It is a mouth-watering prospect, understanding how the geographer’s concern with the nexus of the global and the local can be explored by “‘mapping’ the labile, sliding identities that are forged in specific, yet globalized sites”(p.196). Pred and Watts suggest that the ‘border’ is the appropriate metaphor for the postmodern subject, a place of hybridity. In their work, Pred and Watts are pointing to the local manifestations of global processes, suggesting that one cannot be considered without the other. This complex relationship is encapsulated in the idea of what has been termed the ‘global-local nexus’. For as Hall (1991:27) has noted :

“Global and local are two faces of the same movement from one epoch of globalization, the one which has been dominated by the nation-state, the national economics, the national identities, to something new”.

The ‘global-local nexus’ is a construction that organises perceptions of identities, culture and

places in postmodernity. The 'something new' that Hall refers to is the shift in the organisation of capitalism that is referred to as flexible accumulation or specialisation.

Another take on the 'global-local nexus' is offered by Robins and Morley (1995). In a series of essays collected together under the title **Spaces of Identity**, they write about the cultural changes associated with the rise of the global media and 'electronic landscapes'. They argue that though their development, capitalist societies have used space as part of their strategies for achieving growth and increasing competitiveness. This has meant that meanings and traditions, attachments and allegiances have developed around the sense of place inscribed in the relations between particular locales (cities, regions and nations). The shift towards post-Fordism is leading to the emergence of a 'new articulation of spatial scales' associated with the 'transnationalisation of accumulation' as localities and cities are drawn into the logic of transnational networks. In discussing the cultural impacts of new satellite technologies which have produced a 'global space of electronic information flows' (Robins and Morley, 1995:75), they argue that these enable a new kind of relationship between place and space- the very boundaries of the nation-state or the physical boundaries of urban structure, have become problematic. As a result, older communities and older, localised senses of place are undone. Robins (1991) develops this theme in his discussion of the question of national culture in an era of globalisation. Drawing upon Bhabha's notions of 'Translation' and 'Tradition', Robins suggests that identities can move towards either Translation or Tradition, where Translation refers to identity formations which cut across and intersect natural frontiers and which are made up of people who have been dispersed from their homelands. Such people create new 'hybrid cultures' where they learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, and to translate and negotiate between them. In opposition to these identities are attempts to reconstruct purified identities, to restore closure, coherence and 'Tradition'. In writing about the heritage cultures which have developed in Britain over the last decade Robins argues that these are essentially responses to the process of globalisation which is 'profoundly transforming our apprehension of the world'. This globalisation :

"is provoking a new experience of orientation and disorientation, new senses of placed and placeless identity" (Robins 1991:41)

Globalisation, for Robins, brings with it a challenge to traditional ways of thinking about places as bounded and meaning-endowed. The challenge is that we are faced with the need to provide a new self-interpretation. Hall (1995) also argues that the destabilization or dissolution of frontiers and boundaries brought about by globalization can have contradictory effects. He provides an account of two contrasting models of culture and their relation to 'place'. One of these sees culture as a relatively fixed set of meanings, which stabilizes cultural identities and guarantees that the way of life of those who share it remains homogeneous. This model is firmly attached to the idea of a 'place' as home of origin to which we are connected by 'tradition'. The second model

sees culture as consisting of meanings that are not fixed, but are constantly being negotiated, contested and transformed. In this version, cultural forms and practices are not 'pure', but combine with elements of other cultures. Cultural identities are not stable, but are constantly producing themselves in new forms, in new places.

Hall argues that globalisation has been gradually, if very unevenly, pushing us away from the first model towards the second, more syncretic model. This trend has accelerated in recent decades, as the pace of globalisation has qualitatively increased. As time-space compression has deepened, so the cultures of more and more places become 'translated'. As migration has stimulated flows of people, cultures have become composed not of single but of diverse cultural traditions and patterns. Hall recognises that this is too evolutionary a way of describing what in fact are intense and complex struggles over culture. For many groups, cultural survival has meant keeping the culture 'closed'- intact, homogeneous, unified within, and with strongly marked boundaries separating it from 'others'. These tactics serve to 'close up the community around its foundational cultural beliefs and values' (Hall 1995:200). Hall provides a range of examples of this 'closure': the revival of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union, the 'Little England' reaction in Britain to the fear of losing sovereignty to 'Europe', the growth of racism, the versions of Islamic fundamentalism which have gained ground in Iran, Egypt, and Algeria, the success of the Hindu fundamentalist movement in India, United States and United Kingdom attempts to roll back 'multiculturalism' in education and go back to much more traditional and exclusivist definitions of 'American' and 'Englishness'. Despite the differences between these examples and their specific histories, they all have one feature in common:

"their response to globalization is to turn back to more 'closed' definitions of culture, in fact in the face of what they see as the threats to cultural identity which globalization in its late-twentieth-century forms represent. They mark the revival of an attachment to more 'local' or fixed, or placed aspects of culture. This may not be such a surprising turn in a world where globalization is increasingly transgressing boundaries, mixing up traditions, confusing 'us' and 'them', 'inside' and 'outside', and constructing identities based on less 'grounded' forms of identification" (Hall 1995:200-201).

This statement reminds us of Tate's call for teaching a distinctly 'British' geography, and the fact that it is just one possible way of conceptualising 'place'. Following Kaplan (1996:159), it may be argued that:

"the 'local' is not really about a specific intrinsic territory but about the construction of bundles of clusters of identities in and through the cultures of transnational capitalism. Whether the 'local' is seen to be fluid and relational or fixed and fundamentalist depends upon one's position or enunciatory situation vis-a-vis

economic, political and cultural hegemonies" (Kaplan 1996: 159-60).

The writers here all share a similar analysis of how the world is being reshaped as flows of capital and labour cross the borders between nations and states. They are in little doubt that the key driving force in all this is the search for profits on the part of transnational corporations that search the globe for new sources of labour and markets, in the process transforming traditional ways of living, uprooting geographical and social relations. However, while we are all affected by this radical transformation of social relations, we are all affected in different ways, depending on our location in geographical space and our position in the social structure. This suggests the need to pay attention to the experiences of different types of people in different places, something which feminist geographers have been doing in providing case studies of women's lives (feminist geography and its impact on the school curriculum is discussed in chapter two). Linda McDowell (1996:31) argues this role for geography, suggesting that its 'middle-range focus', combined with its comparative nature, should lead to a focus on connections, 'looking at the links between processes and people at a range of spatial scales from the local to the global, and the ways in which these scales are themselves fundamentally interconnected'. McDowell further suggests that places and spaces are not only sets of material social relations but also cultural objects, which means that geographers should be concerned not only with 'patterns of flow' but also the meanings of place.

Returning for a moment to the accounts of postmodernism offered by Jameson, Harvey and Soja, we can note that they were concerned with offering explanations for the condition of postmodernity that were rooted in the economic transformations associated with late capitalism. Their materialist credentials were unquestioned. The globalization of culture was tied up with the globalization of capital. Time-space compression in the economic sphere was mirrored by the increased 'disposability' of cultural and social life. The accounts considered in this section offer an alternative way of viewing these shifts. Whilst they all accept, to a greater or lesser extent, that a relationship between the economic and cultural spheres exists, they are concerned 'to think of the ways in which people with different perceptions and experiences conceive of being in the world, how globalism and localism are configured in contemporary conditions' (Shurmer-Smith and Hannam 1994:80). This suggests that places must be seen as *multiple*. Rather than being the preserve of a dominant cultural group, places are contested, having multiple meanings, existing as points of intersections between people who may cut across each other, align with others, conflict at different points in time. Places are complex and unsettled. Thinking about places in this way presents a significant challenge for geography educators, since we have generally been happier drawing boundaries around places, mapping the material flows of people and goods, seeing people as belonging or not belonging to certain places. Seeing places as multiple and contested suggests that we must learn to represent places as both material and metaphorical, a mixture of the experienced, imagined and perceived. An example of the type of approach that might usefully be used in geography classrooms is Fyfe's discussion of the



contested visions of Glasgow embodied in the ideas of planners and the writings of local poets. Fyfe suggests that 'there can be few better examples of a struggle for the definition and the making of the built environment than the events in post-war Glasgow'(Fyfe 1996:394). In other words, there was a struggle for the definition and making of place. Fyfe draws on Henri Lefebvre's (1974) work on the production of space, suggesting that the rationalist conceptions of the city produced by the planners were examples of representations of space, while the work of the poets produced in response to these plans were examples of spaces of representation- the field of lived experience in which human understandings of spaces and places are developed, contested and transformed.

## **Conclusion**

Where has this discussion of recent writing about 'place' taken us ? How are the five 'senses of place' discussed here related to the broader concerns of this study - namely the implications of the postmodern critique for a critical geography education ? In this chapter I have outlined some of the variety of ways in which place is conceptualised in contemporary human geography in the belief that geography educators need to broaden the ways in which places are studied in school geography. A major limitation of contemporary geography education is that it rarely asks students to reflect upon the theoretical construction of places, and the methods used to study places are generally based on a 'positivistic' or scientific means of understanding. This chapter has suggested that representations of place are never innocent, they are intimately tied up with the politics of knowledge. In this sense this chapter seeks to develop Peter Jackson's call for teachers to:

"find the most stimulating ways of conveying the idea that there are multiple ways of seeing the world, that all forms of knowledge are selective, and that the partiality of particular forms of knowledge is indicative of a politics of position"(Jackson 1996a:91).

If we want students to get to grips with changing economic and social environments then we might be better encouraging them to draw upon new cultural discourses rather than rely on the relatively closed theoretical and methodological frameworks found in current geography education. A postmodern approach to the study of place would embrace unpredictability and uncertainty, recognise difference and otherness, and stress the contextual and discursive nature of all knowledge. It would allow students to reflect critically on the origins of what counts as geographical theory and the ways in which other forms of knowledge are effectively ignored. The current geography curriculum is based on a formal body of knowledge wrapped in a discourse of facts and objectivity at the expense of a detailed consideration of a world that is increasingly rooted in the cultural and symbolic. Whilst this performs the task of providing educational credentials in the form of examination passes, it means that the important question of how places are constructed is largely ignored. This chapter suggests the need to approach the study of

places culturally, that is, as products of human activity. Shurmer-Smith and Hannam (1994) put it thus:

“if mountains, rivers and weather are not approached culturally there is a terrible lie uttered every time the word ‘environment’ is used”(p,216).

The same is true of ‘place’. Students and teachers need to learn how to study places using ethnographic, semiotic, phenomenological and historiographical methods of inquiry in order to deconstruct the ideologies of place (for representative studies that illustrate these approaches, see Rutheiser 1996 on Atlanta, Taylor et al. 1996 on Manchester and Sheffield, Pred, 1995 on Stockholm, and Allen et al. 1998 on the south-east of England).

## CHAPTER TWO: THE CULTURAL TURN AND THE GEOGRAPHY CURRICULUM

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I suggested that at a time when geographers are increasingly interested in the ways in which places are socially constructed, school geographers have been faced with calls for a return to old certainties. Curriculum developments in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s largely ignored the situated nature of knowledge, emphasising the 'objectivity', value-freeness, universality and reliability of a decontextualised, absolute, subject-based knowledge. Ball (1994) has called this a return to 'curriculum fundamentalism' or the 'curriculum of the dead'. The relative autonomy that geography teachers enjoyed throughout the 1970s was severely curtailed. The post-war welfare settlement - which had offered teachers the exercise of professional autonomy so long as an active politics was excluded - crumbled, and the Conservative governments moved to regain control over teachers and counter their assumed radicalism (Avis 1991). Though there has been little research on the impacts of these macro-economic shifts on the lives of teachers, Fergusson (1994) has suggested that classroom work has become more technicised, more routinised and more bureaucratised, and more dependent on the judgment of others. This finding is supported by Gewirtz (1997: 230) in her study of schools in an era of 'post-welfarism'. She notes that the culture of teachers' work is changing:

"In short, teachers are experiencing a loss of autonomy and an accelerated intensification of activity and stress; there is a decline in the sociability of teaching; and there is pressure on teachers to adopt more traditional pedagogies, with a focus on output rather than process.."

In such a situation it is difficult to envisage radical changes in the content and pedagogy of geography education. Geography teaching seems to be characterised by the transmission of an agreed body of knowledge from teacher to student. This picture is confirmed by Healey and Roberts' (1996) account of the current state of school geography. They argue that school geography bears the imprint of the legacy of the introduction of the 'new' geography based on positivist approaches. What this means is that (neo-classical) models, spatial theories and quantification still dominate. School geography is still largely concerned with general laws about people's behaviour. Individual enquiry (which has been enshrined in syllabuses) involves testing hypotheses using quantitative data and producing generalisations. Though the national criteria for GCSE means that syllabuses have to incorporate the study of values and attitudes, in practice different viewpoints tend to be considered as pieces of scientific evidence rather than as 'something constructed and selected by people with different perceptions of the world' (Healey and Roberts 1996:296). If humanistic geography has not developed a strong foothold in schools, then structural approaches which focus on issues of power and control are also marginalized. What emerges from this account is a school geography that is overly narrow and insular in its outlook. The emphasis is on the description and mapping of the empirical world, and geography is

more comfortable aligning itself with the natural sciences rather than the humanities (such as History and English) and social sciences (such as politics, economics and sociology).

School geography has proved particularly partial to the 'grand theory'. This reflected developments in the wider discipline that revolved around the search for a single set of methodological principles that would provide a unity and order to the subject matter of geography. From this perspective, the history of Anglo-American human geography since the second world war can be regarded as a 'tale of three modernisms' - positivism, humanism and structuralism- that each claim to tell a better story about the world (Johnston 1979 and subsequent editions). Perhaps the most enduring of the 'grand theories' imported into human geography and then into school geography has been rational choice theory which claimed that every aspect of life can be understood by reference to one single principle: the principle of getting the most from least. The appeal of this principle is reflected by the continued use of neo-classical economic models in the geography curriculum. But rational choice theory and the positivist approaches spawned by the 'new geography' did not go unchallenged. In the wider discipline rational choice theory was challenged by other grand theories. Thus, there was David Harvey's (1973) version of structural Marxism which saw landscapes as the outcome of processes of capitalist accumulation (see chapter one), and Guelke's (1974) use of idealism, putting the actions of reasoning human actors at the centre of explanation. The importance of these 'grand theories' was their insistence that, by applying some central principle(s), an accurate representation and explanation of the world could be obtained.

Geography teachers have made much of the fact that the subject occupies a pivotal location between the arts and the sciences (see, for example, Walford 1994). The problem for those geographers who were attracted to the arts was how to argue that their attempts to make sense of a place, a region or a landscape were something more than impressions, scribbles that could be produced just as easily by mere tourists or travel writers. What distinguished geographical writing was its ability to tell a truth, to provide an accurate and informed account of the world, free of prejudice and ignorance. Human geographers who were attracted by the natural sciences could claim that their approach relied on 'hard facts' which were obtained by a rigorous and accepted scientific method. Geography was essentially an objective science, no different in principle from any other science. Though these are ideal-typical positions, they are useful for thinking about how what counts as geographical knowledge and methods is mediated in the school curriculum. What both approaches have in common is the image of the geographer as someone who has been elevated above the rest of the population, who is able to view the world with a detachment and clarity that is unachievable for those too wrapped up in the messiness of ordinary lives. This leads to forms of writing in which the observer is detached from the observed. I find it hard to disagree with Edwards (1996) assessment that:

"The subject in general remains anchored in a set of positivist assumptions. Human

geography is structured within a narrow, and increasingly outdated, population-settlement-economic triad, more so since the imposition of the national curriculum" (p.220-21).

This chapter seeks to argue that scope exists for the inclusion of alternative geographies in the curriculum, and builds upon approaches to the school geography curriculum that challenge dominant views of the subject. Thus, this chapter draws upon research in geography education that recognises that the geography curriculum is ideological because it privileges and validates certain ways of seeing the world, in the process marginalizing and invalidating other ways of seeing the world. To give one example, fieldwork has formed an important element in geography education. Carl Sauer argued that the principal training of the geographer 'should come, wherever possible, by doing fieldwork'. The validity and desirability of fieldwork is virtually unquestioned. However, some feminist geographers have challenged mainstream approaches to fieldwork as part of the masculinist way of seeing that dominates the discipline (Rose 1993). They question the notion of the 'field' as somewhere else, away from the personal concerns of the researcher, and see this as part of a process that favours the study of some places, using particular (scientific) methods, and excludes other places (such as the home) and other ways of knowing. To take this example further, to what extent is fieldwork constructed on the assumption that the participants are white, able-bodied and heterosexual? This may be considered 'extreme'. However, the point I want to make is that certain forms of knowledge are routinely subjugated to the demands of the mainstream curriculum. There is an intimate relationship between geographical knowledge and power (Painter 1995; O Tuathail 1996).

In what follows I first discuss the view that the geography curriculum can be seen as a social construction and review research in the tradition of 'ideology critique'. I then go on to discuss more recent work in the area of geography education that views the geography curriculum as a 'text'. The small volume of work in this area can be seen as part of a broader 'cultural turn' in social, geographical and educational theory, and this is discussed. Viewing the geography curriculum as a 'text' allows the possibility of making alternative readings by highlighting the various exclusions of the mainstream curriculum, and I offer some suggestions about how the geography curriculum could be reformed to include perspectives based on gender, sexuality, race, and class. Finally, this call for a school geography that reflects other geographies is located in a broader educational context.

### **The social construction of the geography curriculum**

In a recent essay, Huckle (1997:242) reminds teachers that:

"What counts as school geography (its content, teaching methods and assessment) is largely, but not wholly, determined by dominant groups and interests in society...school geography is socially constructed and continues to play a role in the economic and cultural



reproduction of our advanced capitalist society”.

Huckle points out that capitalist school geography was opposed from the outset. In 1885 the anarchist geographer Peter Kropotkin advocated an anti-imperialist, anti-militarist and anti-capitalist education through geography. Hemingway (1994) reminds us of how the long tradition of anarchism has informed geography education (see also Cook 1991 and Pepper 1993). Such accounts support the view that:

“The curriculum is avowedly and manifestly a social construction”(Goodson 1992:66).

Goodson’s curriculum-historical work has argued persuasively that:

“It would seem that, far from being timeless statements of intrinsically worthwhile content, subjects and disciplines are in constant flux”(Goodson 1983:165).

Goodson’s social history of school geography presents it in terms of vested interests in the pursuit of resources and the career aspirations of individual academics and teachers. Goodson suggests that geography teachers reneged on their social and pedagogic optimism in pursuit of status and resources. By the mid-1950s, when geography had become accepted as an academic subject, students were ‘at best apathetic, at worst resentful and rebellious to geography’. At this crucial period, control of the definition of the subject was in the hands of subject specialists, whose activities, motivations, status and career concerns were far removed from the concerns of school pupils. It was these vested interests that provided the impetus for the introduction of the ‘new geography’ with its quantitative methods of spatial analysis. The adoption of a scientific positivism provided geography with the rigour of a ‘real’ science. This development reflected the prestige and status concerns of contemporary university professionals:

“Ultimately, geography, whether for secondary schools or for higher education, was driven by their needs and concerns. In the process of academic establishment, the geography profession accepted the hegemony of university scholars and the result was a particular content and form for the subject created in the image of those scholars”(Goodson and Dowbiggin 1990:124).

The vested interests of academic geography and the school curriculum were increasingly challenged from the late 1960s. Whilst the radical geography of the 1960s and 1970s was questioning the political neutrality of academic geography (see Peet 1977), the school curriculum was subjected to a thorough-going critique by phenomenologists and what became known as the ‘new sociology of education’. The ‘new sociology of education’ was effectively launched at a British Sociological Association conference, which eventually led to the publication of Michael Young’s seminal edited collection **Knowledge and Control** (1971). Prior to the ‘new sociology

of education', the sociology of education was considered a relatively unsophisticated and largely 'practical' discipline, based in the colleges of teacher education and thus hemmed in by the demands for practical relevance and the pressing concerns of classroom life (Harris 1992:ch.3). The 'new sociology of education' challenged this, placing its own theoretical concerns on the agenda and developing powerful critiques of existing educational institutions and practices. It distinguished itself by putting 'curriculum' at the centre of its inquiries. Young (1971) argued that placing curriculum at the centre of the analysis of schooling offered fresh insight into old problems (such as the marked effect of social class on educational achievement) by asking how these 'selections' from all the socially available knowledge came to be chosen and regarded as 'proper' knowledge. 'School knowledge' was obviously partisan knowledge that most school children found difficult to acquire because it reflected and encoded the values and interests of dominant groups. Young (1977) distinguished two main approaches to the curriculum. The first is associated with educational thinkers such as Hirst and Peters and is named 'curriculum as fact'. The 'curriculum as fact' approach treats the curriculum as an *object*, in constant need of updating and modification in order to keep it 'relevant'. Young considers that to conceptualise the curriculum in this way is to move away from the concerns of pupils to a concern with the curriculum itself. He considers it to play a mystificatory role because 'it presents the curriculum as having a life of its own and obscures the human relations in which it, as a conception of knowledge, is embedded' (p.242). Young's critique is an attack on the unproblematic acceptance of teaching as 'knowledge to be transmitted'. The possession of knowledge by the teacher and the needs of students to acquire it in order to achieve educational success means that the grounds of teachers' knowledge is not questioned. The second approach identified by Young is 'curriculum as practice' which is a phenomenological approach concerned less with a structure of knowledge and more with 'how men(sic) collectively attempt to order their world and in the process produce knowledge' (Young 1977:242). It is important to note the context in which the 'new sociology of education' developed. Young was engaged in an intellectual struggle with his own colleagues at the Institute of Education, especially those who were advocating some abstract philosophical approach to the curriculum, seeing school knowledge as derived from underlying universal categories of mind. Against this, the 'new sociology of education' was concerned with the ways in which teachers and pupils made sense of everyday classroom experiences, and on how 'educational 'reality' is continuously reconstructed in the interaction of individuals, rather than imposed on them by mysterious external forces'(Whitty and Young 1976:2). The preferred philosophical position in Young's early writing was social phenomenology, in which the lifeworld was divided into 'multiple realities' (Schutz 1971). The key idea was that school knowledge was a social construction, and could therefore be constructed differently. The objective world could be defined in as many ways as there are people to define it. The world has no intrinsic meaning, and meanings are assigned to it. Whilst social phenomenology is perhaps in tune with the 'postmodern' sensibility, its apparent relativism led to problems for a project firmly committed to political radicalism. Social phenomenology appeared too 'voluntaristic'. As Whitty and Young noted in their introduction to **Explorations in the Politics of School Knowledge:**

"The implication that an invitation to teachers to suspend their taken-for-granted assumptions and to examine critically their own practices would produce a transformation in the nature of their activities was ludicrously naive"(1976:2).

The chapters in the volume were accounts of attempts to develop an adequate radical politics to critique existing educational practices as ideological or conservative, and to try to understand the barriers to radical changes provided by examination boards, school bureaucracies, parents and pupils. For example, Hextall offered a fascinating account of the 'secret garden' of marking work, while Bartholomew analysed the authoritarian 'hidden curriculum' of the teacher training college. Collins discussed the difficulties faced by a 'radical' course such as media studies in the conservative milieu of the school, while Young highlighted the way in which the influential Schools Council used conservative criteria to police curriculum innovation. By the time of the publication of **Society, State and Schooling**, Young and Whitty (1977) had surrendered their earlier faith in social phenomenology by exploring the wider economic and social contexts of curriculum, and used Marxist terms and models to describe education.

The 'new sociologists of education' and their specific analyses of the operation and implementation of the curriculum represented an essential struggle with the dominant discourses about the curriculum. They suggested that teachers deliver preferred or chosen knowledge from a position of power to those they teach and this stratified knowledge serves to perpetuate a class-stratified social formation. Hartley (1997:48) considers that the 1970s saw a widespread phenomenological critique of the curriculum in England which served to question the 'received' curriculum, and the insights of the 'new sociology of education' were drawn upon by a minority of geography educators who questioned the dominant forms of knowledge found in school geography (Huckle 1983). This must be seen as a response to the reform of the school geography curriculum in the 1970s which centred on the 'new' geography and its positivist and generalist outlook. In this approach, geography adopted a more 'scientific' approach, moving away from the 'unscientific' ideographic description of the world to a focus on the processes that produced the patterns observed. The influence of this approach can be seen in the present day curriculum in the form of models based on neoclassical economics, and in the widespread acceptance of the 'scientific' method. Whilst the take-up of the new geography was uneven and it is doubtful whether many geography teachers knowingly adopted the positivist philosophy, its influence was widely felt (Huckle 1983). However, an increasingly vocal group of geography educators expressed concern about the ways in which the new geography required a suspension of feelings, intuition and imagination, and regarded human and physical environments as mere exemplars of scientific facts and theories. Like the 'new sociology of education', these critiques drew upon both humanistic and Marxist approaches, and had the goal of transforming the geography curriculum to reflect other knowledges and interests. In what follows I briefly discuss these critiques of school geography.



## **Ideology critiques of school geography**

A small number of school geography educators built on the phenomenological and sociological critiques of school knowledge and applied these insights to school geography. Thus, a distinctive body of work followed in the wake of Huckle's (1983) designation of the geography curriculum as ideological (see Huckle 1985 for an account of the role of geography education in the reproduction of capitalist relations). Geography educators such as John Huckle, Dawn Gill, Rob Gilbert, and Richard Henley questioned the ways in which geographical objects and processes are 'naturalised'. For instance, urban land use models that described the social division of space and explained them in terms of Social Darwinism or 'natural' competition between different social groups; or, again, complex changes in rural areas which were covered without recognising the uneven costs and benefits to different classes or left unexamined the notion of the 'rural idyll', were deemed to be ideological since they sought to tell one true story about the world (see the discussion in chapter four). These writers argued that the capitalist-economic system is the dominant agent in the formation of human landscapes. Their work is best seen as part of the tradition of 'ideology critique' which focused on the content of school syllabuses and textbooks, interrogating the naturalised narratives and explanatory frameworks of curricular texts. 'Ideology critique' draws on Raymond Williams's notion of the 'selective tradition', and on Michael Apple's (1979) sociological work in order to examine the ways in which schools work to maintain and reproduce the dominant social order. Perhaps the best example of this approach in geography education is Rob Gilbert's (1984) analysis of secondary school curricula and textbooks. His chapter on geography is called 'Environment, space and technology: images of geography'. Gilbert notes the dominance of the 'Man-land' tradition in school geography which is 'an unlikely source of insights into the relationships among people' (1984:67). The content of geography has, he suggests, been largely unquestioned and generally agreed upon, a fact which is surprising given the existence of a wide variety of views about the subject. Examination syllabuses show a consistent emphasis on the physical environment, mining, agriculture and industry, whilst human geography is reduced to the study of population distribution. Gilbert concludes that the dominant image presented is that 'the most important human activities are those by which people use the resources of the environment to fulfil their needs' (1984:72). He argues that this leads to a model of the 'plastic' individual whose strongest features are environmentally and economically determined. Another key feature in the texts analysed by Gilbert was that society is represented as being on the path of continual progress. This was evident in the tendency to see history as the story of society's increasing success in coming to terms with the environment. For instance, while the agricultural and industrial revolutions were recognised to have some drawbacks, the general view was that 'modern society can be pleased with its achievements of technological advance and material prosperity' (1984:79). In addition, the textbooks tended to display a consensus view of political relations, with a plurality of groups all seemingly working towards the same goals. Thus planning, which might be regarded as a

mechanism that serves to favour and legitimise the interests of capital, is regarded as a mere technical exercise, generally emptied of political or economic controversy. Gilbert provides some interesting comments on the use of language in the geography classroom, what he calls a 'pervasive tone, a normal way of referring to events which is so taken for granted that it is not immediately obvious'(p.90). This 'commonsense of geographical discourse' has the effect of draining intention in human activity, events are typically phrased in passive terms, people respond to causal forces, rather than act as constructive agents.

Another significant turn in the debate about the ideological nature of school geography came with the work of Dawn Gill, who carried out an analysis of the Schools' Council Geography for the Young School Leaver (GYSL) course. This was a course that had gained some popularity within Inner London secondary schools. Gill sought to raise teachers awareness of the political nature of the course content, question the validity of presenting geography as an isolated discipline in schools, and evaluate the suitability of the GYSL course as an urban geographical education in inner city areas. Her approach was to analyse the conceptual content of the course in relation to the theoretical work of the Marxist geographers David Harvey (1973) and Manuel Castells (1977). These Marxist geographers argued that spatial form and social process are so interrelated that is senseless to study one without the other. This is the basis for Gill's dissatisfaction with school geography: its failure to explain the patterns it seeks to describe. This failure is typically exemplified by the work of the 'Chicago School'. Her approach is to examine the 'Key ideas' of the syllabus, and reveals that the course fosters an unquestioning acceptance of the status quo, fails to challenge the racist view about the relationship between immigration and unemployment, sees unemployment as inevitable, and fails to relate social inequality in urban areas to the class system. She concludes that:

"If the objective is not to distort perceptions and blinker understanding, then study of spatial form cannot be divorced from social process - most significantly, it cannot be isolated from an understanding of the class system and the workings of capitalism"(1981:13)

Gill develops her arguments with respect to the role of geography education in fostering racist misunderstanding. She is very clear in her belief that 'some school geography courses foster racist attitudes'. The subject as it is taught in schools:

"tends to use explanatory frameworks which fail to mention the trade relationships between 1st and 3rd world as a reason for the relative poverty of the latter; it presents the notion that third world peoples are responsible for their own poverty and thus implicitly supports the view that they are ignorant or stupid; population growth, if mentioned in the texts at all, is rarely linked explicitly with levels of economic development -more often with hints that the uneducated are failing to use contraceptives..."

Gill's analysis caused a minor political stir when the Schools Council (which had commissioned the report) refused to publish her findings. Her research prompted a re-evaluation of the images and representations found in geography textbooks, something that was also found in terms of gendered images and development. However, there was little consideration of the relationships between syllabus, textbooks, teachers and students. Phil Cohen (1997), in a discussion about anti-racist education has noted 'the profound failure to appreciate the secret power and pleasure which the racist imagination confers through various media of popular culture'(1997:140). As a result, teachers have tended to overestimate the effect of multicultural and anti-racist curricula in changing attitudes and behaviour, and underestimate the subtler kinds of student resistance that they encounter. Gill's work failed to make explicit the view of working-class inner London school students on which her anti-racism was based. In other words, what can a teacher do if students reject the 'correct' answer (which is based on rationality) presented by the teacher (this issue is discussed in chapter three in relation to the question of pedagogy).

Another important contribution to the debate about ideology in the geography curriculum is Henley's (1986) suggestion that the 'ideological nature of language has largely been ignored by those concerned with geographical education'(p.162). Henley notes the heightened awareness of the racist and sexist representations provided by textbooks. He is concerned however with 'deeper' ideological formations found in the language of school geography. Starting from the position that language is a social construct and so cannot be viewed as neutral or value-free, Henley argues that:

"Geographical education, language, and knowledge can most fruitfully be conceptualized as part of the hegemony established by the dominant social formation"(p.163).

The growth of geography was linked to the need to promote nationalist and colonialist ideologies. Though these external relations have changed, geography has become more firmly articulated to the needs of the economy via more vocationally and technocratically conscious courses. Thus Henley argues that the:

"nature of language used by geographers...reflects the wider social and economic climate and the dominant ideological formations"(p.164).

Writing in the mid-1980s, Henley saw that the main influence on the school geography curriculum was the legacy of quantification and positivism. For instance, he suggests that Bradford and Kent's (1977) popular textbook adopted a 'pseudo-scientific' vocabulary and 'scientific approach'. Its language abdicates any notion of political or social responsibility, so that urban geography relies on metaphors derived from plant ecology and the use of the gravity model developed from Newtonian physics means that migration is divorced from its social, political and economic contexts. Henley shares Gilbert's concern that the language and metaphors used in school

geography encourage teachers and students to see society as a machine, an organism, a game or a system. Systems seem to provide a more powerful and rigorous description, offering ideas of efficiency and control. Henley endorses this view and suggests that the language of school geography serves to dehumanize and depoliticize social processes, leading to a general 'flattening of reality'.

Ideology critique is an established tradition in research in geographical education (Bennett 1996), and the advent of the National Curriculum for Geography spawned a series of accounts that saw it as an ideological imposition. For example, Morris (1992) considers that the design and implementation of the National Curriculum was a case of 'back to the future'. Drawing on Michael Apple's (1979) **Ideology and Curriculum**, he sees the orders for geography as 'a manifestation of the process by which hegemony becomes established'(p.76). Students are to have a knowledge of agricultural, manufacturing and retail elements of economies but not of the distribution of welfare in a society. Morris argues that the orders represent a politically ideological document, which was produced by political appointees (he points out that the members of the working group had no trouble endorsing the orders). Huckle and Machon (1990) make a similar critique of the National Curriculum, arguing that the orders served to separate the spatial, economic, political and ecological aspects of the subject. In particular, they point to the way in which the environmental geography attainment target promoted an individualistic, voluntarist form of environmentalism that reflected market ideology and marginalized other, more socialistic alternatives. Hall (1990) raised the question of the extent to which the orders reflected a harking back to an imperialist past, when Britain's ruled the waves and dominated world trade.

Ideology critique has played an important role in alerting teachers to the fact that school curricula and textbooks are not politically neutral but contain important ideological messages, helping them to reflect on the forms of language used in the classroom, and thereby playing an important role in the development of an 'emancipatory' or critical human geography education. Ideology critiques alert us to the fact the school geography curriculum is a 'selective' appropriation of knowledge. There is nothing natural about these choices. At the same time, there is a danger of regarding the geography curriculum as a seamless, monolithic imposition on the work of teachers. There is the implication that the work of geography teachers is rendered uniform and standardized. The structure is imposed and there is little or no space for creative agency on the part of teachers and students. There are some important limitations in the way these accounts treat textbooks and syllabuses. First, they tend to assume that texts have one deep, hidden meaning that is capable of being revealed by the informed reader. Gilbert (1989) himself has noted that the structures and metanarratives of ideology critique are too singular and complete. There is too much emphasis on making 'heroic', oppositional readings of texts at the expense of investigating the social processes involved in the realisation of textual meaning. In other words, texts do not have predetermined meanings just waiting to be accessed by readers, but meanings are created in the social process of reading. To focus on the meaning of the syllabus or textbook is to ignore the

specific contexts in which these texts are used. In ideology critique, texts appear to be transparent, open to the single and masterful readings produced by critics. Second, much of the work of ideology critique has originated from a Marxist perspective. This has meant that it has tended to focus on class and the economic base of social inequality at the expense of other dimensions such as gender, race, age and sexuality. In addition, ideology critique maintains a foundational distinction between the material and the ideological, or the economic 'base' and cultural 'superstructure'. What this means in practice is that there is a concern with the problem of 'false consciousness' and an unrelenting tendency to reduce texts to their origin in material reality. In response to these criticisms there has been an increased interest in post-structuralist approaches to studying texts. Such approaches reject the idea that there is a 'real' meaning buried within the text that can be excavated by the critic. Instead, the role of critique is to continuously re-write ideology in contesting discourse. Such approaches reject the search for an underlying representation of social structure and are characterised by permanent auto-critique. The critic is required to reflect constantly upon the readings he or she is making, so as to make explicit the partiality of the reading. Critique holds that discourses are frameworks for exercising power, so the task is to ask whose interests are represented in this text, and whose are excluded. However, the message of the 'ideology critiques' considered here is that school geography represents certain material interests and leads to students accepting a partial view of the world.

Ideological critiques of the school geography curriculum make for depressing reading, and can lead to a pessimistic view of the potential for escaping the straightjacket of ideology, especially when coupled with the argument that schools are primarily sites of capitalist reproduction. There was a contradiction in some of these accounts, in that teachers were thought to be key producers of ideology, the 'handmaidens of the state and capital', yet at the same time, armed with a radical consciousness, they could help students recognise ideology and replace it with geography lessons that were based on alternative philosophies (Fien 1993). In response to this problem, the insights of the 'new sociology of education' have been updated to incorporate ideas of social transformation and critical pedagogy.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy sees schooling as a form of *cultural politics*, since schooling always involves an introduction to, preparation for, and legitimation of certain ways of seeing and behaving in the world. Schooling always involves power relations and the privileging of certain forms of knowledge. Invariably, these forms of knowledge serve to reproduce social inequalities linked to racism, sexism, classism and ethnocentrism. Critical pedagogy has profound implications for geography teaching in schools, since it involves recognising how existing curriculum, resources and approaches to teaching offer students a perspective on the world that serves to marginalize certain voices and ways of life. The task of critical pedagogy in school geography is for teachers and students to make explicit the socially constructed character of knowledge, and ask in whose

interests particular 'knowledges' are constructed. Furthermore, armed with such awareness, students and teachers should be equipped to challenge unequal and undemocratic structures. The goal of critical pedagogy is to 'teach geography for a better world'. Huckle (1988:7) summarises this relationship between reflection and action:

"If critical awareness is to result in an extension of democracy, social justice and ecologically sustainable production, it must lead to action. An effective curriculum...should not only encourage pupils to reflect on social structures, but should also equip them to act as agents of democratic change".

Following the writings of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1972), critical pedagogy adopts a 'problem-posing' approach that regards all knowledge as historical products to be questioned rather than universal wisdom to be contested. The approach involves drawing upon students' own experiences and concerns in order to generate themes or issues. In practice, critical pedagogy has had to come to terms with a number of problems. First, although the themes and issues based should ideally comprise the primary subject matter of critical teaching and learning, in reality these themes face the constraints of the classroom setting, the demands of the curriculum and syllabus, conventions about the organization of learning, and the historically evolved role of the teacher. Second, there is a dilemma surrounding the extent to which critical pedagogy is teacher-centred and teacher-controlled. The teacher is still primarily responsible for conceptualizing issues to be discussed, providing relevant materials and orchestrating enquiry in line with his or her perceptions of what is appropriate. There is an important question about how far students can be said to be in control of the direction, nature and pace of their own learning. As a result, critical pedagogy risks students being left with the teachers framing of social identities and moral-political perspectives. Third, there is the question of how identities are theorised within the classroom. In geography lessons for example, what range of identities get discussed, and even if issues of race and gender are raised, how far do teachers avoid suggesting that there are 'essential' categories (this question is discussed later in the chapter).

There is a substantial literature concerned with critical pedagogy and the project of critical pedagogy is the subject of much debate (for a flavour of this debate, see, for example, Giroux 1992, Gore 1993, Ellsworth 1989, Lather 1991).

### **Re-reading the geography curriculum**

An important challenge for geography educators is to go beyond the idea that texts such as syllabuses and textbooks have one 'real' meaning that imposes itself on teachers and students. Recent developments in the sociology of curriculum conceptualise 'official knowledge' as lived culture. That is to say, the curriculum-in-use is best seen as a text that embodies multiple and contradictory power relations. Meaning is produced in the bodily and linguistic interactions among

texts, students and teachers. Studying the language contained in a textbook is a start, but meanings are only produced in actual classrooms or social contexts, by people who are constantly engaged in the negotiation of knowledge, social relations and identities. Texts can have different uses, interpretations and possibilities in different sites - they may be 'open' or 'closed'. Thus, while analysing syllabuses and textbooks is important, it is not possible to predict the consequences of the discourses of policy and curriculum. In poststructuralist terms the ability to 'read off' broader generalizable effects of texts and practices is problematic. More recent work has pointed out that there is no simple relationship between political economy, the institutional production of a text or syllabus, the text itself, its codes and its readers, who are situated in specific institutional contexts (Luke 1995). Grundy (1987:69) summarises this view of the curriculum:

"...an interpretive view of textual analysis would deny the authority of the [curriculum] document to impose its own meaning. Such a view implies that the practitioner has not only the right, but also the obligation, to make his/her own meaning of the text...if practitioners take seriously their obligations to regard the interpretation of curriculum texts as a practical action, that is, as one which engages their judgment, they will also take seriously the status of the students as learning subjects, not objects in the curriculum event".

It has been suggested here that one of the problems with accounts of school geography in the tradition of ideology critique is that they give little indication of the work that is done, every day in every classroom, in the re-production of social forms and relations and identities, or in other words, how teachers and students, using textbooks, videos, slides and so on, actually create or produce geographical understandings. There is a tendency to see the curriculum as text as given, there to be handed down from high to the teacher and then on to the students. There is little attention to the ways in which teachers and students might interpret, edit, omit, amend, add to, embellish, or simply oppose the curriculum-as-text. In other words there is little evidence of teacher and student agency in the construction of geographical knowledge and understanding.

However, in recent years a small number of studies of relevance to geography education have challenged the view that there is a direct and unproblematic relationship between the prescribed or official curriculum and what actually happens at department and classroom level. For example, Roberts (1995) has studied the ways in which geography departments went about implementing the National Curriculum. She shows that the curriculum-as-text could be interpreted in a variety of ways, and as such was capable of being incorporated into existing patterns of teaching and educational philosophies. In that sense, if the National Curriculum was intended to impose order on the practices of geography teachers, it has not succeeded. Even when the teacher has interpreted the curriculum and translated it into activities, there may be mixed messages - between for example written materials, spoken words, visual resources. The geography classroom is characterised by housing a range of media, and is capable of producing multiple meanings. As any geography teacher instinctively knows, students can resist, challenge,

oppose, accept, modify, or selectively appropriate the knowledge and resources offered in classrooms. There is a danger of regarding the National Curriculum as a seamless, monolithic imposition on the work of teachers. The structure is imposed and there is little or no space for creative agency on the part of teachers and students. An alternative way of thinking about the National Curriculum for Geography is provided by accounts informed by a post-structuralist approach. Thus, Ball and Bowe (1992) use Roland Barthes' distinction between 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts. In 'readerly' texts the signifier/signified relationship is clear and unambiguous. There is little space for readers to make their own interpretations of the text. The national curriculum documents with their technical language of levels, attainments and suggested examples give the impression that they are 'readerly' texts. However, National Curriculum Council texts such as the **Non-Statutory Guidance** indicate that there is room to interpret the National Curriculum texts in different ways and that teachers can be co-authors in the production of the National Curriculum. In Barthes terms, the text may be seen as 'writerly', in that meaning or 'making sense' requires the active, creative participation of readers. Barthes suggests that the reading of writerly texts involves two kinds of 'pleasure'. The first is the pleasure of reading and the second is the *jouissance* (ecstasy or bliss) which arises from the sense of interruption, the glimpsing of alternative realities. Ball and Bowes suggest what *jouissance* might be found in reading the National Curriculum texts:

"The blissful...comes perhaps in relation to those 'gaps' and 'moments' of progressive and radical insertion, from the breakdown of transmission teaching and subject boundaries and formal examining and their replacement with cross-curricular work, with investigations, with group and process assessments"(Ball and Bowes 1992:115).

In their review of the implementation of National Curriculum policy within subject departments, Ball and Bowes observed exactly this process of writerly readings of the policy texts as teachers and institutions responded with processes of 'resistance, accommodation, subterfuge and conformity'(p.100). Margaret Roberts (1995) observed the same processes in her account of the responses of three different school geography departments to the National Curriculum for Geography. She found that, 'Deeply held beliefs about what it is to teach and to learn are persistent'(p.203):

"Teachers frame the new curriculum according to the ways they have learned to frame the old curriculum. They continue to teach in the way that they want to teach. The students...were learning very different things in the three schools"(p.203).

Another example of this approach, which accepts the idea that the curriculum is a 'text' that is open to different interpretations, is Winter's (1996, 1997) consideration of the National Curriculum for geography as a 'socially constructed discourse'. She interprets the National Curriculum as having a dominant positivist and ethnocentric paradigm. She adopts the arguments



found in what has been called the 'new' cultural geography about the social constructedness of knowledge, which suggests that there are no 'true' models, laws or theories. Instead there are only ways of thinking about knowledge which are constructed by the thinkers themselves. The implication of this position is that we should think more carefully at the processes involved in the construction of geographical knowledge. As Winter notes:

"We are thus challenged to look more closely at the ways in which places are represented in many different texts and to understand the different ideological positions which underpin those texts" (Winter 1996:372).

Winter 'deconstructs' the Geography National Curriculum Policy text, especially focusing on how place knowledge is constructed (chapter one represents my own attempt to deconstruct place). She notes that the categorisation of the world into EC countries, 'economically developing countries' and a group of countries including the USA, Japan and the former USSR is an example of 'developmentalism', the ideology that assumes countries are independent and wholly responsible for their own development, and all follow the same path of development (Taylor 1992). The diversity of the category 'economically developing countries' is obvious, yet teachers and students are encouraged to regard these countries as uncontroversial. There are also subtle differences in the types of thing students are expected to know about EC and economically developing countries. Winter notes that the National Curriculum policy document is a representation, an 'encoding' of geographical knowledge which seeks to be authoritative, providing a 'correct' reading of the world. Textbook writers act as 'decoders' of this text, responding to and interpreting it. She analyses a popular textbook which contains a case study of an 'economically developing country' - Kenya. The representation of Kenya is Eurocentric because Kenya is compared unfavourably with the United Kingdom in terms of its access to capital and services. The place and people are represented as static and unchanging, and key processes that are serving to transform the way of life of the Masai people and their landscapes are ignored. The voice of the textbook representation is white, male, and Western, and the view of the Masai people about their lives is missing.

Winter's solution to the ideology of this text is to reconstruct the study of place within an 'alternative paradigm', to decode the National Curriculum policy text and create another text. The alternative paradigm is social constructivism, and her reconstruction is based on four principles. These are: positionality, provisionality, contestation, and social mediation. These principles are useful for any teacher seeking to attempt the reconstruction of curricular knowledge, but Winter asks the important question:

"Is it, then, the responsibility of textbooks writers and teachers to 'go beyond and improve National Curriculum requirements' in order to ensure an unbiased view of an 'economically developing country' ?" (Winter 1997: 185).

The accounts offered by Roberts and Winter discuss the geography curriculum-as-text. Rather than see the curriculum as carrying a singular 'truthful' meaning, which unproblematically imposes its ideological message on teachers and students, the curriculum-as-text is capable of offering plural, multiple meanings. However, we should not get carried away with this idea, since the departments studied by Roberts appeared to adopt fairly mainstream interpretations of school geography, and the type of rewriting of the curriculum text carried out by the teacher in Winter's account requires a fairly sophisticated understanding of 'social construction' (not to mention a considerable amount of preparation time which is not generally available to teachers). An indication of the potential and limitations of such an approach is offered by Alison Lee (1996). In **Gender, Literacy, Curriculum: Re-writing school geography** Lee (1996) offers a complex account of how particular gendered forms of geographic knowledge are produced in an Australian school geography classroom. Lee adopts a critical view of geographical knowledge, seeing it as inextricably linked with the exercise of power: its institutional growth was closely linked with nationalist and colonialist imperatives, and like psychology ('another disciplinary discipline'), it is dominated by scientism, especially positivism. 'Doing geography' then, is to participate in the 'technical rationality' dominating modern science. The greater part of Lee's study is devoted to a complex account of how student identities are produced in one geography classroom. She takes the official written syllabus and shows it to be:

"rather like an archaeological site, bearing the traces of its complex history and the sometimes competing interests which inform it"(Lee 1996:33).

The syllabus is a set of selections from a series of disciplinary, political, economic and pedagogical cultures. It is one text among many within the day-to-day work of teachers, and the relationship between a written syllabus and what actually takes place in classrooms is complicated. Lee reads the syllabus-as-text in two ways. First, as a pedagogical text which is based on a distinction between skills and content. In the syllabus she examined, content was privileged, a point confirmed by the assessment documents that favour outcomes (facts or known truths) rather than processes and skills. Thus, the 'good' subject/student of geography in this context is one who can reproduce facts as against producing knowledge according to a process of enquiry. This objectives-based approach to the curriculum is likely to lead to a strong classification of geographical knowledge. Second, as an approach to geography, Lee considers the document to be part of the 'Man/land' tradition identified by Gilbert (1984) as dominating school geography. This has important implications, since the emphasis on physical geography establishes the primacy of physical-scientific methods as *the* favoured approach to studying geography.

The bulk of Lee's book is an account of the ways in which geographical writing was constructed in classrooms. She compared two essays written by students on the topic of 'shifting cultivation' and noted the ways in which student writing was 'gendered'. She suggested that in this particular

geography classroom, the dominant and officially approved form of geographical writing was characterised by facticity, neutrality, and a concern with classification and scientific voice. This type of writing was also evident in the types of teaching materials made available by the teacher, and the external form of assessment which emphasised the importance of accurate definitions and factual evidence rather than more open, expressive forms of writing. Lee is making the important point that geographical classrooms are about the production of subject positions for students to occupy, and these are gendered (and raced).

Lee notes important differences between the texts produced by male and female students. Robert's essay 'attempts to perform a simple representation of the facts, with little or no qualification of the status of those facts'(p148). There is a general effacement of the writers position. The object of the essay- shifting cultivation- is treated with detachment, the writer and the reader are assumed to be external. The text is produced as 'an unmediated representation of the world itself' and it is this transparency of textual representation that characterizes the text as scientific. Lee argues that geography as a science 'privileges the representational and categorical functions of language and backgrounds the interpersonal'(p.150), so that Robert's text approximates the writing of school textbooks as official encodings of school geographical knowledges. Katharine's text is marked by a strong personal tone and a strong sense of voice - most commonly used in English. She uses a written style that is organized around the interpersonal and textual functions of language and backgrounds the representational function. However, from the viewpoint of the geography curriculum, this is not a 'proper' text. Robert's text, by contrast, conforms to the type of text which belongs in school geography textbooks. It is factitious, performing the generic functions of description and explanation, and is organised around cause and effect relationships, representing the world as transparent and immanent. Katharine's text exhibits many of the salient features of expository writing. It is a text produced to change something, explicitly mobilised within the field of environmental politics. It foregrounds difference, conflict and struggle. Whereas Robert's text relies solely upon the curricular resources and forms of writing encouraged in the geography classroom, Katherine's writing draws upon styles of writing encountered in non-curricular intertexts such as magazines.

Though we must be careful about generalizing these ideas to include all school geography, I think it could be argued that Lee's dominant form of geographical writing represents the norm in (English) school geography. Language is, of course, central to the work of geography teachers, and much time is spent trying to improve the quality of student writing. However, the way language is used in geography lessons is usually unproblematic. It is assumed that language is literal, describing innocently the world 'out there'.

Lee's account suggests that students construct themselves and the world through different geographies, or, put another way, they construct different literacies. The issues raised by Lee are very important. She is suggesting that certain views of the world and ways of seeing are privileged

in the school geography curriculum whilst others are marginalized. Within the scientific or positivist academic curriculum, a student who constructs a literate identity within an English discursive framework is a marginalized and feminized subject within this curriculum generally.

The studies considered in this section take geography educators away from a concern with ideology critique which holds that there are objective realities that can be revealed if only the veil of power or selected interests can be removed. The rationalist pedagogy that underpins this approach means that little attention is paid to the production of meanings in the classroom. Thus, for example, in Henley's account teachers and students are either trapped by the language they use or liberated by it. On the one hand it is structure that determines the meanings that can be found in the classroom, and on the other hand it is radical agency that offers up other terms. Similarly, in Gilbert's account, 'plastic' individuals are represented in the classroom and this effectively denies the space for students to imagine the possibility of agency. Both these accounts are tied to the overarching superstructure that is the capitalist economy. The school geography classroom is thus part of the grand metanarrative of capitalist schooling. The classic statement of this position is provided by Huckle (1985:292) when he states that geography teachers:

"fulfil both a general and a more specific role in social reproduction. Along with other teachers they sustain a hidden curriculum, or practical ideology....The specific role geography teachers fulfil is more related to the overt curriculum and theoretical ideology".

The accounts of the geography curriculum considered here suggest the possibility of more open readings. However, I want to sound a note of caution here. Though the possibility of reading the geography curriculum more actively is attractive, there are likely to be limits to how far teachers can offer alternative readings. In line with the work of Fiske (1993) I see schools (and by extension the geography curriculum) as a site of disciplinary power. Successful geography students (those who pass exams) are not just knowledgeable or talented, they are disciplined. Fiske uses the term *power bloc* to refer to social formations (defined by class, race, gender and ethnicity) that have access to various resources (such as money, information, cultural capital, media) which they can use for economic or political gain. Fiske considers it is more important to understand the effects of the power bloc than what it is. The power bloc works to maintain existing social relations and keep them running with the minimum of social conflict. In this context, it is important to ask just what interests are being represented by the geography curriculum, and whose interests are being excluded. Using Fiske's terms, it might be suggested that dominant approaches to school geography use a form of 'imperializing' power which seeks to extend its control over what counts as geography as far as possible, defining for teachers what geography is, how it should be studied, and what a professional geography educator should be like. Against this 'imperializing' power, critical geography educators might seek to utilise 'weak' or 'localizing' powers which seek to maintain and strengthen their control over their work. This means subjecting the geography

curriculum to other readings and highlighting the existence of alternative or 'other' geographies. This is similar to Doll's (1989) discussion of the foundations for a postmodern curriculum. Doll suggests that modernist schooling is based on the idea of linear, sequential learning and the application of positivist rationality. He argues for a postmodern curriculum that celebrates uncertainty, spontaneity and provisionality. This would value personal, 'partial' accounts of the world and celebrate difference. In the next section, I outline some alternative readings of school geography. This is not merely an academic exercise, for I would suggest that a school geography curriculum that does not provide some opportunity for students to reflect upon the representations of the world it offers is seriously failing many students, who are consequently left to form their own alternative explanatory frameworks.

### **The 'cultural turn' and geography education**

This account has focused on the work of critical geography educators. Critical geography education has its roots in neo-Marxist theories about reproduction of social order through the content and organisation of schooling (Althusser 1972, Bowles and Gintis 1976, Apple 1979). Critical geography educators have sought to develop an alternative geography curriculum based on more radical geographical perspectives. The best example of this approach is found in the journal **Contemporary Issues in Geography and Education**. The articles and activities in the journal drew upon the political-economy approaches that dominated human geography in the 1980s. The journal had a number of objectives, including:

"to examine the ideological content of geographical education in relation to its political context"

and:

"to encourage the realisation of the links between critical understanding and the active transformation of the world in which we live".

This represents an attempt to develop a geography education with an emancipatory interest. Johnston (1986) concludes that the school geography is empiricist, stresses problem-solving, and avoids understanding. He suggests that school geography fails to 'explore what it is that produces geography', and fails to help people see what it is that governs their lives:

"It is part of the ideology of capitalism, promoting the ruling ideas of that mode of production"(Johnston 1986:159).

As discussed in the previous section, more recent accounts of the geography curriculum have tended to see the curriculum as a 'text' which, although appearing to have a singular, dominant

meaning, is open to interpretation by teachers and students. This way of viewing the school geography has the potential to incorporate recent developments in the wider discipline which attempt to read places and landscapes as texts. Thus, in what follows I suggest that both geography education and geography can be seen to be experiencing a 'cultural turn'.

### *The cultural turn in geography*

During the 1980s and 1990s geography has been influenced by developments in cultural studies. Cultural studies is often thought of as a radical departure from the modernist theories of Marxist political economy. However, though at times overtly critical of political economic approaches, cultural studies can be seen as evolving from previous work. The so-called new cultural geography can be seen as the result of the coming together of humanist and Marxist agendas. Throughout the 1980s geographers were increasingly concerned with the subjective experience of space and as the decade drew to a close there were attempts to reappraise the relationship between 'idealist' and 'materialist' philosophies in the search for alternative models of society, space, and people (Pile 1996). Kobayashi and Mackenzie's (1989) edited collection **Re-Making Human Geography** aimed to establish a dialogue between humanism and historical materialism. For example, David Ley's contribution reaffirmed the humanist sensibility that meaning and experience are integral to the study of agency and place, but pointed out that the 'culture-building routines' of everyday life tend to be taken-for-granted and thus are opaque to actors. In doing so he recognised the materiality of everyday life and moved closer to the position of time geographers and their concern with social structure. In addition, Ley recognised a weakness in humanistic geography in its tendency to fetishise subjectivity and experience so that they are 'separated from context and material life' (Ley 1989:p.230). Ley hoped that the potential integration of humanism and materialism would restore the relationship between the social milieu and the hermeneutics of everyday communication (p.243).

While humanists such as Ley were moving closer to historical materialism by recognising the presence of the social, the loss of confidence in 'master-narratives' associated with postmodernism has enabled some historical materialists to move closer to humanism. Specifically, it was the loss of hegemony of the neo-Marxist approach in political-economy that enabled this shift. Thrift (1989) in his introductions to the essays in **New Models in Geography**, exemplifies this shift. He suggests that Marxism has undergone a series of re-theorisations. First, the idea of Marxism as a total explanatory framework is increasingly questioned on the grounds that it produces a metanarrative in which all phenomena are viewed as instances of the workings of capitalism. Second, the assumption of the autonomous, rational subject capable of full consciousness is seen to be flawed. Finally, there is a recognition that transcendental truth claims are less secure and that all knowledge must be seen as situated and partial. For Thrift, the problem is how to refashion the confidence of the Enlightenment into 'something more suited to less confident times' (Thrift 1989:256). He favours the quest for knowledge that is provisional and

uncertain, but not so uncertain as to degenerate into the freeplay of purely local narratives.

The confluence of humanistic and historical materialistic geographies offers the possibility for geographers to develop approaches that recognise the importance of both human agency and social structure. This is best expressed in the notion of a 'cultural turn'. Denis Cosgrove's (1983) essay 'Towards a radical cultural geography' can be seen as a turning point. Cosgrove is concerned with the way that 'human beings experience and transform the natural world as a human world through their direct engagement as reflective beings with its sensuous, material reality'(p.1). This statement immediately owes its debt to Marxism and recognises the importance of human agency, but the concern with experience allows Cosgrove to emphasise the importance of communication in the production and reproduction of the material world. As he puts it, 'if all human production is symbolically constituted we may restate modes of production as modes of symbolic production'(p.8). This argument places the human subject as located between the material world and the symbolic, or cultural world. Thus, the 'material world is constituted culturally' (p.9). Cosgrove argues that since social formations leave their mark on the landscape through the succession of modes of human production, and since these modes of production are symbolically constituted, places and landscapes are endowed with human meaning. Cosgrove's 'radical cultural geography' can be seen as a reaction against the traditional view of culture held by the Sauerian school of thought. Sauer saw places as having distinct cultures, which marked the inhabitants of a place. The role of cultural geography was to identify the generic traits of landscape types, to ask the question; what is it about this landscape that expresses the culture of this place. However, the effect of seeing places and landscapes as having a broad and unitary culture is to render them static and mere reflections of a superorganic culture, rather than the product of human agency. For Cosgrove (1989), contemporary geography misses much of the meaning embedded in the human landscape, tending to reduce it to an impersonal expression of demographic and economic forces. He advocates the idea of applying to the human landscape the same interpretive skills we use in studying a novel, poem or film, seeing it as an intentional human expression composed of many layers of meaning. The argument that the material world is constituted culturally is significant, since for Cosgrove, the material world cannot be 'read' except through representations of the world. There is no real world that can be distilled from the cultural, symbolic and personal relations that constitute it.

Cosgrove's argument challenges the commonsense view of the work of geographers that is based on the idea that language is simply a tool or resource for mapping the contours of the material world. In other words the idea that the language used by geographers mirrors the real world. With the advent of the so-called 'cultural turn' (Committee of the Social and Cultural Geography Study Group 1991) geographers have increasingly questioned this commonsense view of language and texts. Michael Curry (1996:5) outlines the structure of the 'new common sense' with admirable clarity:

"First, language is rethought. The traditional notion that some language is literal and some figural, or figurative, is discarded; all is now seen as figural. The image of the text as a neutral and transparent representation of the world is abandoned; the written work is now seen as inevitably partial, obscuring just as it represents. Second, knowledge is now taken fundamentally to derive from a particular point of view, and the products of knowledge are thereby taken to be relative to that point of view. And third, the world is now seen as resistant to a reduction to a simple set of constituents. Rather, it is fundamentally messy; it consists of all manner of objects, events, and processes".

In their introduction to a recent collection of papers, Barnes and Gregory (1997) talk about the 'poetics' of inquiry. Poetics is used to denote that all geographical accounts are 'rhetorical constructions' - textual artefacts that seek to persuade us of their claims through an amalgam of 'academic' and 'literary' genres. In a similar way, O Tuathail (1996) talks of the notion of 'geographing', literally, writing about the world, to remind us of the way in which all accounts of the world are human constructions, and therefore are not free from questions of power. A central concern among cultural geographers has been the question of language. It is often asserted that we face a crisis of representation, where the meaning of terms seems fluid and unconnected. This stems from the realisation that in geography, as in other disciplines, not all language is literal, that language is also used figuratively. Words do not merely represent, they also create worlds, offer possibilities, produce action. This view of language as non-representational strikes at the heart of the positivist approach, which sees language as transparent and unproblematic. This argument or 'linguistic turn' challenges an earlier view of language which, following Eagleton (1983:134) may be termed naive realism where 'words are felt to link up with their thoughts or objects in essentially right or incontrovertible ways'.

The view that language is essentially a transparent self-effacing medium, a means of more or less neutral exchange between the individual psyche and the world, is increasingly questioned. A one-to-one correspondence between the order of words and the order of things can no longer be assumed. Against this, Gregory and Walford (1989) call for geographers to recognise that:

"our texts are not mirrors which we hold up to the world, reflecting its shapes and structures immediately and without distortion"(Gregory and Walford 1989:2).

A useful account of the way the relationship between language and representation is conceptualised in the 'new cultural geography' is provided by Cosgrove and Domosh (1993). They refer to the approaches to writing of Cole Harris and Susan Hanson, two editors of prominent journals, and argue that 'the types of writing advocated by Harris and Hanson do in fact serve to naturalize and therefore mystify the role of the geographic author in the former and the geographic text in the latter' p.36). Cosgrove and Domosh are broadly welcoming of a postmodernity that has ignited a 'bonfire of the certainties' by deconstructing the idea of a



progressive historiography of scientific knowledge and replacing it with a form of relativism where we have to accept interpretations of the world as equally valid or invalid. The modernist tenets of value neutrality, uniformity of nature, and experimental method are regarded as historical creations of specific time periods, cultures and social formations. Cosgrove and Domosh want us to acknowledge this fact and accept the need to write geography in a self-conscious way that will make it clear to readers that we are writing from a particular point of view:

“With the shift to more cultural metaphors we have been forced to abandon the innocence of representation, for we know that our metaphors are themselves drawn from the arena of human meaning creation” (p.31)

Other geographers make similar points. For instance, Barnes (1996) has discussed the role of metaphor in economic geography. He suggests that the recent history of the sub-discipline of economic geography is the history of different metaphors. As examples, places have variously been seen as points of mass that interact, as maps that we store in our heads, deposits of dead labour time secreted from the circular flow of capital, the geological strata of past investments, or as poles of flexible linkages. The point is not that any of these is more ‘truthful’ than any other, but that ‘what is happening is that live metaphors are becoming dead ones’ (Barnes 1996:155). The important thing about metaphors for Barnes is that they make us stop and think, make us see the world in a new way, and lead us to change the way we act. The negative side of them is that, if we are not careful, they come to be seen as literal. This is what happened to the gravity model. For Barnes, the metaphor of the gravity model worked against an old and entrenched vocabulary that limited questions about explanations and predictions. By metaphorically redescribing geographical things in terms of physical models, quantitative geographers were able to use statistical methods, make predictions, get published in scientific journals and speak with authority about scientific explanation. The gravity model metaphor was pragmatic, not cognitive. It did not reveal the ‘Truth’, but it enabled economic geographers to look at the world in a different way. Metaphors are important. Barnes is suggesting that there can be no return to a belief in the transparency of language, in the idea that our language can be seen as a resource to get a grip on or capture reality. Barnes and Duncan (1992) have edited a collection of essays that use literary theory, semiotics, and discourse theory to develop ways of ‘reading’ the landscape as if it were a ‘text’. They use these ideas to challenge the view that geographical writing provides a more or less realistic account of the world. Instead, they argue that:

“Pieces of the world.. do not come with their own labels, and thus representing ‘out there’ to an audience must involve much more than just lining up pieces of language in the right order. Instead, it is humans that decide how to represent things, and not the things themselves”(Barnes and Duncan 1992:2).

This relatively simple idea has a number of important consequences. First, once the supposed

link between language and reality is severed, the notion that writing mirrors the world is untenable. This raises the question of where our 'texts' come from. Second, the act of writing about worlds reveals as much about the authors of texts as it does the worlds represented, since 'the worlds we represent are inevitably stamped with our own particular set of local interests, views, standards and so on'(Barnes and Duncan 1992:3). Third, in writing about worlds we must pay attention to the rhetoric used. Whereas under the claim of objectivism, rhetorical devices such as metaphors, irony, similes are obfuscations to be purged from our accounts, we should recognise these as devices central to conveying meaning. Barnes and Duncan develop these themes by outlining the role of text, discourse and metaphor in the representation of landscape. Like literary texts, landscape is a social and cultural production:

"Thus a landscape possesses a similar objective fixity to that of a written text. it also becomes detached from the intentions of its original authors, and in terms of social and psychological impact and material consequences the various readings of landscapes matter more than any authorial intentions. In addition, the landscape has an importance beyond the initial situation for which it was constructed, addressing a potentially wide range of readers. In short, landscapes are characterized by all those features that Ricouer identifies as definitive of text"(Barnes and Duncan 1992:6).

Barnes (1996) has recently set out two opposing directions in geographical thought. The first (what he calls the 'Enlightenment' tradition) has dominated the geographical discipline, whilst the second (what he calls 'post'-prefixed theories) has challenged the Enlightenment view. "'Post'-prefixed theory' is an ensemble of anti-enlightenment views that reject the idea of 'progress' and associated notions of rationality, reason, and truth. "'Post'-prefixed" geographical enquiry pays attention to the ways in which economic and social order is constructed, as opposed to approaches which seek to uncover or reveal an underlying order. In the next section, I discuss the implications of the 'cultural turn' for the geography curriculum.

#### *The cultural turn and geography education*

The view of language that dominates geography education, at least in practice, rests on a correspondence or transparency theory of language. To date, there is little evidence of geography educators undertaking such a critical examination of language. A starting point would be to examine the 'Cartesian perspectivalism' that characterises geography, and leads to forms of writing that stress exact terminology, using neutral and objective language, and trying to gain an 'overview' of the world (see Edwards 1996 on geography education; O Tuathail 1996 on the imperialistic gaze of Mackinder, one of the founders of modern geography education; and Morgan 1997).

Having briefly discussed some of the features of the 'new cultural geography' or what Curry (1997)

calls the 'new commonsense', what are the implications of these arguments for school geography ? The school geography curriculum operates on the assumption of mimesis, which means that it is assumed to be like a mirror, reflecting the real world as it is. This is true even though there have been shifts in emphasis over time. In school geography the key shift has been from the 'capes and bays' and regional approaches which sought to provide accurate descriptions of particular places and features, to a more scientific approach based on the positivist search for generalisation. In both cases though, the concern was for the geographer to provide an accurate account of the world. This search for accurate description and explanation has provided the basis for the development of school geography as it allows for progression in curriculum planning. Thus, students may study the same topics or places at various stages of their school career, but they will be able to offer more detailed explanations, more complex accounts, and better understanding of geographical theories as they progress. In terms of the role of the geography teacher, these mimetic approaches suggest that there is a distinctive body of knowledge that makes up the geographic discipline which operates as the *curriculum-as-fact*. This way of thinking about the geography curriculum is the dominant one. The curriculum is seen as an object, needing constant revision and up-dating. However, there are other ways of thinking about the curriculum. As we have seen, the 1970s saw the emergence of a phenomenological critique of the curriculum. The school curriculum, it was argued, was 'external to the knower', 'imposed' and had little connection to the commonsense understanding of students. This argument was based on the idea that the curriculum was a social construction, and could just as easily be constructed otherwise. According to this perspective, the geography curriculum was not a fixed, absolute reflection of reality, but was contingent and perspectival. This approach to the school curriculum was seized upon by geography educators who were interested in the humanistic geography that was developing in the 1970s, and by the early 1980s there were some clear arguments for a humanistic geography education (see for example MacEwan 1986, Fien 1983).

Some of the key advocates of the phenomenological approach to curriculum quickly abandoned their original position on the grounds that to see all knowledge as a social construction led to a pluralist 'relativism' that offered little in the way of radical politics. If we all had different perspectives, then all were equally valid. What was important to understand is that some knowledge comes to be valued more than others. So, for instance, in the geography curriculum, the decision-making of industrialists is given greater attention than the views of industrial workers. This suggests that knowledge produced in the school geography classroom is ideological in that it represents the interests of certain groups and marginalizes other perspectives. This type of thinking has been influenced by the idea of structuralism, which suggests that beneath the surface appearance of human activity there are underlying structures or causal processes that affect human behaviour and thought. In geography, Marxist-inspired theories of political economy have been most influential, and this has affected our understanding of the role of the geography curriculum. In this view, the geography curriculum operates as ideology, systematically representing the interests of capitalism.

These three approaches to the geography curriculum can be labelled 'curriculum-as-fact', 'curriculum-as-value', and 'curriculum-as-ideology' and each corresponds to respective approaches to knowledge: empiricism/positivism, phenomenology, and structuralism. However, all three approaches can be said to be similar in that they are all striving to tell a better, more complete story about the world (Barnes and Duncan 1992). They are all seeking mimesis, an accurate reflection of the world. The 'cultural turn' has meant that geographers have become interested in the ways in which we represent the world. Whereas previous approaches had assumed that there existed a fixed real world, external to the observer, which could be accessed by the geographer using appropriate methods. In recent geographical theory, there is a tendency to see the world as a 'text'. Thus the landscape can be read in exactly the same way as one might read a novel, or interpret a painting or film. The meanings of texts are not found in texts, but are produced in the act of reading. Thus different people, with different outlooks and experiences, will produce different meanings of the same text. In this situation, it is foolish to talk of the 'truth' or 'correct' interpretation. Our understanding is just one of many possible ways of understanding the text. This leads to the postmodern view that there is no privileged, superior way of looking at the world. A recent tendency is to regard the geography curriculum as text, in that there is no essential or fixed meaning to it, and teachers and students can interpret it in a creative way, devising their own routes through it, deconstructing its statements and reaching new understandings of it. In this way, the geography curriculum can be seen as 'ludic-rous'. This term is useful because it suggests that the curriculum is 'absurd' in that there no secure basis or 'core' to the curriculum, and also suggests a degree of 'playfulness', in that we can choose between approaches and revel in the 'pick and mix' nature of postmodern school geography (Bale 1996).

I have taken time to highlight these different perspectives on the curriculum because I would suggest that they offer geography educators a way of re-invigorating the project of developing a critical perspective. In recent years geography teachers appear to have forgotten the debates about the nature of the geography curriculum that were a feature of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This has been partly from necessity because the National Curriculum has been prescribed and teachers might as well get on with delivering it. Treating the geography curriculum as 'text' serves as a reminder that in geography classrooms it is not only geography that is being taught but the historiography of geography- implicitly at least. Viewing the curriculum as text allows teachers to suggest to students that it is not the 'real world' that we study in geography lessons but rather a discourse about the world - a representation of the world that is 'geographical' (as opposed to historical or sociological). Regarding the curriculum-as-text is to suggest that geography teachers are not teaching knowledge, but preferred discourses. These are not necessarily chosen by the teacher, and he or she may not be aware of what is taking place. An example would be accounts of gentrification which are couched in terms of lifestyle choices and voluntarism with no attention to the economic conditions that create low rents in certain parts of inner cities. We are all, always involved in discourses - frameworks for thinking about the world -

the role of the teacher is to denaturalize these instead of endlessly validate them.

## **Other Geographies**

The emergence of the 'new cultural geography' has the potential to inform the work of geography educators seeking to build upon the insights of critical pedagogy. For instance, a key insight of the 'new cultural geography' relates to what may be called the 'cultural politics of place'. This is based on the idea that:

“the representation of place is a cultural practice which must be understood in relation to structural social inequality and geographers have linked practices of representation to social relations of power by insisting that the representation of place is also necessarily a question of ideology”(Rose 1994:46).

Geographers have been interested in interpreting images of place through the social relations of class, race, gender and sexuality. What this suggests is that the ways in which we represent places is always informed by issues of social power and inequality. Similarly, critical pedagogy is concerned with 'exposing the race, class and gender power relations embedded in disciplinary knowledge, the organization of schooling, popular culture and other cultural manifestations'(Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997:41). Just as cultural geographers have acknowledged that the ways in which we see the world are always situated, partial and positioned, so critical pedagogy seeks to highlight the many versions of reality. In what follows, I provide some examples of the ways in which certain 'subjugated' knowledges are excluded from the geography curriculum and point to the emerging literatures which could be used to inform curriculum development.

In his excellent **Geographies of Exclusion**, David Sibley (1995) provides a framework for thinking about the way certain knowledges come to be excluded from representations of the world. He starts by considering the contexts in which knowledges are produced, noting that the compartmentalizing of knowledge is a characteristic of academia associated with the growth of specialisms. This compartmentalized knowledge gives power and authority to those who peddle it. Power is reflected in the existence of hierarchies. Practitioners defer to a small number of 'higher' authorities whose ideas are widely accepted as fundamental and who provide a discipline with its paradigms. This would appear to suggest that dominant forms of geographical knowledge are the result of conspiracy and the suppression of ideas, but this is not necessarily the case. It may just be a case of not having to engage with other ideas because they just do not register. People 'talk past each other'. In order to press home how this might relate to the work of school geography teachers, I want to offer the example of Sibley's (1995) accounts of the exclusions of knowledge that surround the work of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology, whose concentric ring diagram of the structure of the city is an 'ever-present' in school geography textbooks. In his

discussion of how the Chicago School came to dominate urban geography, Sibley points out that some ideas count for more than others:

“Power is not equally distributed in the knowledge industry, and those practitioners who have more of it have the capacity to marginalize or exclude the work of dissenters”(1995:115).

What this means is that if critical ideas come from the oppressed, from women or black authors, or from minorities who write from a position informed by their sexuality, they may be dismissed because they challenge white, heterosexual male domination of the knowledge industries. Sibley's work suggests some of the ways in which school geography acts to exclude other voices and perspectives. Sibley considers that the whiteness of human geography is a problem for a subject which is concerned with the diverse experiences of the world's population. As a result there is a failure to include the views of black authors on the nature of urban space. Sibley discusses the work of W.E.B. DuBois, whose **The Philadelphia Negro** represented a 'significant contribution to the understanding of social space'. DuBois studied the most important area of black settlement in Philadelphia, surveying almost every household, collecting data on housing, work, literacy and institutions. As a product of its time, **The Philadelphia Negro** was the first holistic account of urban, black America, and one of the few studies to be written by a black American. Yet the book has had little impact on modern urban studies. Sibley suggests that this is linked to the dominance of the Chicago sociologists in urban sociology in the early part of this century:

“Blacks, ethnic minorities and women, as students of urban society, were suppressed or marginalized by the dominant white, male centre which comprised the academic establishment”(p.148).

Sibley concludes that DuBois failed to make an impact for two reasons. First, his methods. DuBois adopted a 'scientific' method in his use of social survey methods, which meant following in the tradition of writers like Rowntree and Booth. However, by the time of the rise of the Chicago sociologists in the 1920s, such methods were considered 'unscientific', when social science was drawing upon theories in the natural sciences. DuBois's work was out of step with the dominant paradigm. Second, DuBois stressed the role of racism in shaping the social geography of the city. This interpretation conflicted with the assimilationist views of Park and Burgess, who were in a position to block alternative perspectives.

The neglect of black perspectives in urban sociology has been transferred to geography, which has drawn upon the work of the Chicago School. Burgess's concentric ring model of the city is still found in school geography textbooks, yet the intellectual origins of this image is rarely alluded to. Raising these issues in the geography classroom would raise significant questions, and an actual

reading of sections of the original texts would force teachers and students to confront the issues of racism and exclusions. Unfortunately, Burgess's socio-spatial model of the city is torn out of its Chicago context and discussed with little criticism, aside from some reservations about its applications in other cities. The relevance of the world-view of the authors and how it may have influenced their portrayal of the city is not available for students to scrutinize. Sibley continues his account of the exclusions of the Chicago School with an account of the work of women at the Chicago School of Social Service Administration who were doing research on the city between 1910 and 1930. The writings of the Chicago women were 'sensitive descriptions of urban cultures' that portrayed the problems faced by recent immigrations struggling to come to terms with the individualism and materialism of Chicago. These writings went a long way to 'developing a scientific study of urban society'. But unlike the work of the Chicago School, they were made by women whose theory and (political) practice were inextricably linked. Sibley suggests that this academic work failed to enter the mainstream of social science whereas the work of Park and Burgess has gained canonical status because their theories were in tune with conservative sociologies and geographies which were dominant until the 1970s. Sibley looks forward to a time when a 'human geography informed by feminist and post-modern theory should be more receptive to other voices from the past, like the Chicago women'(p.180). Sibley's argument would seem to have direct relevance to geography educators whose everyday work involves them in the representation and understanding of other people and other places. Virtually all students who study geography to examination level encounter the work of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology, yet few seem to recognise that the models of urban structure were produced by sociologists and imported into geography with the quantitative revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. That students are not given the opportunity to consider the intellectual context in which these theories originated or adequately reflect on their status within contemporary human geography is revealing of how the school geography operates to exclude other perspectives and voices.

The following sections suggest other examples of the ways in which the school geography curriculum serves to exclude perspectives based on gender, sexuality, race and class. Whilst I recognise that it is important to understand the ways in which these various axes intersect, for the purposes of this discussion I treat them separately.

### Gender

The major textbooks written for students of geography make almost no reference to women, feminism and gender in their indices. There is little evidence with which to challenge Longhurst and Peace's (1993:3-4) assessment of geography:

"What geography is today is very much the product of those who have had their particular interpretation of the world accepted. It is therefore not surprising that the discourse of

contemporary geography can, on the whole, be seen as a statement by white, middle-class, and middle-aged men about their environment”.

School geography serves to legitimate dominant groups in society and their world-views by valuing their knowledge, language and beliefs. However, as we have suggested, this knowledge does not go uncontested. Teachers and students may struggle to resist or recontextualise knowledge in schools. A significant development in geography and education in recent years has been the development of feminist geography. It is not possible, in the space available, to offer anything more than a brief introduction to some of the literature in this area.

Feminist geography emerged in the 1970s in North America, Britain and the Netherlands as geographers sought to establish the connection between contemporary women's rights movements and the geographical profession. Initially a key concern was on 'making women visible' to a discipline traditionally concerned with the places and spaces of men. For example, Monk and Hanson's (1982) essay, 'On not excluding half of the human in human geography' pointed to the way in which geographical theory ignored differences among the people and within the places these theories sought to explain, and exposed gender biases in traditional methodologies, particularly those influenced by positivism's assumption of the separation of the researcher and researched, and of fact and value. In addition they pointed to geography's failure to focus research questions towards the other 'half', thus making women's experience effectively invisible. Geography educators have been interested in the questions raised by feminist geographers and how they relate to classrooms. Early statements were made by Bale (1982) and Larsen (1983) who pointed to sexist bias in geographical materials. The Association for Curriculum Development in Geography was concerned with this issue and an issue of its journal **Contemporary Issues in Geography and Education** was devoted to the topic. Important statements have been made by Monk (1988, 1996), Bowlby (1992) and McDowell (1992). A key concern in this work was to make women's experiences more visible in the geography classroom. From the initial concern with the 'geography of women', feminist geography has moved to consider the ways in which men obtain and maintain more power than women in society, and more recently, with a concern for the differences between people and cultures.

There is no doubt that feminist arguments have been felt in geography education as part of a broader movement towards equality of opportunity within education. In particular the worst excesses of sexist language and representation have been removed. However, this tends to suggest that 'it is linguistic representations of knowledge that are flawed by gender biases rather than knowledge itself' (Bondi 1997:248). Thus, presentations in geography textbooks may be couched in non-sexist language but there is no acknowledgement of the gender inequalities inscribed within geographical knowledge. Non-sexist language suggests that we all -men and women - can achieve the same degree of rationality, clarity and objectivity in our understanding of the world. More recently, feminist geographers (drawing on the work of feminist philosophers)



have argued that dominant conceptions of knowledge are 'gendered'. This is based on the idea that western intellectual traditions operate through dualistic categories such as reason and emotion, rationality and irrationality, objectivity and subjectivity, general and particular, mind and body. In each case, the former term is positively valued and considered superior, and associated with masculinity, whilst the second term is negative and inferior, and associated with femininity. Feminist geographers and male geographers sympathetic to feminism argue that the discipline is dominated by men and, more importantly, is characterised by a masculinist perspective.

One of the most sustained critiques of the masculinism of geography has come from Gillian Rose (1993). Rose draws on the work of Evelyn Fox Keller who argued that the emergence of modern science in the early seventeenth century was tied up with the growing polarization of gender which was occurring in the same period. Debates during the Scientific Revolution about what science should be were in part a response to increasing distinctions between masculine and feminine. The mechanical theories of science that came to dominate saw science as the objective revelation of an already existing order, and only men were capable of such objectivity. This was tied up to emerging dominant forms of masculinity. Only men were thought capable of separating themselves from the world, taking an overview and remaining the detached observer and recorder of events. As an illustration of this, Haraway (1997) considers the scientific work of Robert Boyle (1621-97) who is immortalised as the Father of Chemistry and, more importantly, the Father of the experimental way of life. Boyle invented an airpump in order to demonstrate the existence of a vacuum. But more was at stake in his experiments than the existence or nonexistence of a vacuum. The airpump was able to establish 'matters of fact' independent of the arguments of politics or religion. It was beyond the influence of culture, having filtered out the role of human agency. The experimental philosopher was able to disclaim any role in the creation of knowledge: "It is not I who say this; it is the machine". The role of public witnessing of phenomena was very important in Boyle's work. The laboratory was to be open, a theatre of persuasion, free of culture. Even today, laboratories have an aura of authority, of cleanliness, of being free from contamination. It is this idea of openness that underpins the most important means of disseminating knowledge, the written report. The written report was based on what Haraway calls the 'rhetoric of the modest witness', a naked way of writing, unadorned, factual and compelling:

"Only through such naked writing could the facts shine through, unclouded by the flourishes of any human author. Both the facts and the witnesses inhabit the privileged zone of 'objective' reality through a powerful writing technology"(Haraway 1997:26).

Haraway calls the type of scientist produced by these material, literary and social technologies the 'modest witness'. The modest witness is the 'legitimate and authorized ventriloquist for the object world, adding nothing from his own opinions, from his biasing embodiment' (p.24). The modest witness does just that: he bears witness, having the power to define facts. The similarities with the way in which geographers view their work is striking. Rose (1993) suggests that although

contemporary science has lost some of its faith in the successful completion of the search for truth:

“most geographers continue to believe that the true nature of the world can, in principle, be explored and revealed by objective study...[Livingstone] argues that the contemporary discipline continues to constitute itself as a search for foundational knowledge through the trope of discovery, which implies that geography retains the assumptions of the kind of modern science that feminists such as Keller have dubbed masculinist”(Rose 1993:63).

The arguments of writers such as Haraway and Rose can be seen as part of a broad critique of scientific thought. In this critique, the scientific way of knowing is no longer regarded as a privileged discourse that links us to the truth but rather one discourse among many. It argues that the tenets of value neutrality and the experimental are historic creations of specific time periods, cultures and social formations. From this perspective certain ‘ways of seeing’ or frameworks of meaning are tied in with struggles for power and dominance between humans. This process is achieved through regarding certain ‘ways of seeing’ as natural and suppressing others. The implication of these arguments is that the quest of science may be read as ideological, from the subject matter chosen to study, how it is studied, and how authority is claimed for scientific representation.

Against the type of knowledge produced under the aegis of masculinist science, feminists such as Haraway and Rose argue for ways of knowing (and being) in the world that acknowledge the incompleteness and partiality of their insights. For Haraway, knowledge that does not draw attention to the contexts of its historical and ideological production is ‘unlocatable and so irresponsible’.

These arguments have had a significant impact on the discipline of geography. An important element of this work has been to make visible the role of women in the construction of geographical knowledge. Mona Domosh (1991) has pointed to the ways in which women have been written out of even the most recent histories of the discipline. She recovers the travel of Victorian women, who, although they were denied formal academic training and traditional fieldwork, nevertheless engaged in research. However, their work was regarded as trivial and the outpourings of the unqualified. A recent example of an attempt to challenge the social relations of the geography classroom is provided by Karen Nairn (1997) in her study of the politics of silence and voice in geography classrooms. She suggests that students are powerful whenever they ‘make their own decisions to talk or not talk in the public verbal space of classrooms’. Whether silence is powerful or not depends on the context and the degree of agency amongst students. For example female students may resist appropriation by a geography curriculum that is predominantly about men and men’s activities by remaining silent. Nairn argues that schools legitimate dominant groups in society by valuing the knowledge, language, and patterns of

interaction - the cultural capital - used by the dominant groups. Geography teachers are the products of gendered institutional contexts, and this influences their own teaching, and female experience is not articulated and validated in school geography courses, so students continue to experience geography as a gendered subject reflecting its position in more general male hegemony. If the geography curriculum retains its male focus, she asks, why should female students actively participate in a curriculum that largely excludes or devalues their experience? Nairn offers an account of her own intervention which involved trying to get 'quiet' female students to speak more in lessons. She devised a women-focused lesson which was based on video about the life of a young woman in Bangladesh. Nairn recognises the difficulties of representation in the classroom - the video presenters are women of colour, but there are still issues surrounding the filming of others for video consumption, and this is compounded by the politics of a white middle-class feminist choosing to show this 'other' women to students. This is the sort of question that needs to be raised in the name of a more complex and intricately thought through geography education. The pedagogy of the woman-focused lesson was attended to also. Students were given a homework to complete prior to the lesson, thus validating their own knowledge and allowing space to develop their ideas, And secondly, the practice of turn-taking in class so that all students could participate publicly. Nairn draws on recent work in feminist geography by paying attention to the situatedness of knowledge, the fact that what counts as geographical knowledge is tied up with wider questions of power in society, and the limits of representation. Despite the increased attention to issues of gender within geography, it is relatively rare to find published material that explicitly draws attention to the ways in which geographical knowledge, in the past and the present is constructed as gendered.

### Sexualities

As the account of the previous section suggests, feminist geographers have questioned the masculinist and ethnocentric nature of existing geographical knowledge. They have redefined knowledge as both experiential and interpretive. This has potentially profound implications for school geography, which relies on particular forms of knowledge. For instance, Sibley (1995) provides an example of how knowledge embodies values which call into question the moral basis of dominant models of society. Power is a central issue as it is the establishment which has the power to define legitimate knowledge and to identify competing truth claims as deviant and dangerous. The example involved a secondary school teacher who was charged with improper conduct following a complaint that he gave an 'unsuitable lesson'. He read the class a story in which a strip-tease artist was sexually assaulted by a group of drunken young men. He then asked the girls in the class to put themselves in the place of the stripper and describe her feelings. The charges about the teacher were tied up with allegations that he transmitted knowledge that was morally anomalous. In adopting a personalising rather than objective approach in his teaching, the teacher encouraged empathy with people caught up in moral conflict and a questioning of conventional moral categories. This example raises the question of what moral geographies are

promoted in our teaching. In other words, how far do our lessons reflect on groups or individuals who have been consigned to the margins of society because the values they represent undermine the moral consensus ? Such issues have not been widely discussed in geography education, though there is now a small but growing amount of literature that could provide the basis for future curriculum development (see Pile and Keith 1997, Pile and Thrift 1995, Bell and Valentine 1995).

Within schools sexuality is an area which is regulated and policed as sexual choice and diversity are systematically excluded. Sex education policies promote and legitimise normative sexual assumptions within a familial heterosexuality. Sexual subjectivities that do not correspond to normative assumptions of dominant (hetero)sexuality are marginalised (Jones and Mahony 1989, Epstein and Johnson 1998). The neglect of the study of sexuality in education is part of a wider process in which schools deploy strategies that serve to desexualise the arena. However, as part of the general process of the desexualisation of schooling, certain areas of the curriculum are sexualised. Health Education and Personal and Social Education has become part of a limited curriculum space where sex is 'officially' dealt with. The Local Government Act (1988) served to reinforce the exclusion from discussion other forms of sexual expression. As a result schools' responses to sexual issues have been highly circumscribed by wider moral prescriptions. At the same time, critical theorists suggest that sexuality in schools can be seen as all pervasive, as it manifests itself in teacher-student relations, student-student relations, within disciplinary practices, and within the curriculum. School activities are central in making available hegemonic and subordinate sexual subject positions, and thus school geography plays its part in this process.

There have been few discussions of the issues surrounding teaching geographies of sexualities. Geography educators should take seriously Tracy Skelton's (1997:425) suggestion that:

"We probably all already teach more about sexuality than we realise. For example, we may assume heterosexuality throughout our teaching - terms such as the 'family' will be taken for granted as mother, father, children; when we talk of couples in the spatial environment we leave the term undefined and it will generally be understood to mean heterosexual couples; in population geography we may use the term 'spouse' without thinking of the implications of heterosexuality; discussions of 'women and the life cycle' may assume that marriage and motherhood are predictable paths for women at certain ages without qualifying this as the 'majority of heterosexual women'; in urban geography or the geography of leisure we may focus on spaces that are exclusively designed for the 'nuclear family' or as heterosexual spaces without defining them explicitly as such".

Skelton's comments challenge geography educators to recognise the ways in which our teaching of the subject is based on heteronormative assumptions. How often do school geography

lessons even raise these questions ? When we teach about places, to what extent do we consider the extent to which they are characterised by a dominant form of sexuality ? The school geography curriculum can be seen as a 'space of exclusion' where questions of sexuality are marginalized. However, as the work of geographers have recently shown (and as is immediately apparent to anyone who has walked around city centres on a Friday or Saturday night), sexuality is a key element of social geographies. The chapters in Bell and Valentine's (1995) **Mapping Desire** are an important contribution to the debates about sexuality and space. The challenge is to incorporate such perspectives into the mainstream curriculum. Thus, Knopp discusses the relationship between sexuality and Western urbanisation, and Binnie considers the role of gay consumption sites in the revival of cities such as London and Amsterdam. These chapters could usefully be incorporated into lessons on urban geography. School geography is in part concerned with raising students' awareness of the 'world of work', and McDowell's discussion of the heterosexuality of city workplaces could provide the basis for classroom discussion. Kramer's discussion of rural lesbian and gay identities in North Dakota could be incorporated into work on rural geography (see chapter four for a discussion of rural sexualities).

It is important to avoid seeing teaching about the geographies of sexualities as a mere 'bolt-on' to existing curricular frameworks. There is a danger of tokenism in such an approach. More fundamentally, the question is raised about the construction of geographical knowledge and social space. Gill Valentine (1996) has discussed the 'lesbian production of space'. She suggests that public space -or what she calls the heterosexual street- is not an asexual space. Instead, it is commonly assumed to be 'naturally' or 'authentically' heterosexual. However, there is nothing 'natural' about this process. The 'heterosexing of space' or the way in which spaces become assumed to be heterosexual is the result of repeated acts, including things such as couples kissing and holding hands as they walk down the street, adverts and shop window displays which present images of contented nuclear families, heterosexualised conversations at bus stops or queues for the bank, and piped music in shops and restaurants that relate tales of heterosexual love. Valentine argues that while heterosexuals have the freedom to perform their heterosexuality in the street, sexual dissidents are only allowed to be gay in specific spaces and places. The heterosexuality of the street has to be maintained in a variety of ways -one of which is violence, and more subtle regulatory regimes (looks of disapproval, whispers and stares)- and these tend to lead to lesbian and gay people policing their own desires and hence reinforcing the appearance that 'normal' space is 'straight' space. But Valentine reminds us that such public spaces are rarely produced in a singular, uniform way as heterosexual. Instead there are usually 'others' present who are producing their own relational spaces, or who are reading 'heterosexual space' against the grain - experiencing it differently. She gives a range of examples to illustrate this. For instance, dress can provide subtle signifiers of lesbian identities (pinkie rings, labris earrings) , and gestures such as a glance, or an independent or confident manner can alert those 'in the know' to one's sexuality. Similarly, in conversation lesbians can 'queer' public space by 'dropping pins' (or verbal clues), by referring, for example, to lesbian cultural icons or appropriated films books or music

(such as Melissa Etheridge or kd lang). As well as these more subtle, discrete ways of producing lesbian space, Valentine gives examples of more overt or 'in yer face' productions. For instance, lesbian and gay pride marches have the effect of allowing gay and lesbians to numerically dominate the streets and fill them with lesbian and gay meaning for one day. In this way 'marchers pierce the complacency of heterosexual space'. Pride marches do more than just achieve visibility, they challenge the production of everyday spaces as heterosexual. Groups such as 'Queer Nation' adopt an 'in yer face' confrontational approach, rather than just trespass in heterosexual public space with the intention of staking out or gaining a share of it - queer is also about confronting and contesting the very production of public space. Another example is a groups self-styled as 'Lesbian avengers', whose activities involved targeting the memorial of queen Victoria (who famously denied that lesbians existed) near Buckingham Palace, surrounded it, chanting slogans and proclaiming banners such as 'Lie back and think of Lesbians' and 'The Lesbians are not amused' These tactics serve to raise the visibility of lesbians and rupture the taken-for-granted heterosexuality of these spaces - (re)imagining/(re)producing them as queer sites.

Whilst feminist geography has become more accepted (by some) as a legitimate discourse within geography education, questions about the 'heterosexing of space' are relatively new, and raising questions of sexuality is likely to be difficult in the context of current constructions of the school curriculum, as evidenced by the letters in response to Larry Knopp's article on 'The social consequences of homosexuality' which appeared in the **Geographical Magazine** (1990). The article was given some prominence in the magazine, with a collage of images and a headline on the front cover:

"It is with great regret that we as a department and a school feel obliged to write to you about the latest issue of **Geographical Magazine**. As educators of young impressionable minds, we have a duty, both morally and legally, not to promote homosexuality as a normal and acceptable lifestyle".

"Two problems with the cover of the magazine this month:(1) It looks very bad to the parents of schoolchildren issued with the magazine. (2) It brings the subject into disrepute."

"I [was] amazed, disgusted and dismayed at the cover and the contents about homosexuality. Is this what the Royal Geographical Society is now reduced to?...I wouldn't dream of having it in my school nor at home.."

## Race

Earlier in this chapter it was suggested that a key element in the critiques of the school geography curriculum that developed in the early 1980s was the issue of racism. In recent years the type of

anti-racist education advocated by Gill has been subject to criticism on the grounds that it reproduces ideas about the fixed nature of cultural groups. In the edited collection **'Race', Culture and Difference**, James Donald and Ali Rattansi (1992) explore an 'anti-essentialist understanding of racial categories'. In his chapter, Rattansi points to the need to consider and reflect upon the theoretical, pedagogic and political foundations of multiculturalism and antiracism. He uses ideas from post-structuralism and psychoanalysis to argue for an 'alternative framework' which emphasizes the complex and contingent nature of 'race', culture and identity in contemporary society. Avtar Brah (1996) has produced work on the perspectives and experiences of young Asian Muslim women in Britain which stresses the complex intersection of gender, class, ethnicity, racism and religion. Her work stresses the historical (and geographical) contingency of these factors and warns against any essentialist understanding of 'race' and racism. This work is in line with arguments about 'new ethnicities' which suggest that the conceptualisation of ethnicities are not primordial, essential and fixed but instead can be seen as constructed, multiple and changing. This suggests that what it means to be white, black, or Asian depend upon the context in which those terms are used (see Jackson 1996 for a discussion of the various approaches to the study of 'race' in geography).

What this means for geography educators is not entirely clear, though it is fair to say that we are not used to theorizing the processes whereby racialised identities are produced. Much anti-racist work in geography lessons focuses on the politics of visibility: that is, making sure that representations of the world are realistic and do not exclude certain groups. Making sure that data on social issues is broken down into categories of ethnicities would be an example of this. The geography curriculum as currently constituted offers little space for geography teachers and students to explore the complex process of cultural translation whereby young people construct their identities, and as such has limited relevance to the actual lived existence of many young people.

Claire Dwyer's (1998) discussion of the ways in which young British Muslim women used dominant representations of Asianness in order to contest and construct their own identities is exemplary here. She suggests that the construction of these young women's identities is produced through a challenge to dominant representations of 'Muslim women'. This process occurs in specific places such as the school and the neighbourhood, in relationships with a range of people, and using a variety of mediative resources such as television and music. For example, watching soap operas such as *Eastenders* or *Brookside* offered them a 'cultural space' in which to discuss the representation of their own cultural identities (see also Gillespie 1995).

The following example shows how newspaper representations of urban conflict can be used to unpack issues of race, gender and community. In September 1993 a member of the neo-fascist group the BNP was elected as a local borough councillor in the East End of London. The election of Derek Beacon came as a shock to many people throughout the country, as it was seen as a

significant downturn in race relations. Located in London's East End, which has a degree of symbolic resonance as the 'heart' of the nation, popularly celebrated in the image of the 'Cockney', geography teachers have turned to this place as a site of economic, political and social conflict. Canary Wharf casts its shadow over what are often represented as areas of economic and social deprivation. It was in this context that the activities described here were devised. The purpose of the exercise was to examine the discourses that surrounded the events. A good deal of media coverage was devoted to the issue, and all seemed to want to offer a way of making sense of the event, trying to explain these events.

Students were presented with copies of newspaper articles. After an initial reading of the articles students were given a framework with which to analyse them. This consisted of five different 'discourses' or explanations of the event. These included the idea that it was 'prejudice' that had led to the election of Derek Beacon, the notion that 'conflict over resources' were central, the idea that the Isle of Dogs is somehow 'unique', and the idea that it was the existence of marked and observable 'cultural differences' that sparked this event. The students then set to work re-reading the articles in order to identify these various articles. This involved selecting phrases or words that fitted into the discourses outlined above. In this way students were introduced to the idea that there are a variety of interpretations or readings of the same event, but also that some readings are more widely accepted than others. Also, it was suggested that the reporting of these events would depend on how similar events had been interpreted and reported.

An important element of this exercise involved showing how the media constructed notions of 'Whiteness' and 'Asianness'. This was achieved through a consideration of the pictures used to portray the perpetrators and victims of racist anger, and this was gendered. It was almost always white men who were pictured in a militarist stance, whilst the victims were Asian women. A consideration of the language used sheds light on commonsense notions of racism. A key lesson is that newspaper, television, and geography textbooks do not provide the truth about an event such as this. Instead, we should see them as being involved in the 'social construction' of race and race relations (see Jackson 1988, 1989, Burgess 1985, Ware 1996).

### Class

Outside formal sociology lessons, students rarely get the opportunity to discuss the question of class (Alvarado *et al.* 1987). If, as Huckle (1997) suggests, a student who has completed an A Level course in geography does not necessarily have a clear understanding of concepts such as the state and capitalism, the same is true of class. However, class plays an important part in the construction of human geographies, and I would argue that questions of class, along with gender and race, need to be placed at the heart of geography teaching. Of course, class is an extremely ambiguous and complex concept. The way I use it here is to assume that an individual's economic and occupational location in the social order is one of many factors that help to construct



consciousness, perceptions of others, and relations of power. A critical geography education needs to provide students with an understanding of the processes whereby a socially differentiated world is created. Too often, geography textbooks and syllabuses talk about 'people', when in fact society is divided into different types of people who possess characteristics based on class, gender, race and so on. In what follows, I do no more than highlight some of the ways in which issues studied in geography lessons would benefit from a more explicit engagement with questions of class.

The world of work forms an important part of the subject core for geography. The London Syllabus 'B' includes a module on 'The Impact of Changing Economic Activities' which requires students to study how the development and functioning of economic activity impact on environments and the quality of life and how people respond to such impacts. Sayer's (1986:89) comments on the earlier version of this syllabus still apply:

"We can study matters such as pollution problems or the influence of governments on industrial location, but not how the capitalist organisation of industry itself reproduces a class of people who can lose their livelihoods if profits fail and who are denied a say in investment and location decisions"

Thus, the syllabus encourages students to see existing social relations as immutable and given, and decisions about what and where to produce are merely technical (where is the best place to locate ?). The frameworks in which these issues are discussed tends to draw upon theories derived from neo-classical economics and based on the idea that government operates as a referee, balancing competing interests. Indeed, a common requirement of students is that they carry out 'cost-benefit' analysis, taking an objective view and denying any personal interests they may have. The syllabus suggests that regional inequalities are inevitable and seems to imply that the quality of life of a place is directly related to levels of economic activity. Though the syllabus seems to recognise that different people benefit from changes in economic activity, class is not mentioned. It would be quite possible for a student to complete this module without acquiring an understanding of how capitalism as an economic system creates high wages and profits for some and low wages and poverty for others in the same place. Thus Cambridge can be studied as an example of a prosperous place, recognised for its high-tech microelectronics industry and a well paid, highly skilled workforce, without recognising the highly stratified nature of employment, which is based on divisions between men and women, middle class and working class, and race (Massey 1997, Allen *et al.* 1998).

The major problem with the syllabus is that many ideologically loaded concepts are accepted as common-sense. Thus, references to 'industrial location', 'government intervention', 'prosperity' and 'enterprise' are used as though they have a taken-for-granted meaning, whereas there is a whole set of meanings surrounding them. The best example of this is the use of the concept of

'global shift'. The problem with this term is that it is used to describe a selective process as a universal trend. The effect is to see the shift of investment to more favourable business climates as inevitable, when in fact, the process is quite sporadic and the extent to which this is occurring is subject to much academic debate. I would suggest that geography educators have to be careful about using these concepts when they are so openly touted by neo-liberal politicians as an argument for encouraging workers to be more 'flexible'. The point is that a concept such as 'global shift' operates as a 'key word' in a larger discourse about the nature of capitalism. After all, one person's 'flexibility' is another person's 'exploitation'. This suggests the need for geography educators to undertake critical language analysis (Lankshear 1997), asking questions such as who is using a particular term, and in what context ?

Other examples of social processes that tend to be used neutrally but in fact conceal conflicts between classes include 'gentrification' and 'redevelopment'. Gentrification tends to be presented as a neutral process of 'improvement' of the look of an area of a city rather than as a process ridden with class conflict and having its roots in processes of economic restructuring (Jackson 1989, Smith 1996). Similarly, 'redevelopment', set within a managerialist perspective aimed at improving the 'quality of life' tends to gloss over questions of class through euphemistic references to 'poor quality housing' and 'run-down areas'. As a result, questions about why some housing is of poor quality or why some people have to live in run-down areas are effectively ignored.

### **Towards deconstructive inquiry**

"Situated by feminist and postmodern critiques of the social construction of knowledge, there is now an interesting and expanding debate about the ways in which contemporary geographical texts reflect, re-present and exclude different voices. Increasingly it is recognised that there is a politics both to the practices of research and in textual construction. Thus geographers are beginning to consider different ways in which we might write so as to allow not only the voices of those multiple others whom we study to be heard in our texts, but also to include our own voices"(McDowell 1994).

The argument in this chapter has been based on the notion that our work in geography education -curriculum development, textbooks, lesson planning and delivery - does not simply mirror or reflect the world around us (the mimetic approach) but reflects discourses drawn from other texts. When we claim to be acting objectively this is simply one type of metaphor for looking at the world. This postmodern approach suggests that there is no privileged or superior way of looking at the world, and implies that all forms of knowledge are relative (see Duncan and Ley 1993). Adopting such a 'radical relativism' in geography education would suggest the need to 'give voice' to previously powerless, marginalised and silenced groups, leading to a rethink of the question of what counts as legitimate (curricular) knowledge.

One way to think about what is at stake here is to consider the ways in which the purposes of geographical enquiry have been framed. A common division is based around prediction, understanding and emancipation or in terms of geography's paradigms: positivist, humanistic and radical. A postmodern approach adds a fourth interest: that of 'deconstruction'. Put very simply, the original paradigms all assume that there exists a *found* world, 'out there', objective, knowable whilst deconstruction assumes that such found worlds are *constructed*, shaped by the interplay of language, power and meaning. Adopting such an approach to geography teaching would have profound implications. Patti Lather (1991) has provided a succinct account of what 'Deconstructive inquiry' would involve.

First, there is a shift from an emphasis on general theorizing to problems of interpretation and description. This suggests that when we offer an account of the world we are not so much *describing* as *inscribing*. The dominant form of writing in geography is narrative realism which assumes the transparency of description. However, a deconstructive approach challenges this by raising questions about what constitutes an adequate depiction of reality. What this implies is that while writing geography involves a process of selecting, transforming and interpreting 'reality', we usually conceal these processes of construction behind masks of objectivity and fact. Whilst this may be seen as a pragmatic move in order to render the world more visible, the effect is to foreground our own perspectivity which is always situated (Eurocentric, sexist, racist, classist). The challenge of deconstructive inquiry is to foreground the authority of the teacher and challenge dominant versions of the world.

Second, deconstructive inquiry suggests the need to use data in order to *vivify* interpretation rather than 'support' or 'prove'. This might involve telling different 'stories' about the same data in order to overcome the problem of univocal authority, or the idea that the teacher is telling the truth.

Third, deconstructive inquiry would require a focus on the social relations of geographical research and teaching. This means that we should recognise that all geographical endeavour involves a political moment which expresses a relationship between people. Social relations are a central part of the construction of knowledge, and the question of who speaks for whom becomes a central question.

These arguments have immediate force for our work as geography educators, challenging us to review the whole question of the ethics of geographical research and inquiry. One of the major consequences of the widening gap between school geography and developments in higher education in recent years is the lack of discussion surrounding methodological approaches to geographical inquiry (compare this with a subject such as Psychology where a recent A-Level textbook mounts a significant challenge to the positivist assumptions of the discipline from a

postmodern perspective, see Gross *et al.* 1997). Thus, a best-selling textbook (Prosser 1995) can introduce students to the use of Geographical Information Systems without any reference to the debates surrounding its use in human geography (for an excellent account of this debate see Pickles, 1995, and for a briefer summary see Dorling and Fairbairn 1997). Similarly, I have yet to see any serious questioning of one of the 'sacred cows' of school geography -the field trip - despite serious critiques of the role it plays in promoting a form of 'masculinist geography' (Rose 1993, **Professional Geographer** 1994, see Slater (1996) for some interesting comments on this issue in relation to geography education). As an introduction to A-Level students about questions of the issues surrounding geographical research I have used Kim England's account of how she came to abandon her research on lesbian communities in Toronto (England 1994). Fortunately though, these debates, largely emanating from feminist and critical geography are impinging on the wider discipline, offering the possibility that geography teachers in schools can introduce them in their work (see Madge *et al.* 1997 for an excellent introduction to feminist methodologies).

A major concern with postmodern approaches is the apparent relativism that amounts to a 'postmodern conversation' where 'anything goes', all knowledge claims have equal validity and all we can do is agree to differ. Against this position, critical educators such as Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren have advocated a form of Border Pedagogy which seeks to locate itself between modernism and postmodernism. Their approach builds upon existing critiques of modernist (or capitalist) schooling (Bowles and Gintis 1976) which suggest that although education is meant to be meritocratic, there are patterns of success and failure based on class, gender or race. In other words, schooling reproduces the social order. Certain groups do better out of it than others, but schools encourage students to put their success or failure down to themselves, rather than reflect upon the social conditions that contribute to educational outcomes. According to this analysis, the Enlightenment project that underlies the education system has failed. However, for Giroux and McLaren, 'critical postmodernism' holds out the possibility of a deconstruction of the curriculum in order to revive the emancipatory goals of the Enlightenment. According to these accounts, geography teachers and their students need to become 'border crossers', which means they must seek to recognise the positions from which they speak about and see the world, in order to recognise other positions and viewpoints. There can be no final, certain knowledge, and whatever knowledge we have is always partial and contingent. Border pedagogies imply the need to constantly deconstruct our understandings of the world and engage in reconstructing new understandings. Border pedagogies stand between a postmodern rejection of universalism and truth, and an Enlightenment search for social justice and empowerment. In other words, although we need to recognise that our knowledge cannot be held up as truth, we should not give up the hope of achieving a more just and better world.

One of the problems of McLaren and Giroux's approach is that they write at a high level of abstraction, and it is difficult to see how such a pedagogy may work in the classroom. McCormick

(1994), Ellsworth (1989) and Wright (1995) provide interesting accounts of using critical pedagogy in the context of higher education, focusing on the difficulties of allowing other voices to be heard in the classroom, and attending to the power relations between both teacher and students, and between students. In geography, Cook (1996) provides a thoughtful account of his attempt to use border pedagogy on an undergraduate course, and McDowell (1994), recognising that many geographers now suggest that the desired aim of writing geography is a polyphonic text, in which the multiple voices of the narrator and his or her subjects are heard, suggests that teachers need to highlight the selections on which any geographical text is based: questions such as who to include in the narrative, how to arrange the material, how to decide who speaks for whom. McDowell discusses the need to transfer the practices of feminist and postmodern research and writing into pedagogical practice. There is a need for texts that 'attempt to represent and position not just the views of the author but also the multiple and often conflicting voices of many subjects' McDowell 1994:241), and also a need to have classrooms in which attempts are made to position not just the views of teachers but also the multiple and often conflicting views of students. To this end, Sibley (1995:184) has recently argued for geographers to have a more active engagement with people:

"I see the question of making human geography radical and emancipatory partly as a question of getting close to other people, making way for them".

This type of approach involves methods of enquiry such as participant observation, group work, grass-roots activism or learning through advocacy. Sibley points to the need for geographers to get much closer to the people whose problems provide the primary justification for the existence of the subject:

"What I would advocate is that geographers go out into the world, not on an imperialist and colonialist mission, but in order to experience the lifeworlds of other people"(p.185).

## **Conclusion: Back to the future ?**

This chapter has described the potential 'postmodernization' of the school geography curriculum. It suggests that there is no single geography but many *geographies*, and that we should therefore be suspicious when we hear people talking about *the* geography curriculum. There are disintegrating tendencies that fracture the notion that we can all agree, once-and-for-all, on what geography education is or should be. In the language of postmodernism, this chapter has sought to adopt an 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. However, there are plenty of people who lament this situation and seek to reassert a grand curricular narrative, in the process fending off the multiple voices of postmodernism. Thus, we now have subject 'cores' that delimit once and for all what is essential about geography for schooling purposes and inevitably relegates other perspectives to the margins. In addition to this, recent contributions from influential geography

educators have welcomed the moves to define precisely what geography is and have tended to see the fragmentation that supposedly characterises the subject in higher education as a negative development. A good example of this is Marsden (1997), who suggests that the period from the 1970s to the 1990s can be seen as characterised by the 'decline of the geography component' in school geography. He suggests that there was a shift towards curriculum theory which was used to support arguments for more integrated studies in schools. There were pressures for environmental and world studies, as faculty structures undermined the role of subject heads of departments in schools. Marsden suggests that in general:

"educational theorists strongly favoured integration, dismissing subject-based syllabuses as mere social constructions and/or historical accidents"(p.247).

Marsden points to the Geography for the Young School Leaver Project which prioritised issues-based content and an enquiry-based educational method. He suggests that the approach 'served to legitimate a retreat from place'(p.248), and relevance was sought at the expense of 'real geography':

"At the extremes zealotry took over, and in some secondary school textbooks distinctive geographical content was seriously reduced. Cartoons became more evident than cartography, and sound-bite talking heads were granted more space than photographs of real-world landscapes".

Marsden sees issues-based approaches as inevitably signalling a withdrawal from a 'distinctive geography'. World Studies and peace studies afforded geography only a partial role in studying such issues and, at the same time:

"moves away from a distinctive subject focus were also reinforced by the forces of structuralism, radicalism and postmodernism"(p.248).

He argues that geography educationalists have got embroiled in an ideological debate about content and process, which has diverted their attention away from 'exciting developments at the frontiers of geography'(p.249). This last comment is more encouraging, but the type of geography Marsden wants to see a return to is Haggett's view of the 'central and cherished aspects of geographical education; a love of landscape and of field exploration, a fascination with place, a wish to solve the spatial conundrums posed by spatial configurations'(Haggett 1996:17).

Similarly, Rawling (1997) has written a substantial essay on the threats and opportunities posed by vocationalism for geography education without once referring to the social and economic context in which vocationalism is taking place and the ideological role it plays in the restructuring of the relationship between capital and the state (Avis et al. 1996, Gleeson and Hodgkinson 1996,

Bloomer 1997). Again, Rawling is concerned about the 'reticence to be *absolutely clear* about the definition and 'heart' of the subject'(p.173, my emphasis). It is important to consider what geography should be about, but the only geographer quoted by Rawling is Haggett. A reader who happened to stumble on these articles could be forgiven for thinking that Haggett is the only geographer in higher education who has anything to say about school geography. Yet in the same volume as Haggett's article, we have Jackson's argument that:

"Rather than policing our own disciplinary boundaries in an embattled and defensive mood, I would suggest that it is human geography's encounter with social theory and its excursions into neighbouring social sciences that are the most promising sources for meeting the intellectual and political challenges of the future"(Jackson 1996:92).

Against the tendency to want to define what is and is not geography, and privilege some forms of geographical knowledge over others, this chapter has emphasized the plurality of geographies, to highlight the ways in which some geographies, some people's knowledge are excluded from the geography curriculum, and importantly, how the geography curriculum can be made to reflect these knowledges. The challenge for geography educators seeking to use the insights of critical pedagogy in their work is to develop situated examples that can be reflected upon and developed by other educators. As noted earlier, one criticism has been that critical pedagogues have failed to develop such examples. Increasingly critical pedagogues have shown an interest in the potential of popular culture (Buckingham 1996), and in the next chapter, I discuss the potential for developing a geography education that acknowledges the pedagogical function of media and consumer culture.

## CHAPTER THREE : POPULAR CULTURE AND GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION

### Introduction

The previous chapter examined the ways in which the postmodern critique offers the potential for critical geography educators to re-read the mainstream (modernist) curriculum and acknowledge the existence of many versions of reality (or many geographies). Critical geography education is concerned with the way the world looks from the perspectives of people located in networks of race, gender, and class. At the same time, geography educators need to be aware of the ways in which education takes place and consciousness is constructed in a variety of sites away from the classroom. There is a need for critical geography teachers to examine the cultural pedagogy that takes place outside school. Though there has long been a blurring of the boundaries between school geography and popular culture (Ploszajska 1996), my concern here is with the more recent tendency for writers within the field of critical pedagogy discussed in chapter 2 to turn to the study of popular culture (Buckingham 1996). In general this shift is attributed to the fact that the information explosion, the media saturation of the late twentieth century with its access to the private realms of consciousness, has produced a social vertigo. This reality has been labelled 'hyperreality' by Jean Baudrillard (1983) and is marked by a blurring of the distinction between the real and the unreal. According to this view, these processes lead to a loss of touch with traditional notions of time, community, self and history. The flood of signifiers or 'semiotic glut' associated with media culture diminishes our ability to find meaning or engender passion for commitment. The senses are literally bombarded, leading to a loss of belief that we can make sense of anything (McLaren 1995).

Such accounts, though not uncontested, suggest that educators need to recognise that, more than ever, education takes place in a variety of social sites including but not limited to schooling. Such pedagogical sites include libraries, television, movies, newspapers, magazines, toys, advertising and so on. This suggests that educators need to examine both in-school and cultural pedagogy if we are to make sense of the educational process in the late twentieth century. We should recognise the power of cultural pedagogies, shaped by commercial dynamics, to impose themselves into all aspects of our lives. The argument of this chapter is based on a belief that we need to extend our notions of geographical literacy (Slater 1996) to include a critical media literacy. This requires students to not only develop the ability to interpret media meanings but to understand the ways in which they consume and invest in popular culture. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997:90) suggest that developing such a pedagogy will hinge upon:

"(a) its ability to link the production of the representations, images and signs of hyperreality to power blocs in the political economy; and (b) its capacity, once this linkage is exposed and described, to delineate the highly complex and ambiguous effects of the reception of these images and signs on individuals located at various race, class and gender coordinates in the



web of reality”.

This chapter thus stands at the intersection of the fields of geography education, cultural geography and cultural studies. The interdisciplinary field of cultural studies is concerned with studying, interpreting, and often evaluating cultural practices in historical, social and theoretical contexts. The emergence of cultural studies has allowed an examination of the cultural practices through which individuals come to understand themselves and the world that surrounds them. Cultural studies offers educators the opportunity to examine the effects of cultural pedagogy with its identity formation and its production and legitimation of knowledge. The importance of cultural studies for critical geography educators is pointed out by John Huckle:

“It is the realm of culture and cultural studies which presents critical school geography with its greatest challenge and potential...[it] should acknowledge that young people face a world with few secure signposts yet display much commitment and imagination in using popular culture to construct meanings and identities” (Huckle 1997:249).

I would suggest that geography educators have hardly begun to understand the implications of cultural studies for geography education, and this chapter is intended as an introduction for geography educators to some of the relevant literature, and the substantive issues it raises.

### **Cultural studies and education**

Cultural studies suggests that the development of the electronic mass media has changed the old rules of how culture operates. In such circumstances, there is a need to expand the range of issues and texts studied in the domain of education. Whilst we should continue to study books and print as academic artifacts, we should also study the values that are produced and distributed through media such as TV, films, Internet, video games, advertisements and so on. Traditional academic disciplines (such as Geography) have been slow to adapt to such changes. However, although the critical pedagogy that has emerged in geography education has been slow to take on board the implications of cultural pedagogy, there are indications that geography educators are beginning to realise the importance of this task. For example, Rob Gilbert (1992, 1995) has attempted to explore the implications of the ‘New Times’ or what he calls the ‘post-modern political culture’ for schools. He outlines the dimensions of a postmodern society in which traditional patterns of work have changed, where experience is constantly mediated by images, where the status of all knowledge is questioned as a matter of course, and in which there can be no assumption that people share similar values or morality. These trends raise important questions about the role of education, which in its modernist form seeks to impose a coherent world view on the young. Increasingly this world view is rejected by young people, which causes problems for those on both the political right and left. He suggests that:

"A feature of postmodernist styles is that they are archetypically the styles of life of the young - cinema, television, MTV, fashion, rock music, dance: cultural forms which are the expressive channels of a generation. Educators ignore this lifeworld at their peril"(1992:56).

Gilbert notes two responses to these changes. The first seeks to return to classical values and morality based on the teaching of great works and traditional morality, teaching students to recognise the difference between right and wrong and their place within a wider social order. The second response is concerned about the shallow and superficial experience of the world provided by the mass-mediated experience of television and consumption. Gilbert's preferred pedagogy for addressing these issues is through a 'cultural studies' approach (Cohen 1997) which combines practical understanding of the way society works with the symbolic means for interpreting, commenting on and working to change it. Gilbert (1997:69) makes an explicit call for educators to take seriously the question of consumption. Adopting Miller's (1995) polemic assertion that consumption represents 'the vanguard of history', Gilbert argues that:

"Education for Citizenship in a postmodern consumer society needs to acknowledge the role of consumption as a key dimension of life whereby people find pleasure, identity and forms of expression as well as utility. Consumption becomes a link with the (increasingly global) economy, and a means of showing how economic processes affect people's daily lives" (Gilbert 1997).

Huckle too, has recently argued that the new (postmodern) forms of politics linked to consumption and popular culture need to inform curriculum developments in geography (1996, 1997). He draws on the theory of reflexive modernization developed by Beck (1992), Giddens (1991, 1994), Lash (1994) and Lash and Urry (1994). Reflexive modernization suggests that as societies are modernized the more people are able to reflect upon social conditions and act to change them. Detraditionalization sets people free from social structures and allows them to monitor themselves in relation to their society and environment (cognitive reflexivity) and interpret themselves and their lifeworlds (aesthetic reflexivity). Aesthetic reflexivity is a 'central feature of youth and consumer cultures and plays a key role in the creation of those meanings that sustain the new social movements'(Huckle 1996:113-114). Reflexive modernization suggests that everyone can become a 'transformative intellectual' and provides the potential for a critical pedagogy that 'connects with youth culture and turns its hedonism and concern for identity politics towards more relaxed and sustainable ways of living'(p.115).

Critical educators working in the field of geography education now have a rich seam of literature that explores the relationship between cultural studies and education. For example the essays in **Popular culture, schooling, and everyday life** (Giroux *et al.* 1989) indicate that schooling has always had to find ways to deal with popular culture, often negatively, as a source of illicit pleasures. These contributions suggest that it might be possible to see popular culture as source

of critical meanings that can be used by teachers to empower excluded groups of students. Instead of simply dismissing popular culture as the source of ideologies imposed upon students, teachers need to recognise the affective pleasures and identities that popular culture provides. The general thesis is that education is not confined to schooling and that the boundaries between education, consumption, the media and popular cultures are increasingly blurred. Giroux's recent writing (1994, 1996) has been concerned to come to terms with a situation in which pedagogy is no longer primarily confined to the realm of schooling. He suggests that it is in the diverse spaces and spheres of popular culture that:

"most of the education that matters today is taking place on a global scale. Electronic media, the vastly proliferating network of images that inscribe themselves on us everyday, and the hybridized sounds of new technologies, cultures, and ways of life have drastically altered how identities are shaped, desires constructed, and dreams realized"(Giroux 1994:x).

According to this view the products of everyday consumption such as Benetton adverts, films such as **Pulp Fiction** and **Dangerous Minds**, or the products of the Disney Corporation are sites of pedagogical practice that shift the struggle over meaning away from the institution of schooling. The increasing sophistication and general ubiquity of such 'edu-tainment' challenges the survival of critical public cultures in which 'people can debate the meaning and consequences of public truths, inject a notion of moral responsibility into representation practices, and collectively struggle to change dominating relations of power'(1994:22). Giroux's most recent work has tended to focus on providing critical readings of the texts of popular culture, showing how they reflect the cultural politics of race, class and gender in the United States. The extent to which the boundaries between schooling and popular culture are blurred is noted by McRobbie (1994) in her influential account of the relationship between popular culture and postmodernism. This essay provides a starting point for geography teachers who are concerned to think through the implications of the fact that 'images push their way into the fabric of our social lives. They enter into how we look, what we earn, and they are still with us when we worry about bills, housing and bringing up children'(p.18). For McRobbie this development is not necessarily to be seen negatively. She points to the difficulty of drawing a line between image and reality, media and society, and popular culture and education. The media also enter the classroom and hence in seminar rooms (and classrooms), 'slides are projected and students prise open new readings'(p.18). This is the source of McRobbie's optimism about postmodernity:

"The invasive impact of new technologies, because they now occupy a place within [education], provides a basis for the production of new meanings, new cultural expressions"(p.19).

McRobbie argues that the ever-increasing velocity of circulation of signs is not nihilistic or superficial glitter. Instead it offers protest, leading to a widening out of culture and a greater range

of resources for people to live out their identities. She says that:

“There is no going back. For populations transfixed on images which are themselves a reality, there is no return to a mode of representation which politicizes in a straightforward, ‘worthwhile’ way...[T]his need not be seen as the end of the social, or the end of meaning, or for that matter as the beginning of the new nihilism. Social agency is employed in the activation of all meanings. Audiences or viewers, lookers or users are not simple-minded multitudes. As the media extends its sphere of influence, so too does it come under the surveillance and usage of its subjects”(p.22-23).

This perspective stresses social agency and the active construction of meaning, and challenges geography educators to open up the geography classroom to the play of the world, to see curriculum as a form of cultural production. McRobbie’s take on postmodernity is broadly positive, and can be seen as pointing towards a form of education for the ‘New Times’ which have emerged in the wake of shifts in the nature of Left politics (Jacques and Hall 1989).

At this point it should be noted that the increasing concern of critical pedagogues such as Giroux, McLaren, Kincheloe and Steinberg with questions of cultural pedagogy is marked by an ambivalence towards popular culture. On the one hand, there is a recognition that popular culture is a site of struggle, which means that ideas about ‘false consciousness’ are replaced with ideas about the negotiation of meanings, and the contestation of dominant ideologies. On the other hand, there is a recognition that cultural texts *do* teach us something, and that there are dominant meanings and readings that seek to persuade consumers to see the world in particular ways. In such circumstances, the role of critical educators is to:

“develop methods of studying the cultural pedagogy of hyperreality and the corporate curriculum, carefully monitoring and documenting their social and political effects” (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997:92).

Examples of this approach are to be found in Steinberg and Kincheloe (1997), Giroux and Shannon (1997), Kellner (1995), Giroux and McLaren (1994), Giroux (1994, 1996). At present such literature has made little impact on geography education, but applying these ideas to geography education would require that geography educators develop ways of exploring the ideological messages encoded in the latest Bond movie or Disney cartoon, producing critiques of films such as *The Piano* or *Boyz n the Hood*, and reading television programmes, popular novels, computer games and adverts for their ideological messages, and at the same time recognising that there is no single meaning that finds its way into the minds of consumers. This suggests that educators seeking to understand the role of popular culture in the construction of ‘geographical imaginations’ (May 1996) need to understand how these products are consumed and negotiated by young people. Do they buy into the messages they contain, or do they resist or reject them ?

This involves geography educators discussing with students the images and messages contained in such cultural texts and discussing their likely impacts. This is a tall order. Fortunately, for geography educators convinced of the need for such an approach, much useful work is being produced by cultural geographers, and some of this is discussed in the next section.

### **Geography and cultural studies**

Geography educators looking to develop insights from the literature of cultural studies and critical pedagogy can draw upon recent work in the field of cultural geography. Traditionally, geographers have tended to concur with the view of those critical theorists who argue that the expansion of mass production in the twentieth century has led to the commodification of culture. Popular culture serves the interests of manufacturers seeking profits, and people are seen as the passive victims of advertisers. Consumer goods are characterised by a high degree of standardization, and thus lack 'authenticity', simply meeting 'false' needs. The strategies of marketing and advertizing used to sell these goods is seen to lead to ideological control or domination. In this type of approach to consumption, consumers are portrayed as passive, manipulated and duped, rather than as active and creative beings. Stacy Warren (1993) notes the traditional neglect of the landscapes of consumption by cultural geographers, which is symptomatic of broader sentiments in social science:

"The most sustained commentary on the everyday has resolutely dismissed it as dangerously mindless 'mass culture'"(Warren 1993:175).

Similarly, in their review of the geographies of consumption, Jackson and Thrift (1995) note the way in which economic and social and cultural geographers have ignored many areas of everyday consumption such as shopping, advertising and the media (and therefore much of the everyday lives of young people), before suggesting that 'an understanding of the process of consumption is central to debates about the relationship between society and space'(Jackson and Thrift 1995:204). The tendency to stress the negative environmental and social costs of consumerism is evident in the work of geography educators. For example, Huckle (1987:148) notes that:

"A look around any town centre shopping arcade on a Saturday afternoon, suggests that young people are particularly susceptible to the culture of consumerism. Yet this is profoundly anti-educational; appealing to wants rather than needs' offering only temporary satisfactions and suppressing knowledge which could inform real choice".

Huckle and Chidley's (1993) **Our Consumer Society** represents the most sophisticated attempt to date within school geography to address the issue of consumerism and youth cultures. It links the development of consumer society in Britain to the rise of Fordism and suggests that the

ideology of consumerism encourages people to see the future in terms of the opportunities it affords for more consumption and judge society on its potential to deliver rising material standards. The shift towards a post-Fordist economy in the 1980s intensified the pressure to consume more and producers increasingly used emotional messages and images to appeal directly to particular groups of consumers pursuing variegated 'lifestyles'. Huckle and Chidley suggest that shopping and consumerism serve to 'de-politicize' the majority of people, as they 'choose to put their energies and invest their hopes in a life outside work and politics; in the world of holidays, home interiors and shopping malls'(p.100).

Through a series of activities **Our Consumer Society** asks teachers and students to consider the idea that consumerism is based on an unreasonable desire for goods. For example, 'The real Cost' uses Shor's (1980) notion of 're-experiencing the ordinary' to get students to describe, diagnose and reconstruct the motor car so that they can get understanding of its environmental and social costs at the local, national and global scales. The main pedagogical strategy used is for students to examine an everyday object and become aware of its true social significance and the ways in which consumption locks us into networks of economic relations. Armed with this knowledge, students may then be encouraged to speculate on how the object might be reconstructed in ways that are more ecologically sustainable and socially just. Similarly, Harvey (1990) advocates that teachers ask geography students to consider where their last meal came from in order to trace the items used in the production of that meal. Real understanding for Harvey is knowledge of the 'geography of production' and he sees his task as an educator to reveal these 'hidden geographies' that are masked within the social relations of contemporary consumption. Sack (1992) talks of the (back-stage) history of extraction, manufacture and distribution being 'virtually obliterated' when the finished product is presented to the public.

The dominance of the 'scientific' approach within school geography has encouraged geography educators to effectively ignore popular culture. Even within humanistic geography, which has perhaps been more responsive to the field of popular culture, there has been a marked reluctance to move beyond 'serious' topics and texts and a tendency to dismiss popular landscapes. There is a similarity between humanistic geography and the conservative tradition of 'culture and society'(Eliot 1948). Humanistic research has tended to focus on the symbolism and meaning found in literature and art, where there exists a body of literary and art criticism familiar to geographers with links in the humanities. As Burgess and Gold (1985) note, from the record of published work about literature, geographers 'emerge as being profoundly elitist in their interests, with a derogatory view of the 'mass' media and thus its 'mass' audience'(Burgess and Gold 1985:15). For example, Yi-Fu Tuan (1976) drew a clear distinction between 'high class' and 'pulp' literature, and Relph's (1976) **Place and Placelessness** classifies place experiences on a scale ranging from the deepest authentic to the shallowest inauthentic, superficial experiences provided by the mass media. He suggests that the media performs a levelling down of place experience which encourages the 'placelessness' of landscapes such as Disneyland and the

Mediterranean coast. The interpretive work of humanistic geographers thus has much in common with the literary-cultural traditions that can be traced from Matthew Arnold through to F.R. Leavis, in which moral standards and aesthetic values central to civilised society were to be found in Great Literature, and where mass culture threatened to destroy the harmonious, stable way of life in preindustrial, organic communities. This disdain for the popular was evident in the writings of Halford Mackinder, one of the founding fathers of school geography. In his approach to teaching geography Mackinder was worried about the negative impacts of 'modern facilities for pictorial teaching and amusement' and by 'youthful debauchery in the penny picture palace' (Mackinder 1918 quoted in O Tuathail 1996:35). Mackinder stressed that geography education should allow people to stand above the confusion and chaos to achieve a wider perspective (O Tuathail 1996). Thus, from its earliest inception in the school curriculum geography was concerned with the education of taste. Indeed, Gregory (1994:84) concludes that:

"There is on occasion more than a hint of Leavis's rasping elitism in the conservative canon of humanistic geography".

Radical geography has been influenced by the Marxist inspired Frankfurt school which tended to regard popular culture as 'false consciousness'. Thus Harvey (1989) and Soja (1989) both note the tendency towards 'theme park experiences' in the contemporary city, and Sack (1992) condemns the consumer's world as immoral. Zukin (1991) describes how property developers have constructed new 'landscapes of power' which have threatened the 'authenticity' of places. However, in recent years there has been a heightened interest in the relationship between geography and the multidisciplinary field of cultural studies, leading to a re-evaluation of consumption and popular culture.

Cultural studies is characterised by a variety of approaches. An early model of cultural studies was developed by the so-called Frankfurt School in the 1930s associated with the writings of critical theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer. They coined the term 'culture industries' to describe the industrialization of mass-produced culture and the commercialism that drove the capitalist system. Cultural products were similar to other products in that they were commodified, standardized and mass-produced. The cultural industries were important in the reproduction of capitalist societies and formed a central part of leisure activity. The Frankfurt School held that there was a clear distinction between high culture and low culture, seeing the former as holding the potential for critical, subversive and emancipatory moments, whilst low culture was held to be ideological and debased, leading to a duped and passive mass of consumers.

The Birmingham-based Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies emerged in the 1960s, and was concerned to develop a critical perspective in which the concept of culture could be seen as both the product of, and the response to, the social conditions of a period. Culture is therefore both a means of social production and reproduction, and cultural studies sought to specify the ways in

which cultural forms serve either to further domination, or enable people to resist and struggle against domination. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's model of hegemony and counter-hegemony was used to analyse social and cultural forms of domination (hegemony) and forces of resistance and struggle (counter-hegemony). Gramsci was interested in understanding how dominant social orders come to dominate, and reasoned that in modern capitalist societies leadership is attained largely through cultural consent - or cultural hegemony. But this cultural hegemony was not a state of permanent or absolute social control. The groups of people involved in securing hegemony, including ruling-class alliances and various subordinate groups, is always shifting. Gramsci insisted on recognising the existence of not one dominant group sharing a common goal but various ruling class alliances, and not one single subordinate group united in its resistance but a collection of oppositional groups, thus going beyond the traditional Marxist emphasis on class divisions and opening the way for a concern with gender, race and other cultural dimensions.

The Birmingham School sought to balance notions of ideology and resistance. The classic statement of this position is the collection of papers **Resistance through Rituals** edited by Hall and Jefferson (1976) which includes empirical studies of youth subcultures such as Teds, Mods, Rockers, Skinheads and Punks. The focus on hegemony and resistance meant acknowledging the power of the mass media to shape and enforce ideological hegemony, the power of people to resist ideology, and the difficulty of reading off the effects of media culture. This approach therefore acts as a corrective to the pessimistic readings of the Frankfurt School where mass culture served to dominate individuals, imposing ideology upon them. This approach is shown clearly in Stuart Hall's (1981) article on the encoding and decoding of media texts, in which he discusses the way in which media institutions produced meanings, how they circulate, and how audiences use or decode texts to produce meanings.

In recent years, the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) has influenced the development of a theoretically informed cultural geography. Its influence can be seen in three of the best treatments of the 'new cultural geography' provided by Burgess and Gold (1985), Cosgrove and Jackson (1987), and Jackson (1989). In their introduction to the essays in **Geography, the media and popular culture** Burgess and Gold (1985) outline the two main paradigms of cultural studies - 'culturalism' and 'structuralism'. Culturalism developed from the work of writers such as E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams and stressed the vital, creative force of the cultural expressions of ordinary people. Structuralism was more concerned with the role of ideology in structuring social relationships and defining reality. Culturalism stressed the importance of human agency, seeing experience as the basis on which ordinary lives are lived, whilst structuralism was more concerned with the analysis of the ways in which particular cultural forms produce meaning. Burgess and Gold suggest that culturalist and structuralist perspectives are important in three areas of media research. First, they allow us to see the media as one of the major ideological forces in contemporary life. The media is seen to be engaged in the process of



signification - making the world to mean - thus there is attention to the ways in which meaning is constructed or made. This means asking important questions such as, how does the media produce its versions of the world ? What are the processes whereby certain images, words and ideas are selected for presentation ? Second, structuralist approaches have led to a concern with analysing the various texts of the media through linguistic and semiological approaches. The focus is on exploring the different levels of meaning within media texts. Third, there is a concern with media audiences. It is recognised that groups and individuals decode media messages differently. Language is 'multiaccented' in that individuals can read and interpret messages in very different ways. A good example of this is Burgess's (1985) chapter on the ways in which the inner city 'riots' of 1981 were represented in the popular press. In her chapter Burgess shows how press reports of the disturbances fulfil an ideological role through the creation of a myth of the 'inner city', a place which is alien, separate and isolated from the experiences of the assumed readership, which is constructed as white and middle-class. She starts from the position that the mass media play a role in the 'appropriation and interpretation of the meanings of social reality' and are able to shape the way in which we see the world. As such, the mass media is an important agency of social control. Burgess's account stresses the ways in which the media serves to provide readers with a set of assumptions which 'reinforce the fundamental framework of social consensus'(p.198). Thus, her account is broadly structuralist, stressing the way in which news is ideological. Although she recognises that there is a space between the text and the reader which allows for a variety of possible readings, this 'culturalist' approach is not developed in the essay.

In Burgess and Gold's account of the relationship between geography and cultural studies we see a concern that 'elite' or dominant forms of culture have been overvalued in geography at the expense of 'popular' or subordinate forms of culture, and this is taken up by Cosgrove and Jackson (1987) in their agenda-setting article, 'New directions in cultural geography'. In this article they suggest the need to move away from the 'landscape concept' previously dominant in cultural geography and build on insights derived from the Birmingham School. They cite the studies of 'mugging', feminism, racism and youth sub-cultures that all talk of the strategies of 'resistance' that subordinate groups used to contest the hegemony of those in power. This recognition of resistance and struggle has the effect of politicizing the field of cultural studies and replaces the unitary view of culture with the recognition that there exist a plurality of cultures. As a result, cultural geographers have begun to see culture as a product of the whole process of living, and this includes the processes by which subordinate groups contest dominant forms of consciousness. This represents an important move away from the position of the Frankfurt School and is best described in the notion of hegemony.

The most fully developed Gramsci-inspired account of the 'new cultural geography' is to be found in Peter Jackson's (1989) **Maps of Meaning**. The concept of 'cultural politics' is central to his account, defined as the 'domain in which meanings are constructed and negotiated, where relations of dominance and subordination are defined and contested' (p.3). Jackson insists on the

existence of a plurality of cultures, subordinate as well as dominant, as cultures are ranked hierarchically. His work can be seen as an attempt to shift cultural geography away from its roots in the Sauerian school, and into the field of cultural materialism advocated by Raymond Williams. Jackson's approach then follows Williams in insisting on the inseparability of culture and society, relating ideologies and cultural practices to the material interests they serve. Whilst discussing the ways in which cultural geographers have been concerned with the ideological production of place and landscape, it is often noted that such ideologies do not go uncontested. Dominant senses of place and ways of viewing places and landscapes are always open to contestation and negotiation. However, geographers have not explored oppositional discourses with as much vigour as they have the representations of the powerful (Rose 1994). A feature of the 'new' cultural geography has been to foreground the geographical experiences of groups of people traditionally excluded from the gaze of the discipline. This form of cultural geography would suggest the need to empower individuals, giving them the tools to criticize dominant cultural forms, images and narratives. It would allow them to discern the messages, values and ideologies embedded in cultural texts. There is obvious potential for using these insights in school geography. Thus a critical cultural geography is not merely interested in providing clever readings of cultural texts, but in advancing a critique of structures and practices of domination and supporting forces of resistance struggling for a more democratic and egalitarian society.

Further examples of the type of cultural geography discussed here can be found in Anderson and Gale's (1992) **Inventing Places**. The essays included in this collection are diverse, ranging from readings of the elite landscapes of corporate culture and high class residential developments, through the ways in which assumptions about gender relationships are encoded in shopping malls and urban space, to the media coverage of environmental concerns about economic development. Though the subject matter is diverse, there is a common emphasis on the way the landscape can be read as 'texts', encoded with meanings that carry ideas about race, gender and class.

Whilst these approaches to cultural studies have exhibited a concern with the cultural politics of race, gender and class, it may be possible to note a turn to a postmodern cultural geography as a response to a new era of global capitalism. This reflects a similar development in cultural studies as identified by Kellner (1997):

"During the current stage of cultural studies there is a widespread tendency to decentre, or even ignore completely, economics, history and politics in favour of emphasis on local pleasures, consumption and the construction of hybrid identities from the material of the popular"(p.20).

Such work stresses the ability of consumers of popular culture to make their own meanings out of any text. The audience is able to gain pleasure from consumption, and the idea that there are

dominant ideological messages that impose themselves on unsuspecting audiences is rejected. In **Worlds of Desire, Realms of Power**, Shurmer-Smith and Hannam (1994) explore the idea that:

“ the places that people construct are polysemous and are experienced in a multitude of ways, sometimes complimentary, sometimes conflicting, sometimes just differently”(p.15).

Shurmer-Smith and Hannam provide a host of ideas and examples that might be adapted for classroom work. In a useful final chapter, they suggest some avenues students might explore. They distinguish between the 'textual' and the 'practical' as objects of study - of analysis, elaboration and interpretation. Texts are defined widely as not just written materials but anything that can be 'read'. Thus there are examples of taking artistic products (paintings, poems and novels) and interpreting them in terms of the geographical meanings contained within them. A criticism of work in the 'new cultural geography' is that it has perhaps focused on 'high' culture and neglected interpretations of popular music, film, adverts, TV, newspapers and magazines as ways of constructing geographical knowledge. These areas are ripe for imaginative work in geography education. 'Practical' work may involve students participating in their localities, workplaces and leisure activities, 'observing and absorbing the spatial and environmental practices and attitudes or the 'sense of place". Quantitative methods could play a part in such work, though Shurmer-Smith and Hannam warn against using questionnaires to assess people's attitudes rather than their practices since 'the quantification of the former is nearly always spurious'(p.219).

The concern that geographers have ignored the 'popular' in their studies is acknowledged in the recent collection of essays edited by Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine (1998) entitled **Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures**. The volume has as its aim the exploration of 'the diversity in young people's lives in order to place youth on the geographical map and to demonstrate youth's relevance to a range of geographical debates'(p.1). Such an approach recognises that 'youth' is a social construction and is far from being a unified category. Thus the chapters focus on different aspects of young people's identities including gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexuality. There are chapters that focus on the way certain categories of youth are represented in the media, and the way groups of young people talk about and use the media to contest and shape their identities. There is a concern with media representations, most notably in chapters which discuss the 'New Ethnicities' and disability. However, the emphasis in these chapters is on the ways in which these representations are received, contested and 'made to mean'. There is a concern with the ways in which the media are used as a resource in the construction of youth identities. Here we can identify a clear shift away from the position that ideology structures everyday life towards a concern with lived experience and identity formation. Other chapters focus on young people's experiences of everyday places such as the home, school, workplace, street and club, and how they are simultaneously constrained by others and find ways to resist attempts to define their identities and spatial restrictions. The book represents

a significant contribution to popular cultural geographical studies, and challenges us as geography teachers to incorporate such perspectives into our classrooms.

Another example of the type of work I am describing here is Bell and Valentine's (1997) **Consuming Geographies**. They note that the 'cultural turn' has brought identity politics and issues of consumption to the fore in geography. They are interested in using the example of food as a way of demonstrating the importance of space and place in identity formation (the subtitle of their book is 'we are where we eat'). **Consuming Geographies** can be seen as a geographical contribution to cultural studies, and an example of the type of geography we might envisage if geography and cultural studies continue to grow together. The book is a collection of geographies past, present and future, and never shirks the popular and the mundane, giving the reader a sense of the all-pervasiveness of food in people's lives (we are consumed by food as well as consuming food !). In the process, the boundaries between 'domestic' and 'foreign', local and global, and real and imagined geographies become blurred. Food is no longer 'merely about sustenance and nutrition. It is packed with social, cultural and symbolic meanings. Every mouthful, every meal, can tell us something about ourselves, and about our place in the world'(p.3). The book develops its argument through a hierarchy of scales ranging through body-home-community- city-region-nation-global and considers the meanings food has in each of these. An obvious example is the ways in which food plays a key role in the construction of the body- as physical body shapes are related to types and amounts of food eaten, and attributed meaning and value. At the national scale, there is the association of food with characteristics of the nation (for example, the British and their roast beef). But rather than attempt to construct a hierarchy of scales, in which some scales are considered more important than others, Bell and Valentine emphasise the porosity rather than the separateness of scales:

"We realise that the interconnections and disjunctions are..complex and multilayered..we leave it to you to compose your own grander recipes and menus"(p.201).

Bell and Valentine show that these scales get tangled up with important axes of race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, nation, and class and, I suggest, successfully represent the diversity of practices, meanings and issues surrounding food. In short, they provide a model of how to study cultural politics, by drawing on a mixture of academic and popular texts, cartoons, television and films as well as interviews scattered throughout the text. One of the important effects of considering a range of scales is that different theoretical approaches are opened up. Thus, a consideration of the body raises important questions about the policing and monitoring of the self and the ways in which the self is gendered, whilst a focus on the home is conducted through arguments about the social reproduction of labour and the way family life is lived. In this way students and teachers can consider a variety of perspectives on consumption and recognise that there are many knowledges of food consumption. It is not difficult to imagine teachers devising lessons that draw upon such work, but it would require a move towards a more personal, social and political

education, focusing on the scales of the body, home and community much more than at present. The geography curriculum would focus on *mapping meanings*, and would incorporate ways of focusing on people's different experiences of place. Students and teachers would investigate the meanings behind the maps they draw, seeing human and physical landscapes and patterns as intentional constructions of human activity (see also Crang 1997 for some ideas about the geographies of food might be incorporated into geography lessons).

These new approaches to cultural geography, by focusing on dominant and subordinate cultures, and resistance and struggle, allow cultural forms to be located in their socio-historical context. They are concerned with the relationship between the economy, state, society, culture and everyday life, but unlike the analysis of the Frankfurt School, appear to reject the high and low culture distinction, arguing that cultural forms such as film, television, and popular music, and practices that permeate everyday life are worthy of study in a broadly sympathetic way. This section has argued that there is a growing concern with the geographies of consumption and media culture. In the introduction to his **Cultures of Consumption**, Mort (1996) neatly summarises the relationship between these new accounts of consumption and developments in the study of human geography:

"Geographers had repeatedly identified how the development of industrial societies had been punctuated by intense phases of spatial reorganisation. Contemporary forms of economic restructuring, it was pointed out, were producing new spatial divisions of labour and new maps of power and inequality, on a global as well as a local scale. In terms of consumer practices, this landscape was multi-dimensional. It was seen to include symbolic and metaphoric territories as well as physical domains. Whether it was the spectacular environments of redeveloped city centres, or the more localised milieus of shopping malls and retail parks, space and place were understood as representational systems. The various environments associated with contemporary consumption were nodal points for the constitution of identity, and for the production of meanings which gave shape to everyday life"(Mort 1996:6-7).

As McDowell (1994) states, the study of youth and other oppositional cultures is on the academic agenda of cultural studies and geography. Space exists for the study of new kinds of geographies that move away from the traditional concerns of the social relations of production, on the firm, the workplace or the industrial region to studies on the social relations and symbolic meanings of consumption. We should recognise that the nature of the 'cultural turn' in geography is hotly debated and involves a wide variety of theoretical positions (for a flavour of these debates, see Gregory and Ley 1988, Sayer, 1994, Mitchell 1995), but the potential exists to incorporate elements of cultural geography into school geography.

## Schooling and cultural studies

In recent years, the place of popular culture within the school curriculum has become an increasingly controversial political issue. There seems to be a worry about the question of 'cultural value' as the distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture are apparently eroded. For example, Nick Tate, the chief executive of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (now Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), recently worried that the dominant view was that there were 'no differences in value between, say, Schubert's Ave Maria and the latest Blur release, between Milton and Mills and Boon, or between Vermeer's View of Delft and a brick wall or dead sheep at the Tate'(quoted in *The Guardian* 8/2/96). Tate went on to suggest that educators should give these things their proper value as the best that has been known and thought. Although geography teachers have not been immune to practice of assigning worth to cultural practices and landscapes, it is in English teaching that the debate has raged most intensely. English teaching has been charged with the task of maintaining and policing the boundaries between the timeless values of 'art' and 'literature', and the 'three minute culture' of popular culture. However, this debate about cultural value and education should be seen as part of a long-term historical process, in that the school curriculum is a focus for deeper concerns about changes in the social order and the national culture.

English as a subject in the school curriculum grew out of the radical changes in the economic and social formations of the early industrial revolution. The school curriculum was recast along the lines of science and technology, but this spawned a counter-reaction and English Literature played an important role in the wake of the anxieties of such writers as John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold. Ball *et al.* (1990) suggest that the growth of urban society in the nineteenth century profoundly disturbed the moral fabric of the existing social order. English literature then was to play the role of unifying the nation and providing a form of moral training. Mathison argues that, "Literary men like Ruskin and Matthew Arnold, who disliked the mechanical aspects of nineteenth century England and feared the threat to cultural standards represented by the cheap press, supported the study of literature in desperate times"(Mathison 1975:26). Arnold outlined the role of 'culture' as seeking to "do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere: to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light; where they may use ideas, as it was then itself, freely nourished, not bound by them..." This was culture as an ideal. An ideal that was not matched in the real world where the 'mass of mankind' lived in an alienated condition. Burton (1989) calls the gap between Arnold's view of culture and the real world a 'cultural abyss' which has been the territory of English teachers.

The role of English in the school curriculum was consolidated by the 1921 Newbolt Report entitled **The Teaching of English in England** which proclaimed English as the preferred

literature of the curriculum ahead of classics. Ball *et al.* (1990) consider the role envisaged for English in the Newbolt Report as one of acting as a basis for national unity, but also as a source of spiritual comfort for those whose good faith had been battered by the Great War. Doyle (1989) provides a detailed analysis of the Newbolt Report and concludes that its contribution was to offer English as the key instrument for educating the emotions of the 'masses' so that as individuals they may be raised spiritually while at the same time remain excluded from political and economic power and the decision-making process (p.66). Burton (1989:p.2) argues that claims for the centrality of English literature endorsed in the Newbolt Report were realised in the work of F.R. Leavis and his followers at Cambridge in the 1930s and 1940s. Leavis and Thompson's (1933) **Culture and Environment** stated clearly the perceived threat to civilisation posed by mass-media and popular culture, and called upon teachers to act and resist the effects of the mass media. For Leavis, English teaching was the guarantee of the moral and spiritual health both of the individual and the nation. It thus played a conservative role, providing active opposition to forces which were seen to be undermining that culture. English was thus the first line of defence against the ravages of an increasingly commercial and industrial society. Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) argue that this 'broadly defensive' approach to popular culture still has considerable influence among English teachers. An important development in the relationship between schooling and popular culture came with the perspectives developed by writers such as Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart (now recognised as the 'founding fathers' of cultural studies) who wrote from a working class perspective and provided a critique of the 'culture and society' perspective dominated by the writings on culture of Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot and Leavis. However, both Hoggart and Williams were suspicious of 'mass' culture. Williams saw the rise of consumer industries in postwar Britain as having a negative impact on organic working class cultures, whilst Hoggart, in **The Uses of Literacy** (1957), bemoaned the 'Americanisation' of British working class culture. The Newsom Report of 1963 recognised the role of the media in the lives of young people:

"The culture provided by all the mass media, but particularly film and television, represents the most significant environmental factor that teachers have to take into account. The important changes that take place at the secondary stage are much influenced by the world offered by the leisure industry which skillfully markets products designed for young people's tastes".

Masterman (1985), in his influential **Teaching the Media**, argues that the late 1950s and the 1960s saw the 'classroom use of advertisements, newspapers, comics, women's magazines, popular fiction, film and television, particularly by English teachers' (Masterman 1985:49). This represented a partial move away from the Leavisite position in that there emerged a whole generation of teachers who actually enjoyed popular cultural forms, could see value in them, and were unwilling to view them as inevitably corrupting influences. However, many remained 'Leavisite' in their strong sense of moral purpose and their belief in the need to encourage pupils

to be 'discriminating' in their use of media culture. Masterman sees the 1960 National Union of Teachers conference on 'Popular culture and personal responsibility' as indicative of the tensions between 'old' approaches which urged educators to be wary of the commercialism and infantilism that the mass media brought with it, and the 'new' approach which was more optimistic about the possibilities afforded by media study. The teachers made attempts to 'discriminate', that is, arrive at evaluative criteria for different aspects of popular culture. This approach received 'official' encouragement in the Newson report which called for teachers to train children to look critically and discriminate between what is good and bad in what they see.

The publication of Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel's (1964) **The Popular Arts** was an important landmark in the development of an approach to popular culture in education, arguing for the importance of studying aspects of popular culture on the same terms as 'high art'. Essentially the same methods of literary criticism that were used to scrutinise the Great Works in the grammar school were to be transferred to popular culture in the secondary moderns. The book contains seeds of the 'relevance' argument, that the cultural framework of (working class) children was to be celebrated rather than overcome. Subsequently, the development of approaches to popular culture within education has been best developed in the fields of Media education and English. Lusted (1986) notes that in the early 1970s, cultural criticism began to focus on media institutions rather than media texts, since the 'consciousness industries' (in Enzenberger's famous term) were thought to position media consumers within patterns of dominant thought.

To conclude this brief account of the relationship between English and popular culture, it is worth noting that whilst English in school has generally adopted a conservative notion of culture in its encouragement of the love of great books and the literary canon, a looser notion of culture has come to be adopted by English teachers in the postwar period. Classrooms have become open to television, films, advertisements, comics and so on, all part of the 'informal' knowledge students bring with them to lessons. At the same time as school geography was selectively taking on board the implications of the 'Quantitative revolution', English was in a state of almost continual 'ferment and contestation' (Ball *et al.* 1990:56). Ball *et al.* (p.58-59) see this as a shift in the nature of English teaching brought about by the challenge of the 'new English' movement. This movement had a number of characteristics: First, there was less emphasis placed on the importance of 'standard' or 'correct' forms of expression. Instead, imagination and expression were to take precedence over 'correctness'; second, the 'new English' accepted pluralism in terms of values, morals and worth. Teachers were less comfortable in validating a version of morality embedded in a literary canon increasingly criticised as representing a middle-class, white and male perspective; third, the 'new English' adopted a wider definition of literature to include a broader range of media and sources. Pupil's own work, popular literature, the poetry and literature of the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, television, newspapers and comics all began to appear in the English classroom; fourth, teaching methods were adopted that offered greater autonomy and freedom to pupils. This was facilitated by the use of project work, worksheets and groupwork,



where the teachers' role would be to facilitate and guide rather than transmit knowledge. In addition, mixed-ability groupings were favoured over streaming, and oracy was given greater emphasis relative to written work; finally, the 'new English' favoured an explicit engagement with social issues 'relevant' to the pupils' lives and experiences outside school.

The 'new English' can be seen as partly the result of the broader definition of culture that was developed by the founders of cultural studies such as Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, which went beyond the narrow confines of an approved canon of 'art' and 'literature'. Ball *et al.* (1990) distinguish between 'progressive' and 'radical' versions of English teaching which have developed since the 1960s and which adopt different stances towards popular culture. 'Progressive' English stresses the relevance of each child's culture, language and self-expression and focuses on personal aspects of experience. Working-class family and neighbourhood culture is explored via the pupils' own creative writing. In this way working-class culture is seen as a meaningful and valid alternative to the elitism of the literary tradition. The 'radical' version of English takes a critical rather than celebratory stance, offering analyses of the political and economic conditions that produce inequality. In this way it takes seriously the structural constraints that produce alienation and lack of opportunity for working-class pupils. These two 'ideal-typical' versions of English adopt different stances towards the teaching of popular culture. The progressive version welcomes a celebratory approach, incorporating the media as the world beyond the classroom. The canon of approved texts would be dismantled and the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture dissolved, as pupils are given the space to explore their own cultural interests and concerns. In their assessment Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) suggest that in practice the degree of freedom and cultural relativism has been limited. In addressing popular culture in the classroom there has been a tendency to do so in a sentimental and patronising way, searching for signs of an 'authentic' culture that in its validity and seriousness, mirrors the dominant 'high' culture. In this way popular culture is divided into 'approved' and 'mass-produced'. The former being valorised and considered worthy of study, the latter approached in a spirit of condemnation. The radical version of English teaching adopts a more 'oppositional' approach to popular culture. The media are not seen as part of the culture of students but as a means whereby the ruling class secures its power. The task then is to analyse the media in order to identify the covert ideologies that they contain. The focus of attention has shifted since the 1970s as the preoccupation with class as the main dimension of inequality has been replaced with a concern with issues of race and gender.

I would suggest that in all the debates surrounding the devising and implementing of a National Curriculum for England and Wales, the question of the proper place of popular culture appeared only in relation to English and Media education, and Music. The debate never impinged on school geography. The British cultural studies literature based around the writings of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams has influenced recent generations of English teachers. For his part, Raymond Williams was concerned to develop a more expansive and inclusive notion of quality than just a

concern with academic standards. Thus, schools would allow children to use and critique the media, and recognise the ideological force in advertising. Williams thought that English teaching should incorporate a range of communication forms needed in everyday life as a defence against an elitist pedagogy. Brynin (1993) considers that much of Williams' curriculum has become a standard part of the routines of everyday teaching: the media and popular culture are classroom resources, and English teaching lays great stress on the ordinariness of everyday communication needs. Hoggart's celebration of a specifically working-class culture had the effect of encouraging the rejection of the idea of working-class cultural inferiority. While it is possible to overstate the influence of these forms of 'culturalism' it can be argued that they produced an approach to education that was more concerned with the social construction of knowledge and the meanings students brought to the classroom. Indeed, Green (1995:396) argues that a strong case can be made that cultural studies is *the* major 'discipline' informing the future development of English as a school subject.

This section has provided a brief account of some of the development of approaches to popular culture in schools. An understanding of these developments is important since any attempt to develop approaches to teaching geography will necessarily have to build upon existing structures and practices. In what follows I outline how approaches to popular culture developed in media and cultural studies in schools might be used to inform curriculum development in geography.

### **Developing a cultural pedagogy for geography education**

In 1997 cinemas in London have been running a series of adverts for the alcoholic drink Foster's Ice. One of the adverts starts off with a series of images showing the likely impacts of global warming. These images of the parched, desertified earth are accompanied by a doom-laden voice announcing that the earth is heating up, the ice caps are melting and life is going to get a lot harder for us all. Suddenly, however, the tone of the advert becomes more upbeat, as a range of possible actions people can take are provided. These include calls to donate money ('every little helps'), write to your MP ('your voice counts') or, alternatively, the viewer can 'say bollocks to it and enjoy the sun while you can'. This last alternative is accompanied by images of the Foster's kangaroo lapping up the sun's rays, and the advert announces that Foster's ice offers 'Global Cooling'. How should critical geography educators regard such media representations that compete for the attention of the students we teach? Is it possible to present images in classrooms without reference to the ways in which such images circulate in popular culture? If sometimes teachers advise students to watch films and television programmes as a source of information and ideas, do we also need to teach students to read these critically? It has become something of a truism to say that we live in a media society. The importance of the media in contemporary society suggests that questions of representation should be at the heart of a geography education influenced by cultural studies. However, although geography teachers make much of the fact that geography is a visual subject, where images of people and places are part of the staple diet of

classroom life, there has been little written about the issue of media literacy. Though textbooks are increasingly made up of photographs and cartoons, and videos are an important element of pedagogy in geography classrooms, along with newspapers and other media, there is no substantive tradition that requires teachers and students to theorise the use of media in the classroom. The new cultural geography offers opportunities for teachers to develop links with the field of media education.

The dominant paradigm of media education in the 1970s and 1980s was that most closely associated with the work of Len Masterman (1985). In **Teaching the Media**, Masterman (1985) argues that developments in media education are relevant to the work of geography teachers. He advocates the development of media education and literacy skills in the teaching of all subjects. He offers two reasons for this. First, media materials are increasingly used in a routine way in the teaching of all subjects. However, these materials are still used largely as 'transparent' carriers of information. This situation has intensified since Masterman wrote, as has the availability of prepackaged materials provided by multinational corporations and other agencies. Masterman argues for the importance of reading this material critically:

"In particular, the basic media literacy technique of relating media messages to the political, social and economic interests of those producing them, needs to be encouraged as a matter of course by teachers of all subjects"(1985:242).

Second, there is a considerable overlap between the contents of the media and the contents of the school curriculum. Students do not come to school with blank minds ready to be filled with knowledge. They bring with them prejudices, misconceptions, ideas and stereotypes. Masterman argues that effective teaching will need to take this into account, and might well begin with a consideration of media representations of the topic at hand. Having outlined the case for a general media literacy in schools, Masterman then considers Geography as a school subject in which there is strong case for media literacy. For a start, geography is a subject in which visual images have a particularly prominent place. He cites Wiegand (1982:26) who argues that visual images 'offer a short cut to the understanding of ideas or features that would otherwise require lengthy explanation' and 'evoke powerful and long-lasting images of what places are like'. Masterman suggests that questions about the sources of information or images, selection, captioning and agenda-setting are all applicable in a subject where photographs and videos are 'all too often handled transparently by the geography teacher'(Masterman 1985:243).

However, there is a need to go beyond the problematising of geographical materials. For the very substance of the subject cannot itself be viewed innocently or transparently. Masterman uses the work of Meinig (1979) to illustrate this idea. Meinig discusses 'ten versions of the scene' or ten organising ideas frequently used to make sense of landscapes. These include landscapes of nature (romanticism), landscape as habitat (environmentalism), landscape as wealth (capitalism)

and so on. The point is that landscapes always carry meanings which have been actively 'produced'. It is this process of the social construction of meaning that needs to be recognised and understood. The media is a potent source of our ideas about the environment. As Masterman argues:

"Different environments and geographical regions are, indeed, so familiar and natural to us that geography teachers need to acknowledge that whenever they teach about a particular region or country they are competing with images, often fragmented, but sometimes remarkably coherent, which already exist in the heads of their students"(Masterman 1985:245).

A key idea in Masterman's account is that of 'image' and 'reality'. Thus he quotes approvingly Youngs' (1980) idea that 'image regions' are 'naive images', and gives the the example of the film and literary representations of the ante-bellum South which are full of images of debonaire young men, beautiful heroines, courtship, duels and dances, whilst in the cotton fields the 'darkies' sing contentedly in their work. In reality of course, things were different. Masterman advocates similar work in schools, so that media images are compared with geographical realities: "How do the images of Dallas in *Dallas*, Denver in *Dynasty*, or Miami in *Miami Vice* compare with the socio-economic realities of these cities ?"(p.246). For Masterman, media education involves the study of 'structured absences', so, for instance, in the generalised images of rural England that appear on TV, adverts, soap-operas, films, posters and other media, what are persistently absent are images of rural poverty, exploitation, unemployment and immobility. The overall conclusion that Masterman reaches is that a 'functional media literacy' could be:

"Invaluable in raising important questions about the taken-for-granted visual illustrations which are used in all classrooms, and in encouraging teachers and students to treat school books and images not as transparent carriers of knowledge, but as culturally loaded texts which need to be actively deconstructed and critically read"(p.250).

Masterman takes an 'oppositional' stance to popular culture. He recognises the media as a central element of young people's lives, but also as the primary means whereby the 'dominant ideology' is imposed upon them. Masterman sees media education not as a celebration of young people's experience, but emphasises 'objective analysis'. Students and teachers should place their personal feelings and tastes to one side, and analyse the media systematically using semiotic methods. This will enable them to identify how media texts are constructed and selected, and thus reveal their 'suppressed ideological function'. Teaching the media is thus a process of demystification. It is concerned with what Masterman calls 'alternative realities', by which he means those constructions implicitly rejected, suppressed or filtered out of the images that appear.

One approach to developing the type of 'critical media literacy' advocated by Masterman would be

to analyse images within geography lessons. The potential for this sort of work is almost limitless (see for example Parker 1988 on images of Chinese people on television and films, Butler 1988 on disability, Featherstone and Wernick 1995 on images of ageing). The following examples discuss the use of images in geography classrooms. The preferred approach is derived from work in cultural studies and cultural geography. Critical media pedagogy involves the study of a wide range of cultural texts and artifacts, and geography education should be concerned with representations of people, places and environments in a range of media, from films, novels, TV programmes, advertisements and so on. The position here builds on the Gramscian notion that these are not innocent entertainment, but are bound up with political rhetoric, struggles, and discourses. A key feature of critical media pedagogy must be to enable students to read these representations politically in order to decode their ideological messages and effects. This will require a concern with more than simply questions of class, and will need to incorporate feminist concepts of gender and multiculturalist theories of race, sexual preference, nationality into the analysis of popular culture. This will allow consideration of the full range of representations of identities, domination and resistance that structure the terrain of culture. Reading culture politically means locating it in a broader socio-political and economic context, and seeing how cultural texts either encode relations of power and domination or oppose hegemonic ideologies, institutions and practices.

The products of media culture help to establish the hegemony of specific political groups and projects. They can be seen as representations that attempt to induce consent to political positions. Criticizing hegemonic ideologies requires showing how certain political positions in cultural texts reproduce existing political ideologies in current struggles. This suggests the need to empower students by giving them tools to criticize dominant cultural forms, images, narratives and genres. In this we need to recognise that students are not naturally literate or critical of their culture, and should be given the tools of critique to empower them against the manipulative force of existing society and culture. A critical media pedagogy would empower individuals to discern the messages, values and ideologies embedded in media culture texts. In addition, a critical media pedagogy that challenges oppression and strives for social equality is necessarily multicultural and seeks to attend to differences, cultural diversity and otherness. This approach involves the analysis of relations of domination and oppression, the way stereotyping works, resistance on the part of marginalized groups to dominant representations, and struggles on the part of these groups to represent themselves, to counter dominant and distorting representations, and to produce more positive ones.

Such a cultural studies approach to geography is critical in that it seeks to articulate the social construction of the concepts of gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality and the ways in which representations of these phenomena produce identities in contemporary society, as well as how alternative representations produce new and different identities. It involves interpreting culture and society in terms of relations of power, domination and resistance. It requires normative

standpoints from which teachers and students can critically engage cultural texts, thus adopting norms and values with which to criticize texts that promote oppression and domination. There is a political dimension here too: critical cultural studies seeks to develop an oppositional politics aimed at producing a progressive turn in contemporary culture and society. Maintaining a critical perspective requires a critical theory of society to ground analysis and critique. In what follows I discuss the ways in which such an approach might be adopted in the classroom through the use of a series of examples.

Media and cultural studies have taken a long-standing interest in advertising, and the development of media education in schools has drawn upon insights from this field (see Appendix One for a discussion of filmic and literary texts in relation to geography). Indeed, Bazalgette (1997) has suggested that most teachers 'feel on safe ground' using adverts. However, until recently geographers have taken little interest in what must rank as one of the most ubiquitous elements of the landscape of contemporary life (see Jackson and Taylor 1996 for a review of the literature on geography and advertising). One of the earliest attempts to consider the use of advertising images was Burgess's (1982) study of the way 'place-images' are used to sell places to executives, an approach taken up later in an article based on 'de-coding Docklands' (Burgess and Wood 1988), and in her seminal paper on the production and consumption of environmental meanings in the mass media (Burgess 1990). Leslie (1993) has discussed advertisements that promote images of 'traditional' family values and forms of femininity in response to broader economic shifts, and Eyles (1987) has analysed housing advertisements as signs. Jackson (1994) has considered the use of Black sportsmen Daley Thompson and John Barnes in advertisements for the soft-drink Lucozade. He reads these adverts socially (Goldman 1992, Goldman and Papson 1996), emphasising representations of Black men in relation to wider shifts in attitudes towards gender, sexuality and race. He points to the way the adverts drew upon a reservoir of imagery that linked athleticism with sexuality via the bodies of particular black men. He argues that the choice of Barnes and Thompson represented a deliberate strategy since these particular sportsmen evoked 'positive' associations between masculinity, athleticism and style 'shorn of the more threatening associations of a more stereotypically anonymous and rapacious black masculinity' (p.57). An important insight from such work is that different groups or 'audiences' may make different readings of the same advert, thus highlighting a need for a consideration of the actual process of consumption of images.

The following activity emerged from an interest in the so-called 'crisis of masculinity' and a reading of the small but growing volume of geographic literature concerned with masculinities. It is an attempt to develop a critical media pedagogy that draws upon contemporary media culture. In developing this example, I have had in mind Pam Shurmer-Smith and Kevin Hannam's (1994:96) suggestion that:

'It may be time we opened up a new space in geography for a discussion of the construction

of masculinities, and their role in the construction of gender identities”.

Masculinity has become an important topic in the social sciences. Layland (1990) has argued that the effect of seeing feminist research as exclusively about women's lives has been to allow men's lives to go unquestioned. In geography Jackson (1991) has outlined the need for a 'cultural politics of masculinity' and Mort (1996) has discussed the various masculine spaces of the city (see also Nixon 1996).

The initial starting point for this activity is a series of adverts featured in the popular men's magazine **Loaded**, which explicitly appeals to 'men who should know better'. The initial task was for students to reach an understanding of the messages encoded in these adverts. The first advert (Appendix Two: Figure 1) is for Umbro Sportswear, promoted as 'The heart and soul of football'. In the advert, a group of football supporters, sporting the colours of Chelsea Football Club, is travelling to or from a Chelsea game. The fans are all males of various ages, apart from one female, inappropriately dressed for watching football, who looks thoroughly fed up and reflects 'Well, he did promise to take me away'. In practice, this was a relatively simple advert for students to decode, and once they saw how it 'works', they were in a position to raise and discuss wider issues of gender roles. The following points were made by students in discussion.

The advert plays on the association of football as a male-dominated social space. The girlfriend is obviously 'out-of-place' in this exclusively male environment. The blue clothing the men wear in contrast to the girl's pink represents the cultural distinction between male and female. Similarly, the advert plays on the different understandings of the word 'away'. For the young women, going 'away' means as a couple, as a weekend break (perhaps romantic). For the lad, going 'away' means something altogether different, away with the lads to watch Chelsea.

In the second advert (again for Umbro) a young lad of 14 or 15 years, dressed in Umbro T-shirt, blue jeans and trainers is lying on his bed, grinning cheekily at the camera (Appendix Two: Figure 2). On the wall are the collected memorabilia of a football supporter (team photos, tickets for important games of the past, programmes, flags etc.). These serve to mark the centrality of football in the lads' life. Dominating the bedroom wall is a poster of an attractive women, in glamour model pose, who would (we suppose) be naked if her upper body was not covered up by a replica Brazil football shirt, pinned with wall tacks. The caption asks: 'Who says girls look better with their kit off?'. Again, there is a play on words, since 'kit' is used by 'lads' to denote women's clothing. These adverts offer the readers of **Loaded** magazine images (fantasies?) of an unreconstructed masculinity which celebrates the matedom of football. Football is seen as a man's world in which women can never achieve full membership and can only join in on men's terms (either by reluctantly accompanying their man or adorning the male world). In the second advert, we see the traditional objectification of the female body. Both ads offer the young lad an idealised set of gender relations in which he 'gets' both the football and the girl - literally the best of both worlds.

The classroom discussion of these adverts was structured through the use of Rose's (1996) methodology for analysing visual texts based on a series of structured questions based on the production of the image (e.g. when was it made ? who made it ? was it made for someone else ?), the image or text itself (e.g. what is being shown ? what use is made of colour ? what do the different components of an image signify ?), and the audience (e.g. who is the audience for this image ? Is more than one interpretation of the image possible ? Do different audiences read the image differently ?). These questions can be used to interrogate adverts, the aim being to draw out the meanings attached to the adverts and allow students to explore the issues surrounding representations.

From this initial activity, students were able to offer their own examples of media culture that shares the same world-view as that of the Umbro adverts. Television programmes such as *They Think its All Over*, *Men Behaving Badly*, and *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* all share a similar 'lad culture' along with a host of men's lifestyle magazines. There is much potential for students undertaking studies of these cultural products. However, in order to develop a critical perspective on these forms of culture there is a need to read them ideologically, which means seeing them in their broader social context. Kellner (1995) suggests that critical literacy requires:

"learning how to read images critically and to unpack the relations between images, texts, social trends, and products in a commercial culture"(1995:252).

Kellner argues that adverts, as part of media culture, are part of a contested terrain, reproducing on the cultural level the fundamental conflicts within society. This suggests that they do not simply reproduce unequal gender relations, but adopt various positions within the 'culture wars' of the present moment and should be analyzed in terms of their positions and effects within existing social struggles. For instance, these adverts could be read as examples of the 'backlash' against feminism (Faludi 1991) in which, after a short period of gains, women are now experiencing the full force of a backlash led by the call for back to basics. In this context, these adverts could be read in the context of a call for a return to traditional modes of masculinity and femininity. However, further consideration of recent adverts suggests a more complex picture, as evidenced by a set of adverts produced for the Manchester based brewery Boddingtons (Appendix Two: Figure 3). These texts can be read as social documents, depicting the contemporary state of youth sexual politics. The first Boddington's advert is overtly antipatriarchal and even offers hostility towards men as depicted by the short man with glasses and the unfashionable male looking slightly ridiculous, whilst the stylish and trendy woman at the bar is the epitome of power and independence. The bar is traditionally a male-dominated public space and this advert suggests the appropriation of this space by women. The tables are turned, and the women is adopting the position of 'eyeing up' the 'talent'. The advert links the product with power, glamour and sexuality and offers an image of transformation, hinting at a dissatisfaction with traditional images and roles, and offers young women the possibility of a new lifestyle and identity. But other Boddington's



adverts provide other representations of gender relations. For example, the next advert shows a man and woman at the bar, waiting to order, with the man saying, 'You want equality ? -It's your round'. This advert can only be comprehended in the context of the shifts in sexual politics that have occurred in the last thirty years. It reflects women's demands for equality in different aspects of economic and social life and the perceived impact this has had on men.

The direction which the series of lessons took followed the interests of the students in the group. We were concerned to look at the relations between young men and women as represented in media culture. This involved students reading extracts from Nick Hornby's best-selling *Fever Pitch* which is an account of his obsession with following his football team- Arsenal, and parts of Susan Faludi's *Backlash* (1991) as well as a series of newspaper and magazine articles discussing the 'New lads' phenomenon.

### **Representing the 'Third World'**

Consumer and media culture constructs 'knowledge' of the 'Third World' through holiday brochures, package tours, picture postcards. The impact of tourism must be considered not only in terms of the ways it invites us to see the world, but also in terms of its real effects, both economic and cultural, on the Third World itself. The magazine *New Internationalist* has persistently warned of the dangers of the production of a limited 'geographical imagination':

"Far from reaching a deeper understanding of the Third World, the average tourists seem usually to have the worst prejudice confirmed by their 'jaunts'" (*New Internationalist*, December 1984, cited in Gabriel 1994:p.145)

A critical geography education would help students to recognise that that are economic institutions promoting and sustaining these forms of travel. A century ago Thomas Cook brochures enticed a wealthy minority to embark on boat trips down the river Nile. However, as the volume of overseas travel increased, there was increased pressure on receiving countries to meet tourists' Eurocentric needs and expectations. Economically, tourism is monopolised by multinational companies. Western tour operators handle 80 percent of Third World tourists, and the twenty leading airlines have an annual turnover of £40 million. There are real doubts about the benefits gained by so-called 'host' countries, as the following account suggests:

"If we cite the not untypical example of a US family on vacation in Java having bought their tickets in their home town, flown by a US airline, staying at a US-owned hotel, and spending a significant proportion of their food bill on items imported to suit their palates, we can see that the benefit to the Indonesian economy is minimal"(South 1985 cited in Gabriel 1994:147).

Thus, there is a need for a critical geography education to alert students to the real material

processes and institutions that underpin cultural relations. However, geography classrooms should also study the representations of the travel industry. For instance, tourist brochures such as the *River Island Expedition* brochure offers readers a 'map of meaning' (Appendix Two: Figure 4). The brochure describes itself as a 'travellers companion of worldwide adventure and activities holidays'. Adventure travel is that part of the travel industry which organizes expeditions to what are called the remotest parts of the globe'. An examination of the River Island brochure can raise some questions about the nature of our consumer society. For instance, the brochure takes pains to distinguish the experiences it offers from those typically sought by the mass tourist:

"We guess you have already been on a few sun, sand and sangria holidays and now feel the need to widen your horizons more. Our expeditions and adventures are for people who want to join small groups in personal voyages of discovery. People want to swim in less crowded waters and walk on unbeaten paths".

This statement itself provides an opportunity for teachers and students to consider the significance of adventure travel. It implies that there is a distinction between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' travel. Authentic travel apparently has the power to liberate people and allow them to discover themselves. The brochure thus appellates or hails (Williamson 1978) its readers as an authentic traveller in search of some deeper inner truth or meaning. In addition, these adventures also have a political dimension, as 'holidays that encourage respect for the planet in the face of devouring consumerism'. There is a rejection of many of the perceived constraints of Western modernity with its overdependence on consumerism and the bureaucratic apparatus of fixed schedules and routines. Instead, adventure travellers have to be prepared to 'rough it' or 'get down to basics' in order to experience other localities and cultures. The adventure traveller must show a willingness to learn from others, to accept difference, and give up prior conceptions and prejudices. This means giving up the normal 'self':

"These are different kinds of adventures. Adventures of the spirit. The trappings of life, its stresses and strains are stripped away to leave you time to find yourself".

This stripping away of the self is achieved through imagining other places and peoples as fixed in a timeless traditionalism, as evidenced by the tendency for the maps in the brochure to ignore any evidence of modernity (such as roads, political divisions). Phillips (1997) has discussed the ways in which the geography of adventure always involves a literal and metaphorical 'mapping' of the world, revealing as much about the 'home' of the adventurer as the places to which they travel. River Island's adventures entail an escape from the excesses of Western consumerism, through engagement in an apparently more benign form of consumerism. The premise on which adventure travel is based is that the 'West' is characterised by a corrupting consumerism, of which 'mass tourism' is one of its most visible forms. However, this is achieved through constructing the world as a 'playground', a place to be travelled to, consumed and experienced. The maps

contained in the brochure mimic the maps used by past explorers, and in their lack of reference to features such as roads, towns, and political boundaries, reflect a desire to step outside the trappings of modernity. The River Island Expedition brochure can be read as a way of representing strange and exotic parts of the world. However, to focus on the text itself risks losing sense of the ways in which such brochures are consumed or read. In other words, what role (if any) do such representations play in the identity formation of young people, and are there important differences in the way various social groups use such images. In order to introduce these issues to students, I first outlined some ideas about the ways in which the 'Third World' has been mapped as being different from the West. This was based around Edward Said's study of the representation of Orientalism, which suggests that European representations justified its hegemony over the Orient by representing it as 'backward' or 'irrational' compared with Europe's 'maturity' and 'objectivity'. Students were then asked to consider how far the type of travel described in the River Island brochure was part of the same Imperial project (Desforges 1998).

A second example of the way in which geographical imaginations are produced and circulated in everyday life is provided by the series of advertisements produced by the clothes company Benetton. Their controversial adverts depict images of race, terrorism, civil war, disease and death and serve to maximize the 'burden on the interpreter (the viewer) to find a narrative in the images'(Goldman and Papsen 1996:103). Benetton produces *Colors*, a 'magazine about the rest of the world'. A recent edition of the magazine (July/August 1996) was entitled 'A Town', and consisted of a series of images and words about the Cuban town of Baracoa (Appendix two: Figure 5). In full colour, on glossy pages, the lives of the townspeople are laid bare- their sex lives, their work, transport, hopes and beliefs, what they eat, buy, watch on television, do in their spare time. By focusing on the everyday and the ordinary, the magazine simultaneously points to the differences and similarities between the lives of the Baracoans and the lives of the readers. A starting point for using this text in the geography classroom would be to focus on the question of why Benetton has taken the trouble to produce these images, given that it is not a simple conduit for Benetton products. The editorial comment at the end of the magazine avoids making judgments about Baracoa:

"We could have spent the last 100 pages telling you all about the shady palms, turquoise waters and friendly natives of Baracoa. Or we could have spent them talking about the pervasive political repression and poverty. Both versions of Baracoa would have been true. And both would have missed the point".

Benetton then, self-consciously, raises questions about the purpose of representations, and creates the space for the readers to make their own sense of the text. In geography classrooms it is possible to raise the question of the responsibility that multinational corporations such as Benetton have in the process of development. One answer is that this text acts as a pedagogic device, raising awareness of the issues facing people in a particular place. Another reading is that,

by adopting a neutral stance, Benetton conveniently elides any discussion of its own role in development and/or underdevelopment. In the end, the magazine does offer a perspective for making sense of Baracoa, and ironically it takes the form of questioning the practice of consumerism:

"In Baracoa we found a highly advanced civilization -maybe more advanced than the one we left back home. Its true that Windows 95 and home-shopping TV haven't reached Baracoa yet. Neither have McDonald's, Benetton or work-induced stress. In fact, Baracoa shows almost no signs of being wired in to the rest of the modern world. Yet Baracoans aren't living in the past. On the contrary, they're way ahead of the times: Baracoans are coping now with problems the whole world will eventually face".

This 'editorial' points out how Baracoa is low on oil consumption as most people get around by bicycle, and how every piece of available space (even rooftops) is used for growing food. There is clearly the potential for active engagement with texts such as this in geography education.

The final example in this section is that of the multinational cosmetic company The Body Shop. Cultural geographers have argued that consumption refers not only to the things we buy, but to everything we do with these things and the meanings we associated with them. In this way, consumption is not merely an act of purchase but a process through which products become imbued with symbolic meanings. The Body Shop promotes its products in a post-colonial context, which means that instead of selling products through an appeal to an image of empire, products are promoted as part of a general celebration of other places and other cultures. In doing so, The Body Shop has become a model of corporate concern for a range of environmental, development and social issues, appealing directly to the young and presenting itself as radical. However, critical geography educators will want to question whether or not this celebration of difference is progressive, or is it a case of offering difference as a way of spicing up the mundane practice of consumption (hooks 1992) ?

The Body Shop's marketing strategy works on the basis of a clear distinction between the urban site of consumption and the peripheral source of production. The idea is that a consumer in the developed world will walk into a store to buy a mundane item such as hair conditioner and come out with something completely 'different'. There is a clear pedagogical relationship operating here - the shopper is learning about other people in other places - and consumption is a political and moral lesson. The content of this lesson is that The Body Shop is bringing economic aid to the periphery: 'People who are socially and economically marginalized'. Vron Ware points out the classic 'missionary discourse' adopted by The Body Shop, including an:

"uninhibited use of 'we' meaning 'First World' and 'they' meaning 'Third World'"(Ware 1992:244).

The simple division of the world into 'First' and 'Third' has the effect of erasing any complex distinctions and differentiations. As Kaplan (1995:58) notes, if we accept The Body Shop's geography of the world economy:

"We're left in a vaguely postcolonial zone of vanishing natures who need managed altruism from a concerned source of capital development".

In The Body Shop's scheme of things, there is no sense in which the government at the nation-state level might have a role to play in economic and social development. Thus, The Body Shop's world view conveniently meshes with the discourse of free-market enterprise that holds that the best way to get things done is to do them yourself and pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps.

All the adverts and products considered here seek to teach young people that, as long as we consume sensibly, the earth can sustain a global economic order based on capitalism and high levels of consumption. They are examples of what Giroux (1994) calls the 'new postmodern pedagogy of mass advertising' that threaten the survival of critical public spheres where people can debate issues and engage in political struggles. A key point of this chapter is that pedagogy - defined as the way in which people come to learn about their identities- is not confined to the classroom, and the challenge for geography teachers is to develop ways of engaging with the signs and images of popular culture. The important thing about using these texts in the geography classroom is that they allow teachers and students to consider the politics of representation they embody. In other words we become writers as well as readers, taking pleasure from the deconstruction of media texts, as well as reflecting on the cultural politics of such images.

Texts such as these allow teachers and students to explore the ways in which 'imaginative geographies' are produced and reproduced in everyday life. However, there has been little written about how texts are used in geography education. In **Our Consumer Society** (Huckle and Chidley 1993) there is an activity which uses adverts that use 'nature' to promote their products. The purpose of the activity is to help pupils 'develop their understanding of the role of advertising in our consumer society and the way it influences our views of nature and society'(p.105). The activity proceeds through an initial brainstorm about adverts pupils have recently seen and some discussion of those that use 'natural' images or claim to be 'environmentally friendly'. Pupils then consider the range of meanings associated with the word natural, and discuss whether nature has positive or negative connotations. This allows the teacher to introduce some simple ideas from semiotics about the signifier and the signified. Adverts use certain images so that some qualities become associated with a product. The main part of the activity involves looking at adverts that use 'nature' in order to sell their product. The idea is to help students to see how these adverts 'work', that is, how they use images and symbols of nature in order to attribute qualities to the

products so as to build upon the positive associations that 'nature' has in contemporary culture. The activity requires that pupils consider the important function of adverts that use nature in order to sell their products. The main concern is that such adverts obscure the real relationship between the products and nature. All these products involve the processing of natural materials, yet they are advertised as pristine, un-manufactured products. Drawing on Williamson's (1978) influential **Decoding Advertisements**, Huckle sees advertising with nature as ideological because it obscures both the true nature of society and the real value of the natural world on which that society depends. This activity can be seen as an example of 'critical media literacy' (Kellner 1995) or 'demystification' (Masterman 1985). I suggest that this example of Huckle's work on consumption can be seen as an example of what Lee (1993) calls a 'Fordist' way of conceptualising the economy, state power and subject. This approach is rooted in an intellectual tradition that speaks of mass society, dominant ideology and manipulation, and draws on the work of Frankfurt School writers like Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse and their condemnation of mass culture and the 'culture industry'. What these approaches have in common for Lee is that they portray an economic and political system of such power so as:

"it seemed that everyday culture and social identity could now be manufactured at the whim of big business and the state apparatus...that social consciousness itself could be produced almost as effortlessly as the assembly lines were producing automobiles or bars of soap"(Lee 1993:98).

Thus, in this activity advertising seen as socially powerful and effective. However, Nava (1997) has suggested that such conceptualisations are totalising and determining so that no justification can be made for breaking down the different moments of production and consumption. I am confident that the activity is not intended to be so totalising and deterministic and in practice the classroom activities may be adapted and re-routed by students and teachers. Nevertheless, the overall tenor of the approach is to conceptualise consciousness and the primacy of the economic in the terms Lee describes. In the activity on 'Advertising with nature', a teacher making use of cultural theory might be able to open up the classroom to allow a consideration of a wider range of textual readings, but the activity does highlight or suggest the existence of a dominant reading that prioritises the economic interests that produce such images and deny the 'real' economic forces that lie behind such images. A full consideration of such images requires a knowledge of sociological, cultural and literary theory that is not generally provided in geography and education courses. However, the potential exists for geography educators to explore the ways in which such adverts may be used in classrooms. A thought-provoking text is Goldman and Papson's (1996) **Sign Wars** which includes a chapter on 'green' advertising. They argue that:

"By stimulating the high levels of consumption necessary to support the logic of capital in the endless pursuit of increased profits, advertising aggravates tendencies toward environmental crises"(1996:187).

Goldman and Papson suggest that 'green' or environmental advertising is a response to the growth of the environmental movement and an awareness that overconsumption contributes to environmental destruction. As a result advertisers now seek to promote 'thoughtful' consumption as a solution to impending environmental disasters. It achieves this through creating a distinction between 'good' consumption and 'bad' consumption: 'Ironically, advertising raids nature for the very signifiers it uses to justify continued incursions into nature'(p.188). Goldman and Papson note that from its earliest origins, adverts used nature as a referent system for the construction of signs. Nature's landscapes were used to signify experiences or qualities lacking in urban-industrial everyday life. Adverts located the cure for societal ills in commodities aligned with meanings associated with nature: essence and purity. As Goldman and Papson note:

"Contemporary advertising is still littered with representations of nature that signify antimodern desires"(p.192).

These representations work on a semiotic opposition between nature (the countryside) and the city. Commodities are placed in landscape settings, labelled 'natural' and juxtaposed with natural objects. The effect is to 'disguise' the negative and artificial characteristics of commodities and refuse to acknowledge the relations of production that produce the commodity. For Goldman and Papson, a major goal of green marketing is the legitimization of production and consumption practices. There can be no escape from the rapaciousness of capitalism. Green marketing sanctions consumption by separating the act of consumption in general from its impact on the environment:

"People can eat at McDonald's, wear fashionable clothes, mow their lawns, use cosmetics, and go into debt all in the name of environmental concern."(p.213-214).

By suggesting that it really does make a difference if we buy from McDonald's because of their environmental policies, questions about overconsumption remain off limits. Goldman and Papson reject the idea that consumers have the power to transform economic-social-environmental relationships via their commodity choices. Instead, they suggest that a better place to start is with a consideration of establishing a conserver society based on decentralized production, reconstruction of the self around nonconsumption strategies, demilitarization and the reduction of multinational corporate power:

"The stimulation of desire by advertising will not likely blunt social and ecological catastrophe. As long as the construction of self-identity is based upon the accumulation and display of commodity signs, it is unlikely that the formation of a conserver, ecologically sound society will occur"(p.215).

Goldman and Papson produce some dazzling readings of particular adverts, showing the ways in which the adverts work as social texts with ideological meanings that 'hail' the reader. The problem of whether these adverts work, in that people identify with or are persuaded by the adverts, or whether they even understand the complex meanings that Goldman and Papson claim they contain, is never addressed. This is what Nava calls the 'theoretical disjuncture between analysing symbolic meaning on the one hand and exploring the interpretations of 'real' audiences on the other'(Nava 1997:43). Nava summarises neatly the findings of ethnographic approaches in cultural studies:

"What evidence we do have indicates that ads, like other texts, are in any case polysemic. That is to say, when people do watch ads, their aesthetic responses and their interpretations of what the ads are trying to say and whom they are addressing are not at all consistent or uniform"(p.45).

Nava's comment suggests that geography teachers seeking to raise issues of representation need to shift the emphasis away from a consideration of the meanings found in the text to a concern with the way the text is consumed, or the social relations of reading, and a number of questions have been raised about the type of 'demystification' advocated by Masterman. An important issue is the authority of the accounts provided by the teachers and students. In offering a reading of media texts, there may be a danger that we are 'reading too much into' these texts. After all, the argument goes, it's only an advert, television programme and so on. For example, Jackson (1994) provides an analysis of the highly successful Lucozade campaign that used prominent black sportsmen in order to promote its product. The analysis provides a detailed account of how these adverts 'worked'. However, as Gregson (1995) suggests, it is important to ask whether anyone else actually read the adverts in that way. To be fair, Jackson does point to the need to focus on how people read and consume these adverts, but in a classroom context, the question of whose voice gets heard is absolutely vital. In accounts of the 'new ' cultural geography there is hardly any discussion of questions of pedagogy. Two issues are worth pointing out here. First, the teacher possesses a good deal of institutional and cultural power in relation to students. He or she is both *in* authority and *an* authority and as such, is able to make his or her preferred reading count, even where classroom relations are designed to maximise interaction and discussion. A second issue surrounds the theory that lies behind teaching the media. The teacher obviously has access to a theoretical language with which to read these adverts. The students, to a lesser or greater extent, do not have this language. An important issue is about whether and how the teacher can induct students into a theoretical language which they can then use to analyse the adverts. One answer to this issue is that pedagogy should be based on a Vygotskian approach that involves students reflecting on and intellectualising their experience of reading media texts. In such a pedagogy, demonstration and discussion serves to introduce students to the formal language of analysis, which they then apply to other texts. A criticism of this approach is that it tends to separate the 'cognitive' and 'affective' processes of learning, and



favours the former, so that students' emotional investments in the media are neglected. Studies of anti-racist and anti-sexist teaching have pointed to the limitations of such a rationalist pedagogy that fails to displace students' pleasure in racist and sexist texts. For example, Judith Williamson's (1981/82) points out how the male students in her classes could deconstruct an advert at five paces, but whether this actually changed their behaviour was questionable. In other words, they were able to 'play the game' and adopt 'politically correct' responses, giving the teacher what they thought she wanted to hear.

### **Beyond Critical Pedagogy**

The most developed attempt to move beyond the 'demystification' approach advocated by Masterman and address the issues raised at the end of the last section is provided by David Buckingham. In a review of Masterman's **Teaching the Media**, Buckingham (1986) argues that by consistently emphasising that the media operate as 'consciousness industries' whose primary aim is to maintain capitalist production, Masterman tends to suggest that the role of the teacher is to raise questions regarding the economic base of the media. That is, whose interests are being served by this media text. For example, in his discussion of the educational materials produced by Shell UK on the regions of Britain, Masterman says that the:

"most basic question of all- who is producing the material and for what purpose ? - is the key to unlocking the ideological significance of the films. Why should Shell UK make films about the British countryside ?"(Masterman 1985:247).

But this isn't the only question that can be asked about these films. Buckingham suggests that supposing an economic determination of the question of ideology is an over-simplification. He argues that Masterman adopts a concept of ideology as a primarily cognitive phenomenon, as a function of the interests and intentions of its producers. In Masterman's view:

"Ideologies are ideas or beliefs which underpin particular texts and which can be recovered by peeling away the surface layers of 'mystification' which serve to obscure them from view" (Buckingham 1986:86).

According to Buckingham, Masterman sees ideology as something that is inherent in the text, and 'real' meanings can be uncovered by the removal of apparent or 'surface' meanings. For Buckingham, what is missing in Masterman's version is any notion of *subjectivity*. By locating ideological production at the level of media industries or the production of the text, Masterman is unable to discuss how readers or texts are themselves producers of ideology, as well as being produced by it. In other words, ideology for Masterman, is a matter of what the text 'says' rather than how it works. Buckingham argues that if we are to understand the process whereby subordinate groups may come to identify with the dominant group and accept their way of

perceiving the world, a more complex account of the relationship between ideology, language and subjectivity is needed. In fact, readers may interpret texts differently from how their producers intended them to be read. Buckingham argues that pleasure should be the starting point of any media education. For example, to attempt to attribute a single ideological meaning to *Coronation Street* or *Eastenders* is inevitably doomed to failure, and to analyse these programmes in terms of their adequacy to the 'real' would merely produce an understanding that Manchester or East London are not really like that, but it would not tell us about the complex pleasures viewers may derive from such media texts.

Buckingham's work represents a shift in the dominant paradigms of media education away from a concern with 'demystification' towards the writing and reading of media texts. Through his involvement with English and Media education (in its early stage of radical initiative followed by slow consolidation), Buckingham has been at the forefront of school subjects that have attempted to recognise and work with the popular cultural experience of young people. It is these spaces within the curriculum where questions of subjectivity have been explored with most consistency. Chris Richards has (1996) usefully characterised the media studies classroom as one where:

"the question of what counts as worthwhile knowledge has surfaced and, effortlessly buoyant, floats between the teacher and the students. The question drifts back and forth, refuses to go under, and from time to time, draws the attention of all concerned. They cannot ignore it and they must, if inconsistently, argue towards some kind of answer, to settle the unsinkable question"(Richards 1996:60)

Buckingham calls for media educators to abandon a defensive position, where young people are seen as the 'victims' of media ideologies, and teachers are agents of de-mystification, and build upon 'progressive' approaches in English teaching which emphasise the importance of analysis and reflection. Against a purely critical approach which involves the analysis of texts, equal attention is given to practical media production, and understanding is seen to arise not from the transmission of academic knowledge, but from a reflexive relationship between 'theory' and 'practice' (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1994). At the centre of this approach is the 'audience', and the question of the social circulation and uses of media texts, rather than a concern with 'reading' texts for the meanings they are supposed to contain. Buckingham and Sefton-Green question the status of texts in media education. They argue against the centrality of the text in classrooms which usually involves an analytical deconstruction of a particular text or starts with a body of texts and seeks to generalise across them. This approach presupposes the possibility of an objective meaning being recovered or unearthed, suggesting that meaning is immanent in the text. Buckingham and Sefton-Green argue that meaning is not simply given, but is achieved or produced through a process of social negotiation, and is therefore diverse, unstable and contested. Rather than see the text as the ultimate source of meaning, it could be seen as a

resource for more open-ended *play* with the possibilities of meaning. In **Cultural Studies Goes to School**, Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) outline their approach to media education based on the detailed analysis of students' work and the social dynamics of classroom practices. They raise questions about the ways in which students acquire 'critical' discourses, about the relationship between 'production' of media in classrooms and theory, and about the political dimensions of students' use of popular culture. Their approach is to start with what students already know, rather than to assume that popular culture is invalid or 'ideological'. Instead of seeking to replace 'subjective' responses with 'objective' ones, or to neutralise the pleasures of popular culture through rational analysis, they seek to develop a self-reflexive style of teaching in which students are able to reflect on their own position as both 'readers' and 'writers' of media texts.

An important element in Buckingham and Sefton-Green's approach is the involvement of students in media 'production', since by being 'writers' as well as 'readers' of visual media they can understand the implications of how the mass media can represent the world in different ways, highlighting parts of it or leaving them out. There are difficult issues here about what is actually learned by students, how it relates to the kind of knowledge teachers want students to acquire, and how such learning can be assessed. Buckingham and Sefton-Green provide the example of a group of A-Level Media Studies students who produced a magazine, *Slutmopolitan*, which parodied women's magazines. In reflecting on the experience of producing the magazine, one of the female students notes that there was a theory behind the magazine but it evolved during (not before) the production process and with 'considerable contradictions'. When asked whether the magazine was produced as a critique of 'the representation of femininity in woman's magazines', one student replied that the groups just wanted to 'have a laugh'. Buckingham and Sefton-Green take this to show the variety of readings that might be made by students and teachers of a media production, and argue that there is a need to emphasise the affective aspects of learning about the media (represented here in the pleasure of 'having a laugh') as well as the cognitive aspects that might seek to 'deconstruct' media texts. There were clearly lots of things going on inside and outside of the classroom during the production of the magazine which serve to make any simple notion of 'empowerment' problematic.

A discussion of these issues of relevance to geography educators is provided by Gauntlett (1996) in **Video Critical: Children, the Environment and Media Power**. Gauntlett considers the ways in which environmental issues are represented to young children in programmes such as *Blue Peter*, *Newsround* and *The Animals of Farthing Down*. Whilst he acknowledges that environmental issues have undoubtedly had greater coverage in recent years, the knowledge they offer children is not neutral, but tends to direct their understanding 'away from structural and societal explanations and towards personalised and individualistic accounts'(p.149). This 'hegemonic bending' cannot be seen as the result of a deliberate plan by television producers to offer children an ideological world-view, but reflects constraints such as

the professional socialisation of programme makers and concerns about 'political' bias in relation to children. However, Gauntlett can be seen as sympathetic to the idea that media coverage, often the primary source of information about the environment, *does* shape children's thinking about the environment, and may serve to reduce political action since children who watch these programmes tend to feel that they *have* done something. Gauntlett worked with children in primary schools to help them produce videos about the local environment. Through an analysis of the narrative themes used to structure the videos, Gauntlett shows how the frameworks for thinking about the environment reflected those familiar to children through television programmes. For instance, the children tended to reproduce the fact-based, realistic or naturalistic form of most television programmes: the videos were 'readerly' texts in that they avoided drawing attention to the way in which they were recorded. Gauntlett argues that the videos produced by the children illustrate the degree of media literacy that children of a young age have and points to the extent that they developed their understanding of how the media constructs, presents and re-presents the world to them. Far from being passive consumers of the media, they were able to appropriate the media products they had consumed and recycle them, reflecting on this process. The writing and re-writing of scripts came close to the approach to writing in classrooms favoured by Pam Gilbert:

"A classroom concerned with textuality and intertextuality focuses on the way in which texts are constructed and readings are produced. In such a classroom the making of a text becomes important...The work of text construction becomes the classroom focus and the myths of authorship and creative inspiration are more critically considered"(Gilbert 1989:170).

Gauntlett's work represents an important contribution to the literature on media studies and the environment, and comes close to the cultural studies approach advocated by Phil Cohen (1997) and Rob Gilbert (1992, 1995). Where Gauntlett is perhaps less optimistic is in the question of how far 'empowerment' can result from such approaches. Stuart Hall has argued that 'it is important to get people into producing their own images because...they can then contrast the images they produce of themselves against the dominant images which they are offered, and so they know that social communication is a matter of conflict between alternative readings of society' (quoted in Gauntlett 1996:92). How far such 'empowerment' is real or whether it is just a case of wishful thinking on the part of educators needs to be considered through work in concrete situations.

What this seems to be suggesting is that readers of texts are going to stand in different positions in relation to these texts, and what is therefore needed is some way to create a space for differences to be expressed in the classroom. This appears to be what Buckingham and Sefton-Green are arguing when they call for teachers to focus on students' use of media culture in their own lives. There is a commitment to media education through production, since this allows students and teachers to be the readers and writers of texts. In their analyses, critiques and reconstruction of media texts the students produce ambiguous, multivocal texts. The point is not

to accept these at face value, but to see them as active constructions. The focus in their approach thus shifts away from a concern with the meanings inherent in media texts to the meanings produced in the act of reading. This accords with Burgess and Harrison's work on how local people interpreted the media output surrounding the proposal to develop a theme park on the Rainham marshes in Essex. They suggest that 'it is practical life lived locally which determines the sense that people make of media texts' (Burgess and Harrison 1993:218).

The implications of these arguments for a critical pedagogy that seeks to empower young people and contribute to social transformation are significant. One is that we have to move away from claiming that any approach to media literacy has definite positive or negative effects. Away from claims about the universal cognitive and social effects of popular culture, we have to accept the local and contingent possibilities of work in media education. In his research, Buckingham (1993) found that even the youngest children displayed a high degree of critical sophistication in their judgments about television (and we can extend this to other products of consumption). However, there *were* gaps in their knowledge. He suggests that news and non-fiction programmes were of little interest to all but some of the older middle-class children, and there was little questioning of the partiality or 'bias' of news or the economic structure of broadcasting or contexts of production. Buckingham warns against any attempt to outline a 'developmental model' of media literacy, and stresses the importance of seeing students as 'writers' of media, rather than just as 'readers'. But he also notes the need for a debate about broader political questions- about what students already know, but also about what they think they ought to know, and why. Cultural studies would seem to offer the opportunity to acknowledge their existing knowledge, but also stresses the need for students to acquire and participate in dominant academic discourses. There is the potential for teachers and students to develop the type of work suggested by Buckingham and Sefton-Green. The task is to study the ways in which students consume cultural texts. In other words, what meanings do they make, and how does this link in with other practices in their lives? Rather than seeking to deconstruct cultural texts to discover their one true meaning, this approach requires discussion and reflection.

This section has built upon the 'ethnographic turn' (Ang 1996) in cultural studies which recognises the 'vitality and energy with which those who are excluded from legitimate, institutional power create a meaningful and liveable world for themselves, using the very stuff offered them by the dominant culture as raw material and appropriating it in ways that suit their own interests' (Ang 1996:139). However, there is a danger if we see this activity outside its political and social context (thus Harris (1992) argues that there has been a retreat in cultural studies from a politics of resistance to a politics of pleasure). Whilst it may be important to show the ways in which consumers can be active in a myriad of ways in using and interpreting media, this must be seen in perspective, recognising the marginality of this power. There may be structural limits to the possibilities of cultural democracy. These issues are taken up in the conclusion to this chapter.

## Conclusion

The arguments in this chapter can be seen as part of a broader 'cultural turn' in geography and the social sciences which involves a shift from a negative and dismissive treatment of consumption to the idea that the consumption or reception of cultural 'products' can be active and creative rather than passive. This links with the idea that consumption is always social rather than individual. Whereas the products of 'mass culture' were seen to be potentially dangerous, and in need of careful regulation (involving the construction of the audience as a 'public'), its products have offered people more, rather than less, space for creative use. Geographers have adopted particular ways of seeing places and landscapes, and the serious, academic study of the world has tended to favour elitist conceptions of culture over more populist ones (teachers have broadly favoured a humanist tradition that has distinguished education and culture from the vulgar masses and consumerism). However, during the postwar period and particularly since the 1960s, schooling has undergone profound transformations (this is especially true of English, where there developed more open, fluid notions of culture and progressive pedagogy). Geography however, taking its cue from developments in the academic discipline, aligned itself with positivism and the 'new' geography based on normative models, so that questions of meaning were effectively marginalised. At the same time there were pressures for changes in pedagogy, so that currently school geography represents an uncomfortable mixture of enquiry learning that has the potential to focus on the way in which meaning is constructed, and open to interpretation, and a curriculum that sees the world as 'out there', waiting to be found, learned about and accepted.

This chapter has suggested that the recent incorporation of perspectives from cultural studies offers the possibility of devising a geography curriculum for the 'new times'. An important feature of recent cultural geography is the way it recognises the relativity of ways of seeing the world. It recognises that our knowledge of the world is mediated through practices of representation and thus draws attention to the plurality of meanings and interpretations of the world. This implies that the task is to understand the ways in which people make sense, or develop 'maps of meaning', of their worlds. However, this process is not the result of individual choices but involves the social construction of meaning. Some people have the power to make their maps of meaning count for more than others. An example of such work is Peter Jackson's (1996) research carried out in two North London shopping centres. The approach was to use focus groups in youth and community centres to tease out some of the meanings attributed to shopping in these places. The research was interested in the way that:

"narrative identities were constructed through the different ways in which people related to particular types of goods and particular types of goods and particular shopping places and the discourses on which they drew in the narration of these identities"(1996:p.8).

Thus, for instance, many of the respondents were concerned with the increasing artificiality of

contemporary social relations, of which shopping was one example. Some complained about the claustrophobic environment, the lack of seasonality in the types of goods available, and the decline in the human relationships on which shopping was based, and concerns about the increasing materialism, artificiality and alienation of contemporary society. Often these concerns were associated with racialised fears of neighbourhood change. For example, nostalgia for the past was tinged with a racialised discourse: the quality of goods in the idealised past was contrasted with 'foreign muck'. What emerges from reading Jackson's account of the research is the complexity of what is going on when people go shopping and begin to talk about their experiences. It acts as a corrective to the celebratory accounts of 'lifestyle' choices celebrated by some. Instead, shopping is deeply embedded in social relations marked by gender, race, locality and class:

"Rather than seeing contemporary consumption as dominated by leisure and recreation, pleasure and desire, we found a persistence of more traditional values including an idealisation of family life, conducted in an environment where time and money are scarce resources and where the work of consumption is a skilled, socially-learned accomplishment"(1996:160).

Against the left's traditional condemnation of consumption and popular culture, in Jackson's work there is a genuine attempt to listen and represent the hopes and fears (the meanings) that 'ordinary people' have. However, the account is never celebratory (voyeuristically championing the honest hard-working salt-of-the-earth qualities of 'ordinary people' ), and Jackson's political commitments come through. There is reference to the racialised discourses and the exclusions that are achieved in making these places comfortable for people with money-to-spend. The accounts offered by Jackson have much in common with Paul Willis's (1990) description of the 'symbolic creativity' demonstrated by young people in their use of the products of consumer culture. His work celebrates the 'extraordinary symbolic creativity' of:

"the multitude of ways in which young people use, humanise, describe and invest with meanings their common and immediate life spaces and social practices-personal styles and choice of clothes, selective and active use of music, TV, magazines; decoration of bedrooms; the rituals of romance and subcultural styles; the style, banter and drama of friendship groups; music-making and dance"(p.2).

Willis argues that 'informal culture' defined largely through its association with 'leisure' rather than school or work, involves and commands the emotional investment of youth. In a thoughtful account of the place of the 'popular' in the school curriculum Chris Richards (1992) argues that Willis shares too much in the subjective marginalisation of education by working-class youth. He points out that education does in fact provide secure identities for certain groups. He says that 'The difference between being 'irrelevant' to most, and being 'irrelevant' to all, young people is

marked by class'(p.90). Richards suggests that English and Media Studies in schools are not so bounded by established cultural hierarchies as Willis implies. The last 10 to 15 years has struggled to address the gap between informal culture and the school curriculum and 'though too little of it is written into the National Curriculum, that practical knowledge survives and continues to expand among teachers of those subjects'(p.91). Richards notes that there are significant problems in embracing popular culture as a legitimate form of knowledge in schools, since teachers by definition have to be bearers of knowledge and cultural power as part of their 'professional identities':

"teachers are supposed to know...they are supposed to have knowledge and, without it, they are in trouble"(Richards 1992:74).

In addition teachers necessarily have a different relationship to their students than ethnographic researchers have to their respondents. Teachers have obligations to 'counsel', advise and sometimes confront students. For example, if students in schools mark out their identities through the construction of space as 'white' through rituals of abuse or racist graffiti, teachers have to intervene. The emerging cultural geography provides geography teachers with stimulating material and approaches to explore, but the fundamental question of how knowledge produced in an academic context gets translated into the context of the geography classroom has hardly begun to be explored. This chapter is intended in part as a contribution to that debate.

Finally, I want to return to the question of the proper place of popular culture within geography education. Whilst this chapter has been an extended argument against the type of thinking that sees popular culture as essentially reactionary, I want to raise the whole question of the purpose of education in late capitalism. Specifically, how far does the re-evaluation of popular culture reflect a shift in political culture from the 'politics of distribution' to a new 'politics of recognition'? The politics of distribution was characterised by a concern with labour and class issues and asked questions about 'who gets what', whilst the politics of recognition is more concerned with questions of culture and identity. This is particularly pertinent to ask in light of the election of a Labour government which appears to have abandoned the traditional project of redistribution. In a recent essay Andrew Sayer (1997) warns of the danger of uncritically reflecting or celebrating the 'commodification of culture':

"The commodity may be valued by the user for its intrinsic use value, but to the seller it is unequivocally a means to an end, to the achievement of the external goal of making a profit..."

Sayer is concerned that we are witnessing not just a growth of individual materialism. In addition, the rise of the cultural industries means that media images provide a prism through which objects and events are classified. He cites Lash and Urry who note that:



"The negative consequences of this are that the ubiquity and centrality of such popular culture objects to youth lifestyle can swamp the moral-practical categories available to young people. And entities and events which would otherwise be classified and judged by moral-political universals are judged instead through these aesthetic, taste categories"(Lash and Urry 1994:133).

Sayer thinks that the moral aspects of culture are dominated by economic imperatives, and partially replaced by an individualised, subjective 'feelgood factor'. He suggests that celebrating or just uncritically reporting these tendencies is 'complicit in the very erosion of cultural values'. This raises the question of whether calls for the type of geography education discussed here serves to collude with the needs of flexible capitalism. For example, in a discussion of the postmodernization of the curriculum, David Hartley (1997) has argued that the new school 'subjects of the self' under the banner of personal and social education and lifeskills based on experiential learning and student-centred approaches 'serve to integrate the fracturing self of the postmodern pupil, to set up the flexible demeanour of the future worker, and somehow to re-moralize society'(Hartley 1997:73). What this suggests is that the old 'hidden curriculum' of schooling, which was based on tradition, and served to legitimise existing social divisions and ways of life is being replaced in the face of a media culture that offers other models and undermines tradition (Usher and Edwards (1994) suggest that experiential learning is the most appropriate pedagogy in a postmodern condition). As a final comment, it might be suggested that the 'culture wars' are only just beginning, and, given the contribution of geographers to the debates and the fact that teachers daily deal with young people forming their identities in popular culture, geography education should have some part to play in the coming battles.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RE-PRESENTING RURAL ENGLAND

### Introduction

"Alice had always wanted to live in Pitcombe; everybody did, from miles around and if a house there was photographed for sale, in *Country Life*, the caption always read, 'In much sought after village.' It was the kind of village long-term expatriates might fantasise about, a stone village set on the side of a gentle hill, with the church at the top and the pub at the bottom, by a little river, and the big house - baroque- looking down on it all with feudal benevolence. Sir Ralph Unwin, who owned the big house, three thousand acres and two dozen cottages still, was tall and grey-haired and an admirable shot. He drove a Range Rover through the village and waved regally from the elevated driving seat. He allowed Pitcombe Park to be used constantly for functions to raise money for hospices and arthritis research and the church roof, though he drew the line at the local conservatives" - Joanna Trollope, **A Village Affair**.

He lives in a house, a very big house in the country  
Watching afternoon repeats and the food he eats in the country  
He takes all manner of pills and runs up analyst bills in the country  
It's like an animal farm, lots of rural charm in the country

(Blur, *Country House* 1995)

Joanna Trollope's imaginary village of Pitcombe draws on a mythology of English village life (see Barthes 1973 for the classic account of the role of 'myth'). It is based on the idea of a close-knit community. Through such representations in the media, literature and geography classrooms, English rural life is mythologized. The rural is presented as the 'other' of the urban. However, such romanticized representations are not left unchallenged. The 'Brit-Pop' band Blur effectively challenge the image of the idyllic charm of the countryside, painting a portrait of boredom and anxiety, even for those with the means to 'escape' the strains of urban life (the video for the single 'Country House' relies on the standard stock of rural images - farmyards and 'buxom wenches' - to offer a wry comment on the lifestyles and sexual morals of the rural middle classes). Raymond Williams' (1973) classic work on **The Country and the City** situates these competing representations of urban and rural places within the material framework of the advent of industrialization. During this period, he suggests, a symbolic distance was established between the rural and the urban, with the rural imagined as static and unchanging (the way we were) and the urban imagined as in a state of constant change and flux. These terms have been afforded a range of positive and negative meanings (Short 1991). Thus the city has been given the role of either Babylon or Jerusalem, while the rural has been seen as embodying the heart of a nation or its backwardness. Short considers that:

"countryside as the setting for the golden age has continued to exercise the western imagination. It has persisted in the modern period because an idealized countryside has been a point of criticism of capitalist social relations and big city life. The countryside as contemporary myth is pictured as a less-hurried lifestyle where people follow the seasons rather than the stock market, where they have more time for one another and exist in a more organic community where people have a place and an authentic role. The countryside has become the refuge from modernity"(1991:33-34).

The point to make here is that the meanings assigned to the 'rural' cannot be seen as immutable or eternal. At different times and in different places, the rural has meant different things (see Bell 1997 on the way the rural is represented in horror movies). This chapter is an attempt to outline the key features of a critical pedagogy for teaching about the geography of rural England. After a discussion of various ways of conceptualising 'rurality', the chapter considers representations of rural England and suggests how these might inform classroom activities.

### **Teaching the rural**

The dominant way of seeing the rural in school geography is through a empiricist/positivistic framework. The rural exists as a world 'out there' to be observed, measured, described and explained by the geographer. The rural is treated as if it were a matter of simple common sense. The dominant approach to school geography has been based on the assumption that the rural exists either as a physical bounded space or a functional space. This way of seeing is based on a 'positivist' regime of seeing which:

"valorises the neutrality of seeing: the world is turned into a set of geometrical arrangements based on an abstract, fixed, universal, isotropic and material understanding of space.."(Pile and Thrift 1995:45).

In the school geography curriculum such a way of seeing can be seen in ideas about the rural-urban continuum which distinguishes between 'pure' rural and urban space (and its monstrous hybrid, the 'rurban fringe') and definitions of the rural that focus on what is measurable and observable. These forms of 'empiricism' accept that the rural exists and are concerned with measuring and recording it. This is an essentially a-theoretical 'commonsense' conception of the rural which defines it simply in terms of its spaces and functions, either negatively, as being synonymous with anything that was non-urban, or positively, where particular functions are thought to characterize and identify rural space. Thus rural areas were typically defined as having extensive land uses or large expanses of underdeveloped land, as having small settlements which are strongly related to the surrounding landscape, and having a way of life characterised by a cohesive identity. In the school geography curriculum it is this 'functional' definition of the 'rural'

that forms the basis for study. In other words, the rural is seen as an unproblematic, self-explanatory category. This is in line with the empiricist and positivist tendencies in school geography. The rural, with its distinctive land uses, settlement patterns and demographic trends, is there to be mapped and measured. Moreover, with the advent of positivism, there was a concern with recognising order and pattern in the rural landscape. Thus the school geography curriculum and textbooks are still littered with 'k=3' meshes, settlement hierarchies, and nearest neighbour analyses.

More recently, school geography has become more concerned with people-environment issues. In such an approach students are expected to consider the ways in which human activities have an effect on the rural environment. Examples of this approach could be the impact of agricultural intensification on the social structure of rural areas and the physical landscape and ecosystems, the encroachment of urban development on green belt land, the ways in which tourist activities can affect the character of rural areas, or, adopting a more welfare-based approach, asking questions about economic and social inequality in rural areas (who gets what, where, and why?). In such approaches, the dominant view is that rural areas are basically self-contained, internally homogeneous places that are threatened by the encroachment of human activities. Rural places are seen as existing outside the confines of 'industrial society', and threatened by the prospect of progress. Indeed there is a need to protect rural places from the threat of external encroachment. In a more sophisticated approach, the emphasis is on balancing (or managing) the costs and benefits of development. For example, it is accepted that new house-building is inevitable, and the question becomes one of deciding where is the best (that is, most rational) place to put them. In this way, the geography classroom becomes a model of modernist technocratic planning. Students are cast in the role of rational 'experts', weighing up the key features of the issue, collecting and evaluating evidence (both objective and subjective) before coming to the best answer. The rural still exists as an object to be studied by a disinterested (sometimes quite literally) geographical observer. Great store is placed on the skill of cost-benefit analysis, and on the transparent reporting of the facts of the issue.

The study of the rural in school geography risks operating as a 'curriculum of erasure' (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997) in that it excludes knowledge that fails to justify existing economic and political arrangements and white middle-class and upper-class interests (see the discussion in Chapter 2). For example, the fact that surveys of young people's perceptions of the countryside reveal that they are likely to see it as 'boring' suggests that they will find little interest in the issue of urban encroachment of green belt land. In multicultural classrooms, the question of which social groups will eventually end up living in the countryside is rarely asked, thus conveniently ignoring that migration to rural areas has been dominated by people from the professional and managerial classes. What is more, discussion of controversial issues tends to be framed within a consensus view of the political system that allows all groups to make their voice heard and denies conflict perspectives which stress the existence of unequal power relations. Few geography lessons

offer students the historical, political, sociological and economic knowledge with which to understand the nature of the changes affecting rural England. By focusing on the observable space of the rural area, students are unable to ascertain the processes of change that are continually shaping rural space. These processes are disrespectful of boundaries, and study needs to focus on processes operating at larger scales. In addition, there is a tendency to talk about rural places as though they have an essential identity, or that people in rural places have common or shared interests, thus downplaying the social divisions that may exist. An example of an attempt to overcome the limitations of this approach is provided in Huckle's (1988) curriculum unit on **United Kingdom Agriculture**. However, such approaches are far less common in geography education, not least because the general social science background on which it is based is not widely available to geography teachers (Johnston 1986). Huckle's book seeks to introduce students to 'the economic and political processes shaping the rural environment'. The unit lies firmly within a realist framework, and the emphasis is on a political-economy approach. It draws upon Peter Taylor's (1985) argument that places are made up of three scales- experience, ideology, and reality. In Taylor's scheme, the scale of the 'real' represents events at the level of the world economy. The tendency in school geography is to pay attention to the scale of experience, whilst the scale of the real is virtually ignored. Huckle's book stresses the ways in which the countryside is being transformed by global economic and political processes. The pivotal activity in the unit is called 'The agricultural treadmill' and is designed to help teachers and students examine key ideas such as *'Between 1940 and the mid-1980s price supports and grants from national government and the European Community accelerated a treadmill a agricultural production in the UK...' and "While the agricultural treadmill has resulted in significant increases in food production...[The] costs of the treadmill can be measured in terms of the loss of wildlife communities; social problems in many rural areas; the increased price and declining variety of foods; and the undermining of food production in developing countries"*.

This is a representation of the rural that stresses the importance of capitalism and economics. In using these activities in the classroom the cause and effects are clear, particularly in the part of the activity where students attempt to explain the links between various trends (such as increased agricultural output, habitat loss, rising farm land prices and nitrate concentrations in rivers). One of the activities in Huckle's book deals with the issue of socio-economic change in rural areas. This activity draws heavily on the work of Newby (1980, 1987) who seeks to reveal the gap between rural images and reality (or, as McLaughlin (1983) puts it, 'take the lid off the chocolate box'):

"The village is the focus of many of our notions about the ideal community, but there is a gap between such perceptions and the reality of today's countryside"(Huckle 1988:51-52).

Huckle notes that village communities have undergone transformation over the last thirty years, and clearly locates the causes in the economic changes analysed in the workings of the agricultural treadmill. In the notes for this activity, it is suggested that students consider alternative

representations of rural life. However, the economism that reflects the dominance of the political-economy approaches of the 1980s is still evident. For instance, in the case study that serves as the central activity, students consider the conflict surrounding the proposed draining of the Halvergate Marshes in Norfolk in the early-to-mid-1980s. It is in this activity that the economic system that frames rural policy in Britain closes in and limits the range of decisions individual farmers can make about land use. The farmer in the activity has little choice but to drain his land and convert to cereals in the name of efficiency (in the end many students give the farmer the chance to 'do something at least' for the marshes by accepting a compromise low-intensity land use scheme). The message of this activity and the overall tenor of the unit is that the rural landscape is uniformly and unfalteringly subject to the forces of capitalist agricultural production. Despite its obvious advantages over traditional approaches that fail to theorize the 'rural', it can be argued that Huckle's book limits the range of meanings available surrounding the 'rural'. By focusing on the countryside as a place of capitalist agricultural production, to the extent that other forms of social and cultural activities are understood within this framework, the 'other meanings' associated with the 'rural' are marginalized. In order to open up these other meanings an alternative framework is needed. For example, an important omission in Huckle's account of British agriculture is any consideration of the role women play in agricultural production and the reproduction of social relations in rural areas (this issue is discussed later in this chapter).

Huckle's account of United Kingdom agriculture was published in 1988 and reflects the changes taking place in rural areas as a result of a shift from a 'productivist' to a 'post-productivist' countryside (Marsden *et al.* 1993). The shift to 'post-productivism' represented a challenge to agriculture's hegemonic position in the countryside and was driven by a range of forces including economic contradictions in the 'Atlanticist' food order, the environmental concern with many agricultural activities, and the impact of social changes related to service class in-migration to rural areas. The effect of these forces was to challenge the notion that farmers should hold a position as the right and proper guardians of the countryside and that the primary purpose of rural policy should be the support of agricultural production. Halfacree (1997) summarises the implications of 'post-productivism':

"..post-productivism may signal a search for a new way of understanding and structuring the countryside. A space in the imagination is opening, whereby non-agricultural interests and actors are given an opening to strive to create a rurality in their image" (1997:72).

It is this struggle over the creation of rurality that is of real interest to geographers. It suggests that students need to be given the opportunity to reflect upon the ways in which rural places are socially constructed. Some of the activities in **United Kingdom Agriculture** hint at the implications of 'post-productivism' for the countryside, but the ideas are not fully developed, and this may be seen as a result of the focus on economic actors that dominates the unit. As an example of how these themes may be developed, John Urry (1995) shares Huckle's argument

that the character of the countryside has been predominantly shaped by landowners, and that any effects that other classes might have had have been less significant than those of the large and medium scale owners of the mass of rural land. The power of the land-owning class is seen in the way in which access to land is highly regulated, the limited success of the state in transforming rural ownership, and the way in which the very appearance of the countryside has been seen through the development of a 'countryside aesthetic'. In particular, the class compromise has favoured the interests of landowners who have been able to promote the:

"notion of 'quiet recreation' as reflected in [legislation] has consecrated the leisure activities that that class favours and represents a class compromise with the interests of landowners and farmers"(1995:209).

This is obviously an important argument and one which comes close to the analysis provided by Huckle. However, Urry stresses that there is a multiplicity of ways in which the countryside operates as a site of meaning. Urry considers the possibility that this historic compromise is dissolving in the wake of a bewildering series of changes. These changes include the movement into rural areas of the service class with extremely diverse lifestyles and politics, including that of 'pastoralism'; the effects upon rural activities of 'post-modern' culture; the increased importance of 'body culture'; changes in the significance and nature of 'leisure' and 'hobbying'; the appeal and use of the countryside as a special place for youthful 'travelling'; and the location within rural areas of many diverse 'new sociations', marked by an enhanced 'reflexivity'. In other words, the hegemonic idea of the rural idyll may be being eroded in the wake of profound economic, social and cultural shifts. Developing the framework provided by Huckle would involve a consideration of these different countrysides.

Huckle's module on the United Kingdom's agriculture is limited by its focus on the economic forces shaping the landscape and the inevitable marginalization of the 'cultural' elements of rurality. This reflects the theoretical basis of the **What We Consume** project which, in its early stages at least, relied on a neo-Marxist analysis. Such a choice was unsurprising given the dominance of the political-economy approaches which dominated the discipline throughout the 1980s. The political-economic approach offered by Huckle, though more grounded in theoretical reflection, and more attentive to the structural conditions that affect the landscape, risks telling too singular a story, and fails to pay attention to the many meanings that exist and collide in rural places. However, the approach is useful since it challenges the view that rural areas are governed by a broad consensus of values which emphasized continuity and 'community'. The rural sociologist Howard Newby (1987) has argued that rural areas had been subjected to two sets of policies both of which worked against the interests of farm workers who made up the rural working class. First, government policies directed at the supply of cheap food had favoured large land owners at the expense of small farmers, many of whom left the land. Second, the effect of planning policy was to free agriculture from development control. Farmers and landowners held

political power in rural areas and, together with middle-class 'incomers', were unwilling to change the balance of power in favour of farm workers and other members of the rural working class. The overall effect of these trends was to direct new industrial development away from rural areas, which narrowed the employment opportunities of rural people. In terms of housing, farmers were unwilling to encourage building of council housing. Housing need in rural areas came to be associated with visual criteria, rather than social need. Planning controls on housing were essentially to do with social exclusivity, dressed up as the need to avoid the 'negative' effects of development. These policies gained political support from the 'adventitious population' of people new to the countryside: second-home owners, rural commuters and retired middle-class people. In the 1980s rural areas were exposed to the forces of market restructuring and cuts in public expenditure associated with Mrs. Thatcher's policies. These included the deregulation of rural transport, the rationalization of schools and other public facilities. Home ownership has increased, thus leading to a shortage of affordable housing in many rural areas...and so on. These changes in the nature of rural England are rooted in 'real', material transformations that have tangible social and economic effects.

Whilst there is much to be said for such a 'realist' account, this chapter suggests an alternative approach to teaching about rural England in school geography. Following on from the argument developed in chapter two, it is based on the acceptance of a pluralism which acknowledges the existence of many versions of reality. This would suggest that rather than search for one true account or representation of rural England, the geography curriculum should open itself to the recognition and study of 'other rurals' which have traditionally been excluded from study. The pedagogical justification for this position is the common assertion that good teaching takes the lives of all students seriously. As suggested in chapter two, a critical geography education needs to account for the class, gender and racial diversity of the student population. If the study of rural England inadvertently focuses on the experience of white, middle-class men, then questions about the way the experience of rural life is structured along axes of race, gender and class will be ignored.

These issues have been aired as part of a debate in the **Journal of Rural Studies**, prompted by Philo's (1992) review of Colin Ward's (1990) **The Child in the Country**. In his article Philo spoke of 'neglected rural geographies' and suggested that most accounts of rural life have been viewed through the lens of typically white, male, middle-class narratives:

"there remains a danger of portraying British rural people..as all being 'Mr. Averages', as being men in employment, earning enough to live, white and probably English, straight and somehow without sexuality, able in body and sound in mind, and devoid of any other quirks of (say) religious belief or political affiliation"(Philo 1992:200).

Geography textbooks tend to represent rural areas as being populated by the 'Mr. Averages'



described by Philo. People appear as statistics about employment levels and types, or population changes, and are presented as one-dimensional, lacking any of the diversity of relationships, motivations, desires and lusts, hopes and fears that are part of human subjectivity. Philo is concerned with the position of 'Others' in rural studies. Others are those groups of people who tend to be regarded as illegitimate members of society due to the possession of certain social characteristics such as being homeless, a traveller, being gay, black or a single parent and so on. Philo wants rural geography to open up to diversity and wants geographers to explore a range of 'voices' or experiences of the rural. In a later essay, Philo clarified his intentions:

"I urged academic rural geographers to enlarge the horizons of their studies by wondering about the worlds of many more non-hegemonic, commonly less than visible, often sad and oppressed, sometimes defiant and resourceful 'rural others' than have to date been touched upon"(Philo 1997:22).

He suggests that rural geography has tended to restrict itself to familiar empirical and conceptual 'moorings', in effect simplifying the countryside. Thus familiar concepts such as the morphology of the nucleated villages, the close-knit community with its *Gemeinschaft* social relations, the local-newcomer division, central place systems, and senses of place, 'can often serve to overlay a curious conceptual sameness on the specific rural contexts encountered...however unusual or individual these may initially have seemed'(p.24).

Fortunately for geography teachers, other epistemological frameworks exist that can assist in the construction of a critical pedagogy for teaching about rural geography. In what follows I discuss changes in the way the 'rural' has been conceptualised in the sub-discipline of 'rural geography' or 'rural studies' and the implications for geography education. Consider the following statements taken from a Sociology textbook written for Advanced Level students:

"Some people have romanticized notions about rural areas. Post-modernists argue that this imbalanced view may be enhanced if they add to the image of rurality the 'normalized' concept of 'community'"(Kirby et al. 1996:16)

"..Short argues that we must learn from the post-structuralist emphasis on symbols and images, ensuring that we do not fall into the same 'rose-tinted' traps"(p.16)

When we compare such comments with the way the rural is talked about in Geography textbooks written for Advanced Level students we are struck by the way in which the rural is seen to exist independent of the geographer, who studies it unproblematically as an object. When it comes to recognising the complex social geography of rural areas, sociology offers students a more challenging agenda:

“In recent times feminists have begun to apply their theoretical concerns to rural areas”

Students are made aware of the call for:

“more work on gender, age and how the two intersect in the rural setting”

and there is a recognition of the need for understanding action and structure combined:

“ranging from the actions of individual rural inhabitants to the effects of national, transnational and global processes on rural life”.

Finally, students are asked to consider whether there is a need to understand individual rural dwellers as ‘active creators’ of their own meanings and ‘symbolic boundaries’. In contrast, geography as a school subject appears to treat ‘rurality’ as if it were a matter of simple common sense. The approach discussed here reflects recent theoretical developments in the study of the rural. An important phase in the academic construction of the rural was heralded by Mormont (1990) who concluded that it is no longer possible to conceive of a single rural space. Instead, there are a series of different social spaces which overlap the same geographical space, and by implication, rurality should be seen as a social construction, reflecting a world of social, moral and cultural values. This is an important argument, because it implies that rather than being regarded as object that can be mapped, measured and observed in an empirical and ‘scientific’ way, the rural becomes a social space where meanings are constructed, negotiated and experienced within the geographical space concerned. Mormont identified five shifts occurring in the countryside that made the use of the term rural problematic. These included: the increasing mobility of people and flows of goods and information that effectively ends the autonomy of local communities; the delocalization of economic activity which renders impossible the definition of homogeneous economic zones; the emergence of new specialized uses of rural spaces (tourism, parks, development and so on) creates new specialized networks, many of which are no longer localized; more and more, people inhabiting ‘rural’ space represent a variety of temporary visitors as well as residents; finally, rural spaces perform functions for non-rural users and exist independently of the actions of rural people.

A related development in the academic construction of the ‘rural’ has been the poststructuralist deconstruction of different rural texts. What this means is that to talk of a category of the ‘rural’ is to gloss over important differences in the meaning of the term. The task is then to investigate the multifarious discourses and representations of the rural. In line with the postmodern turn, academic discourses increasingly seek to incorporate ‘lay’ discourses so that ‘ordinary’ people’s own views and other popular texts are used. There is no assumption of a homogeneous view of rurality existing to be uncovered or revealed by the researcher. Halfacree (1993) draws on the ideas of Baudrillard to argue that meanings diverge at the level of the sign (rurality) which is

increasingly detached from its signifier (the meaning of rurality) as social representations of the rural become more diverse, and both are divorced from their referent (the rural locale). Halfacree draws upon theories of social representation to show how people come to understand the rural by way of images and representations shared by members of a social group. Social representations act like a map which make the world familiar and understandable. According to this view, the rural is a social representation that consists of a mixture of concepts, ideas, and images which exist in people's minds and also circulate in society. Halfacree's work reflects the postmodern concern to allow the voices of 'ordinary' people to be heard. In particular, he is interested in whether the general rural population subscribes to the 'rural idyll'. Halfacree adopts a social-psychological approach to defining the 'rural' which reflects the post-structuralist 'linguistic turn' in the social sciences. This definition stems from the idea that the rural and its synonyms are *words and concepts understood and used by people in everyday talk*. Halfacree draws on the work of the social psychologist Moscovici, in order to argue that the rural can be seen as a 'social representation' (or a 'social representation of space'). Social representations of space are partly a description of the physical world, but are not reducible to it. They play the role of conventionalizing objects, people and events, as well as prescribing and organizing our subsequent behaviour and responses. The 'rural' represents one such social representation of space, and the 'rural idyll' is one hegemonic social representation.

These more recent 'phases' in academic constructions of the 'rural' are concerned with the social and cultural construction of the 'rural'. It cannot be assumed that the rural exists, out there, to be mapped, described and explained by the geographer. Rural geography (part of the wider field of 'Rural Studies') has had a 'magnetic' attraction for the 'new cultural geographers' concerned with the theorisation of difference and otherness. Cloke and Little (1997) note that:

"rural studies has travelled a tortuous and non-linear journey from a fascination with theorising regularity, via a fascination with a critical theorising of the sameness inherent in the structuring of opportunities and the agency of human decision-making, to the more recent emphasis on theorising differences and significations in geographies of otherness, discourse and cultural symbolism"(Cloke and Little 1997:2).

Recent work in rural studies has shown an interest in the imaginary texts of novels, films, paintings, photographs, television and radio. It is increasingly recognised that the 'imagined geographies' of these texts have a complex relationship with the 'imagined geographies' of rural and non-rural people. The recognition that our knowledges of rurality are highly mediated is of great importance for geography educators who are more often than not teaching about rural places to students whose impressions of such places are gleaned through images presented on television, through visits to rural places that have been constructed by museum curators, and through images and texts in school. In view of this, the question of representation becomes of fundamental importance. Students and teachers need to think about whose social representation

of rurality is being presented and whose is being excluded, and why do certain images come to dominate over others. A seminal work that considers these issues is Raymond Williams' (1973) **The Country and the City**. The book is an historical account of the ways in which the country and the city are represented in English literature. Williams shows how our commonsense ways of thinking about the countryside are socially constructed, there is nothing 'natural' about them, and also that these representations often reflect the power of dominant groups. Williams argues that literary texts must be understood in the light of the social and economic conditions in which they were produced.

The rest of this chapter is an attempt to discuss these developments in rural geography and rural studies in relation to geography education. In doing so this chapter mounts a challenge to dominant ways of teaching about rurality in geography education.

### **Cultures of rurality and cultural pedagogy**

At the time of writing there has been little discussion of the ways in which the insights of the 'new cultural geography' may be incorporated into cultural pedagogy. The new cultural geography is concerned with the relationships between power and knowledge, and the ways in which knowledge is produced, accepted and rejected. Geographers working in this area are interested in the process whereby dominant meanings based on assumptions about race, gender and class are 'encoded' into landscapes and representations of landscapes, and the ways in which individuals (marked by their own social location) 'decode' or read these representations. This suggests that a geography education based in recent developments in the 'new cultural geography' should teach students to read critically places and representations of places. However, the impetus for such a pedagogy should not simply be driven by developments in academic geography. Instead, as suggested in Chapter 3, the key rationale for such a pedagogy derives from the fact that pedagogy increasingly takes place outside the formal structures of the school and classroom. The 'informal curriculum' is that taught by media representations. Films, television shows, music and so on are all important sources of knowledge about the world.

As suggested in chapter three, there is little tradition within geography education of considering the 'politics of representation'. Most lessons on rural geography fail to develop an understanding of the role of images and media culture in relation to the countryside. There is a need to develop a pedagogy based on the use of images of rurality. In what follows, these form the central part of the unit of study and thus allow students to cut loose from the teachers agenda. In his recent work Huckle has argued for the importance of critical media pedagogy:

"We increasingly know our environment through the mass media which represent it to us. Representations of environments and environmental issues crowd our television screens yet few of us are educated to watch these in an informed and critical way...a critical media

education enables people to reflect and act on how they are constructed and how they might be re-constructed to better serve the interests of democracy, social justice, and sustainability”(1994:2).

These frameworks can help us think about how we represent the rural in the geography classroom. The school geography curriculum is characterised by its claim to ‘realism’. That is, it claims to represent the world as it is. However, recent work in rural studies has argued that we need to pay attention to the ways in which the rural is represented. Places cannot be taught about unproblematically, as factual, preexisting objects. There is a need to theorize the object we are examining. In the account that follows, my approach builds on Lash and Urry’s (1994) account of the economies of signs and space- as the cultural industries have expanded so there has been an unprecedented increase in the production and circulation of rural imagery, whether it is in the form of television programmes, film, pop videos (the leading Brit-pop band Blur, recently had a hit single entitled ‘Country House’, the video to which drew, in an ironic way, on a plethora of stereotyped views of the rural), adverts or magazines. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) suggest that:

“As we gain a more sophisticated view of the ways cultural pedagogy operates, we are better able to expose race, class and gender oppression and even rewrite popular texts when the opportunity presents itself”(p.93).

This account has argued for geography teachers to adopt new approaches to the study of the ‘rural’ in schools. Following shifts in the academic construction of the rural, and recognising that the study of the rural cannot avoid questions about how the rural is experienced through the media of popular culture, rurality has been redefined as a dynamic and unstable social construction rather than a fixed geographical entity. In other words, the ‘rural’ is a category that people use in everyday life, but its meaning is not fixed and is open to multiple meanings. Rurality is culturally defined, and the social, economic and cultural meanings attached to the rural need to be understood. Cloke and Thrift (1994:1) capture the nature of this shift:

“the meanings and intensities of the rural have multiplied. For example, the rural is now routinely linked to gender, sexuality and ethnicity in ways which would have been considered remarkable only a few years ago. In turn, as the differences have multiplied so the idea of the rural as a fixed location has faded. It is now an infinitely more mobile and malleable term”.

This approach to the ‘rural’ has important implications for geography education in that it suggests that when geography teachers teach about rural England they are involved in an attempt to constitute a particular social and economic landscape - rural England. The term ‘constitute’ is used deliberately, because most geography educators would see their work not as ‘discursive constitution’ but of ‘uncovering’ or ‘exposing’ what has happened or what is happening in the

changing world. What this means is that when geography teachers present information and categorizations of the world to students, there is usually an assumption that these are more or less accurate representations of the world. There is an unproblematic subject-object relationship between the geographer and the world he observes (the masculinist term is used since this way of seeing the world has been designated as typically masculine, see chapter two). As Gibson-Graham (1997:88) argue:

“In contrast, to talk of ‘constituting’ an economic geography evokes the performativity of social representations, encouraging us to consider the ways in which our choices and desires as theorists are implicated in the worlds we ostensibly represent”.

In the context of this chapter, what this means is that we can no longer claim to be teaching about rural places as if they existed independently of our representations of them. In such circumstances, as Harvey (1996) has suggested, the only interesting question to ask about places is how they are socially constructed. Thus, when a newspaper or magazine article talks about how rural England is being threatened by the bulldozer, this is a particular social construction of the rural, and the important question is how that place came to be thought about in that way. The ‘postmodern’ approach to the ‘rural’ suggests that we should see the ‘rural’ as a text. As Barnes and Duncan (1992) argue, texts actively construct the world rather than simply reflect it, they are created or written by authors:

“But also, like a book, the people who read the landscape and its places can never be forced to read it in only one way. The text is subject to multiple readings despite the fact that some readings are encouraged more than others. We can thus talk of a variety of readings, with favoured, normal, accepted readings and discouraged, heretical, abnormal readings - dominant readings and subordinate readings”(Cresswell 1996:13).

What this suggests is that critical geography educators need to be aware of the way in which representations can serve dominant interests and exclude other, subordinate interests, and develop strategies for introducing students to a range of different ways of seeing. Thus, educators need to adopt a critical stance to ‘commonsense’ knowledge about rurality and see such knowledge as historically and culturally specific. Cresswell (1996) provides a way of studying places through a consideration of the concepts of ‘ideology’ and ‘transgression’. He argues that space and place are used to structure a normative landscape. Ideas about what is right, just and appropriate are transmitted through space and place, and Cresswell is interested in the way in which the media creates and maintains normative geographies, so that certain behaviours, ways of thinking and talking can be said to be ‘out of place’. That is, they transgress the boundaries of what is accepted. The examples Cresswell offers include graffiti artists who challenge (or at least disrupt) the ideology of New York City as a clean, ordered ‘world city’, and the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp in Berkshire which sought to create a place of peace and challenge the

hegemony of the military-industrial complex. The point Cresswell seeks to make is that:

“Ideologies are not only created and maintained in some monolithic fashion; they are also challenged, resisted, and transgressed, leading to revisions, adaptations, and denunciations”(Cresswell 1996:162).

Transgression provides a necessary corrective to arguments about the power of the media to impose its ideological world-view upon us. People are not the naive victims of the oppressive views of a manipulative minority. Just as chapter two suggested that the National Curriculum in geography and the mainstream textbook representations of the subject could be open to other readings, Cresswell's approach offers a possible pedagogic strategy since it suggests that students can be enabled to recognise the social constructedness of places and that there are always other, heretical ways of viewing the world.

In order to illustrate how such ideas could be incorporated into the geography classroom, students can begin to reflect upon the ways in which ways of thinking and ways of being in the countryside are constructed and contested. One simple activity could take the form of a 'discourse analysis' of a document produced by the Countryside Commission (see Clark *et al.* 1994). The aim is to unravel the different meanings and definitions of 'the countryside' that are found within the document. In Potter and Wetherell's (1987) account of discourse analysis, the purpose is not to discover any stable characteristics of the countryside but to focus on how particular definitions are used to legitimate only certain views and uses of the countryside. That is, the discourse analysis seeks to show the partiality and selectivity of the representations included in the document. The document identifies a variety of different functions, uses and aspects of the countryside.

The first discourse is that of the *countryside as environmentally healthy*. For example, the document suggests that:

“The basic countryside resources of land, air, water and of diverse species and habitats should be conserved for the use and enjoyment of this and future generations”.

Students can be asked to consider why the Countryside Commission wants to see the conservation of the ecological diversity of the countryside. Is the countryside defined as intrinsically valuable, or is its value defined through its source of human recreation ?

A second discourse included in the document is that of the *countryside as beauty*. The report defines the countryside in terms of its attractiveness, beauty, unspoilt nature, character and fitting buildings:

'Much of England is green, unspoilt and outstandingly beautiful and should remain so. Countryside that has been degraded should be renewed. Buildings have contributed to the character and beauty of the countryside for many centuries; new development should be well designed and carefully located'.

This statement constructs the countryside as a visual snapshot rather than a process. New elements are to be incorporated into this static vision so long as they are in harmony with existing elements. The conservation of the present is favoured over any need for development.

Finally, a third discourse is that of the *countryside as something to be enjoyed*. The issue here is the type of activity the Countryside Commission sees as legitimate:

"enjoyment of the countryside is vital to our quality of life. People need opportunities to walk, ride, picnic, study and play in the countryside. An accessible countryside brings with it rights and responsibilities for landowners and visitors alike".

The Countryside Commission equates people's enjoyment of the countryside with a certain degree of access. However, this notion of access also comes with its own constraints (such as the need to be responsible), thus implying a degree of surveillance or self-surveillance.

Examining the language used in this document can help us to identify elements of the 'moral geography' that underpins the Countryside Commission's view. The uses which appear to be primarily promoted are those associated with the informal enjoyment of the countryside. These tend to be walking, fishing, bird watching and picnicking. In favouring these 'passive' activities, other activities are rendered inappropriate. Whilst seeking a beautiful countryside that is accessible for all to enjoy, the Countryside Commission is opposed to those forms of recreation that take place outside public rights of way and common land. The Countryside Commission thus argues for the upholding of private property rights that effectively limit people's freedom to enjoy the countryside. Camping outside of commercial sites is frowned upon, as is the idea that people might want to stay on a piece of land for a few days or more (e.g. new age travellers or 'hippy' festivals). These examples effectively challenge the Commission's claim to promoting a countryside of diversity. In summary, the Countryside Commission seeks to impose its own moral geography on the countryside, and regulate and control people's behaviour when in the countryside. Through the promotion of such concepts as the 'responsible citizen' and the 'country code', people are under surveillance (and more crucially self-surveillance) in how they use the countryside, just as closed circuit television cameras and police officers monitor their behaviour in the high street.

I would argue that this is a hegemonic representation of the countryside. It constructs a 'moral geography' of the countryside which sets out what types of activities, behaviours and values



should be adopted towards and in the countryside (the work of David Matless 1994, 1995 provides some fascinating insights into the moral geographies of the English countryside which could form the basis for study in geography lessons). As such it is important to understand the social interests that underpin such a social construction, and provide students with alternative representations. For instance, students and teachers might compare the 'moral geography' of the Dongas tribe, a group of 'New Age Travellers' who are perhaps representative of an alternative countryside aesthetic (see McKay 1996 for an account of this group). In their report on the future of leisure landscapes for the Council for the Protection of Rural England, Clark *et al.* (1994) write:

"the phenomenon of mainly young people choosing to live on the road, and to foster a sequence of cultural events maintaining their networks and shared sense of identity, rather than remaining dependent on deteriorating urban environments, is a significant one for the future, prospective legislation notwithstanding" (p.30).

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill (1994) is designed to exclude a host of others from the countryside, others who threaten to disrupt the image of quiet villages and huntsmen. Hetherington (1998) suggests that New Age Travellers share with many other British people a 'romantic gaze' that sees the countryside as a source of authenticity and moral order, but their sense of authenticity is very different. While the dominant view is one of the picturesque and the pastoral, Travellers stress the authenticity of nature as something mysterious and spiritual, and society as something expressive and communitarian, existing in harmony with nature. When this view of the world based on freedom, nomadism, tribalism and harmony with nature is put into practice, New Age Travellers inevitably come into conflict with:

"the spatial practice of others, local people, farmers, landowners, local authorities, police and guardians of the countryside like the National Trust and English Heritage" (Hetherington 1998:338).

Hetherington is clear that while the material manifestations of this conflict may be expressed in terms of issues such as trespass, rights of access and land use, the conflict is 'principally a contest of representation'. In other words, the contemporary countryside is a site where competing understandings and ways of being are increasingly coming into contact, jostling with one another and contesting the very notion of what 'rurality' means. The approach to teaching the rural and the resources highlighted here are intended to complicate and multiply the meanings of the rural in the geography classroom. In the following sections I consider the ways in which representations of rurality are linked with issues of class, gender, and race.

### **Rurality as class**

In chapter two it was suggested that geography textbooks and syllabuses largely ignore

questions of class. This glossing over of the unequal economic and social relations in modern societies can be seen in exercises which ask students where is the best place to locate new industrial activity, or which assume that economic growth is good for all people. Such approaches tend to avoid asking important questions about who owns capital and where profits go. Given the dominance of consensus views of politics, this glossing of class inequality is unsurprising. In the study of rural areas the distinctive middle-class bias found in rural populations and policies is effectively ignored. Where potential conflicts between working-class and middle-class people are noted, they are often veiled euphemistically as conflicts between 'locals' and 'newcomers'. The decision to move to and live in rural areas tends to be presented as a matter of 'lifestyle' choice, as people wish to escape the 'problems' of the (inner) city. In such depictions of counterurbanisation, the overwhelmingly classed nature of this process is ignored or mentioned only in passing. Statistics are rarely available which indicate that it is largely those in professional occupations who migrate to rural areas.

Social representations of the rural tend to stress the existence of harmony and consensus. Such a view has been recognised as ideological. The concept of ideology has been central to the literature of the 'new cultural geography'. Daniels and Cosgrove (1988), for example, take the view that 'landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing surroundings'. Their emphasis is on the way ideology-laden images are constructed. Cosgrove has shown how the very idea of landscape as a 'way of seeing' (as a perspectival view) has a history linked to the hypercommodification of land that came with the capitalist transformation of Europe. The development of perspectival views in gardens and parklands, on canvases and maps, allowed ownership of the land to become explicit and abstract, and it relegated peasants and other workers to part of the 'natural' scene. Raymond Williams (1973) made a similar point in **The Country and the City**. He suggested that landscape represented as a perspectival view gives the idea of the countryside as being *unworked*, as part of the natural order. It is significant that this view of the landscape emerged at a time when the social relations of labour were being remade in the form of an emerging capitalism. One way in which these issues can be introduced to students is to study artistic portrayals of the countryside. Alvarado *et al.* (1987) suggest that students carry out some image analysis of eighteenth century aristocrats 'enjoying the bounty of nature on their estates' (p.155), while Bunce (1993) comments on the paintings of Constable which transformed the picturesque tradition into a 'portrait of an English rural garden populated by a contented peasantry engaged in rustic tasks' (p.52).

The need to challenge ideological representations of rurality has been recognised in geography education (Pepper 1986, Huckle 1988). For example, Jenkins (1990) provides a critique of the representations of rural Britain in a series of programmes about regions of Britain produced and distributed to schools by the transnational corporation Shell. He identifies five categories or themes through which to view the films:

(1) *Visual-picture postcard appeal*. The films draw on a modified romantic view of the landscape, incorporating ideas of the picturesque and the sublime. Jenkins suggests that this is myth-making in action. Looking at the landscape with this 'romantic gaze' tends to ignore the reality of declining rural services, inadequate educational facilities, poor transport, unemployment and poverty, and environmental pollution.

(2) *Tourism - country from the city*. The films focus largely on a touristic perspective on the landscape rather than the more functional perspective of people who live and work in the countryside. The perspective adopted is that of the urban viewer. The hustle and bustle of modern life are contrasted with that of harmonious nature. As a result, the countryside 'is not seen as a working environment of hard manual labour but a happy playground of contented arcadians'(p.66).

(3) *Rural craft not labour*. The films adopt the view that the countryside must remain unspoilt by industrial growth. Work, even agricultural labour, is virtually absent. Nobody seems to be working in the fields, and agricultural labour is romanticised as a timeless struggle between man (sic) and nature rather than capitalistic and profit-driven.

(4) *Harmony not conflict*. The implicit message of the films is that all is well in the 'garden'. Britain's inner cities may be decaying and unemployment rising but in the countryside everything is right with the world. Conflict between established residents and newcomers, between those who wish the countryside to remain 'unspoilt' and those wishing to spread high paying jobs in the countryside are ignored.

(5) *Ahistoricism*. The films frequently refer to the landscapes of Britain being full of 'history'. But the history presented is of great men doing great things, building great houses and monuments. It is not the history of everyday people shaping the landscape. What mars the films for Jenkins is 'a failure to comprehend that the British countryside has been organised around distinctive agricultural economics'(p.68)

Jenkins is concerned with the ideological nature of these films. He notes the tendency to treat films as 'transparent' when in fact the information conveyed is:

"a highly selected, socially constructed reality and the view offered may be ideologically based serving a particular set of interests and values"(p.63).

In the light of this it is important that teachers and students develop a critical media literacy in order to counter representations of the 'rural'. Youngs and Jenkins (1986) suggest a number of practical activities for developing the type of media literacy advocated in this and the previous chapter. It is likely that students will have encountered such hegemonic images through their

exposure to the media, and a critical form of rural geography will need to consider the politics of representation associated with them. However, as Alvarado et al (1987) note, 'Outside formal sociology lessons, class is rarely an issue that is directly raised in classrooms in the British education system'(p.141). They suggest a number of ways in which issues of class can be introduced through the media. These include composing a 'typical reader profile' for a range of magazines; deciding in which magazines adverts for different products would likely be placed; a comparison of the home 'interiors' found in magazines with the homes of the students; and finally the comparison of working-class and middle-class characters and families in popular television soap operas such as **Emmerdale**. There is a need to work with the products of popular culture since these are part of a cultural pedagogy which contributes the formation of young people's identities and understandings of rurality (there has recently been a resurgence of interest within cultural and social geography on childhood and parenting (Valentine 1996, 1997)). Bunce (1993) suggests that our perceptions of the countryside are first acquired in childhood, and that 'many of our most durable and stereotypical images of the countryside come from the literature of our childhood' (p.63). For example, Enid Blyton's best-selling **Famous Five** books portray a traditional rural England with a fixed social order in which children can roam free and find adventures. Squire (1993) studied the meanings that the readers of Beatrix Potter stories attached to the texts themselves and the Lake District locations that inspired the stories. She suggested that for readers and tourists, the stories of Beatrix Potter were a vehicle through which to experience 'olde England', the rural and the picturesque. Owain Jones's (1997) article on rural children's geographies provides some ideas for activities that might be used in classrooms. Books such as Laurie Lee's **Cider with Rosie** and Flora Thompson's **Lark Rise to Candleford** are still found on school English literature book lists, and are powerful representations of rural childhoods. The magazine **Country Living** has a regular feature called 'My Country Childhood' where famous people recollect their rural childhoods. In **The Child and the Country** Ward (1990) suggests that such stories have led to the creation of country child 'stereotypes'. Fleming (1996) has discussed model toy farms manufactured for children (see also Houlton and Short 1995). Toys farms evoke 'a perfect childhood image of the farm, all white fences, oak trees, free-range hens, shiny tractors and portly, jovial farmers' (Fleming 1996:152) that serves to locate the toy farm in a land of symbolism rather than any real landscape. Interestingly, Fleming notes that in later versions, farm machinery has overshadowed the farm itself, and diggers and tankers have more in common with the industrial imagery in toys than with the farm itself. Fleming's account raises interesting questions about how toys offer sophisticated semiotic systems through which children learn about the world (see also Steinberg and Kincheloe 1997 on kindercultures).

Geography lessons with a critical perspective should allow students to consider the 'class colonization of the countryside' (Cloke, Phillips and Thrift 1995). For example, in England, the number of people living in areas classified as being 'remote rural' grew by 6.4% between 1981 and 1991 while the population of metropolitan areas fell by 5.2% over the same period. In

addition, it has been argued that the social make-up of these areas shows a bias towards those who, in terms of wealth, power and influence, are influential in deciding national policy and public opinion. Thrift (1989) has linked the growth of the 'new middle classes' to the rise of the 'rural middle class' and suggested that notions of an 'idyllic rurality' have figured both as a motive for colonizing the countryside and in the construction of a cohesive and legitimate identity for that class of people. Here we see a relationship between the economic and the cultural. In terms of economics, the colonization of the countryside by the middle classes takes place something like this: restrictive planning policies in rural areas lead to an upward spiral in house prices, thereby limiting occupancy to those social groups who can afford the new prices. The new rural middle class is immediately engaged in conflict with the 'working class locals', and political power gradually shifts to newcomers. Colonization of the countryside thus depends on having enough accumulated income to be able to compete in the lucrative rural housing market, which usually means having a well paid occupation, involvement in successful business ventures or savings from a well-paid earlier career. In this way the class colonization of the countryside is linked with gentrification and geriatrification. But the colonization of the countryside also relies on a cultural image of the countryside as some 'bucolic idyll', and Cloke *et al.* (1995) note that descriptions of the countryside given by rural dwellers read like those of a place marketeer:

"the image makers in the service class produce images that express an idyllic cultural texture of the rural that is then disseminated by the mass media and marketing agencies; this image of the countryside is bought and accepted by people from a wide range of class backgrounds; the culture (and arguably thereby power) of the service class has become hegemonic"(Cloke et al 1995:233).

In order to consider the politics of representation associated with the 'rural', I have used the following two adverts taken from the magazine **Country Living** (which appeals to people with their 'heart in the country') in the geography classroom. The first is a place promotion advert for Milton Keynes (Appendix two: Figure 6). The advert consists of people who have moved to Milton Keynes drinking in a variety of pubs which are similar in that they are all 'olde-worde'. Hence the title of the advert: Locals. The reader of the magazine is likely to see a mirror of him or her self in this advert. The men in the adverts are all managing directors, general managers and chief executives and are engaging in pursuits of matedom or coupledom (with, invariably, given the overwhelmingly heterosexual image of rurality, their wives). The text of the advert is steeped in a romantic vision of a world that is all but lost. These pubs are all community 'drop in, see a friend' sort of places, the kind of village pubs that, anywhere else but around Milton Keynes, are a 'dying breed'. This advert can be read for the social world and social relations it idealizes, but equally it can be read for its exclusions. Bell and Valentine (1997) ask: where are the workers of these employers? Or dare one ask, where are the jobless of Milton Keynes? The second advert is for the 'Musto snug', one of those all weather jackets needed for living the dream in the English countryside (Appendix two: Figure 7). The 'Musto Snug', the advert tells us, is the 'genuine

article', and the picture makes this point by juxtaposing the jacket with other 'authentic' service class objects: the grandfather clock, the landscape painting, and the trusty Landrover. Almost everything about this advert can be linked to the alleged lifestyle choices of the new middle classes who have colonized the countryside; the desire to be seen in the countryside and the obtaining of souvenirs or objects of rural tastefulness, an interest in countryside pursuits (the women looks as though she has just return from walking the dog), and a modest environmentalism. Adverts such as these, along with other images of the rural from magazines and television could be used to introduce students to the idea of class-based, dominant social representations of the countryside. Such adverts are commonplace and there is plenty of potential for developing the type of media education that involves the 'demystification' of media representations discussed in the previous chapter, though there is a need to go beyond such an approach in order to recognise the complexities of learning about media representations.

### **Rurality as gender**

The meanings of the rural is tied up with ideas about the home and the community. Rural studies has been increasingly influenced by arguments from feminist geographers about the gendered nature of the social construction of rurality. Women play a central role in ideas about the rural. Dominant representations of rurality assign women a role in the home and community, nurturing and caring for her family. Rose *et al.* (1997) provide an activity that uses the products of the Laura Ashley clothing and furnishing company to show the way in which rurality is constructed through gendered categories (an activity that could be adapted for use in the school classroom). Jo Little (1996, 1997) has written of the ways in which women are marginalized in representations of the dominant rural idyll. Ideas of domesticity and home have been seen as central to dominant notions of rurality, and women have been assigned specific roles in this idyll, so that the stereotype of a rural woman is that of a family woman, traditional and conservative, absorbed in the care of the home. The 'sentimentalised' portrayal of country folk and village life is epitomised by the water-coloured paintings of Helen Allingham. Allingham was a professional painter who painted country cottages and gardens at the turn of the last century. Travelling by train to these villages in the countryside around London, she painted working class women and children, and her paintings were used as part of a movement that favoured the 'preservation' of traditional architecture. There are interesting issues regarding the politics of representation in Allingham's work, concerning, for example, the politics of a middle class woman painting working women, the way in which Allingham constructed her paintings by dressing her subjects and 'touching up' the dilapidated cottages she painted. The concern to paint women in their 'natural' surroundings suggest that Englishness is linked to a white, rural, southern, maternal, feminine and heterosexual landscape. It has been suggested that the combination of the rural idyll and domestic femininity 'enabled the working-class woman at the cottage gate to signify social order' (Cherry 1993:182-183). Other readings can be made of these paintings. Thus, the local doctor commented that one of the cottages painted by Allingham was the most fever-wracked cottage in

the parish. Rose et al. (1997:181) argue that the 'blanks' in the pictures can be made to read the paintings differently:

"The 'blanks' might suggest female homosocial spaces whilst awaiting the return of men from work. The paintings, frozen in time and space, might even suggest that men never return, men who are permanently absent and consigned to the paintbox with the sweep of the brush".

Thus, paintings can be contextualised and also made to mean in relation to present day concerns, and geography teachers may wish to develop links with art departments in order to consider representations of the countryside in paintings.

Francine Watkins (1997) has discussed the notion of community amongst women in a village in Oxfordshire, highlighting the way in which 'certain women can control access to a community, alienating others whom they construct as different'(p.385). She argues that the imagined community life that women in the village presented to outsiders was based on the experiences and preferences of particular women, namely white, heterosexual, middle-class mothers. Their perspective of village life was presented as 'normal', which served to marginalize other experiences as transgressive. Thus networks of support within the village tended to be based on informal ties based on motherhood and childcare, which meant that women without children were excluded from the focus of village life. In particular, single, childless women were treated as a threat and regarded as 'man-eaters' who were 'after' someone else's husband. There were clear evaluations of certain types of behaviour, such that a single women who drank in the local pub or wore excessive make-up was considered to be sexually available. In line with the representation of village life as synonymous with the heterosexual nuclear family, women who did not have a husband or children risked being seen as 'odd'. Different female sexualities were effectively marginalized as a result of the power of certain women to make themselves the centre of an imagined community and 'others' peripheral. David Bell and Gill Valentine (1995) have written about the experiences of gay and lesbian people in rural areas and the relationship of sexuality and rurality (see also Kramer 1995), and Valentine has (1997) discussed the role of the rural in attempts by women to build separatist communities. A consideration of the notion of 'community' can open up important questions about who belongs and who is excluded, and about the power to represent places. One recent example of the way in which rurality is assigned sexual meaning can be seen in the article which appeared in **The Observer** (15 December 1996) which told of the furore caused by the move of the actress Sophie Ward and her 'girlfriend' to a 'large house' in the Gloucestershire village of France Lynch (Appendix two: Figure 8). The story is represented as a 'real-life village affair' that has uncanny similarities with the television adaption of Joanna Trollope's popular novel **A Village Affair** in which Ward herself played the role of a mother of three who embarks on an affair with a neighbour's daughter. The newspaper article charts some of the reactions of the residents of France Lynch to the 'public secret' of Sophie Ward's sexuality.

An elderly couple were reported as 'stunned' that the young mother was 'like that', and possibly a little perturbed that 'these lesbians' don't look any different from anyone else. The article points to the differences between the close-knit 'gossipy' village portrayed in Trollope's novel and the private, 'live and let live' attitude of the real-life village. The high moral tone adopted by the fictional vicar is contrasted with the tolerance and reluctance to judge other people of the real life vicar. Interestingly, this is attributed to the arrival of affluent professionals who have played their part in 'breaking down the traditional fabric of the village'. The vicar also hints that this 'beautiful patch of England has long attracted not only the commuting professional, with their families, Agas, dogs and Volvos, but many interested in alternative lifestyles, and suggests that Ward will not find the condemnation here that she might expect elsewhere'. There is ample scope here for developing within students a critical understanding of the concept of 'community', and the way certain forms of behaviour and identity are excluded.

The newspaper article raises some interesting issues for seeing the countryside and the English village as a source of transgressive values and behaviour. It allows us to raise the question of those 'neglected 'others'' mentioned by Philo (1992). For as Bell and Valentine (1995) point out:

"rural areas may best be represented as settings for traditional (and not especially enlightened) moral (including sexual) standards...In its cosiest forms, rurality conflates with 'simple life', with hegemonic sexualities (church weddings, monogamy, heterosexuality).."(Bell and Valentine 1995:115).

Rurality does have sexual connotations, and these are evident in popular cultural forms. Bell and Valentine mention a whole series of these, ranging from the 'innocent sauciness' of television series such as **The Darling Buds of May**, **Heartbeat** or **All Creatures Great and Small**, through to the 'self-consciously raunchy' **Lady Chatterley's Lover. Viz**, a popular adult comic read largely by young males equates rurality with 'in-breeding', and the television soap opera **Emmerdale**, set in the timeless and mythical English village has recently 'spiced up' its storylines to include adulterous relationships, lesbian relationships and teacher-student affairs. To highlight the 'strangeness' of same-sex relationships in the English village is to point to the extent to which everyday places are not asexual, but are commonly assumed to be 'naturally' or 'authentically' heterosexual. The difficulties faced by gay men and lesbians include isolation, unsupportive social environments and a lack of services and facilities (Kramer 1995). Raising the question of the relationship between rurality and sexuality is bound to be difficult in the context of current constructions of the rural in the school curriculum, as evidenced by the letters in response to Larry Knopp's article on 'The social consequences of homosexuality' which appeared in the **Geographical Magazine** (1990) (see the brief discussion of the geographies of sexuality in relations to school geography in chapter two).



## Rurality as race

Another area where the question of the representation of rurality may intersect with the concerns of geography teachers is that of ethnicity. A major part of the critique of the school geography curriculum that developed in the early 1980s concerned the treatment of race (Gill 1982). One concern was the invisibility of black people in geography textbooks, and there is little doubt that there has been an improvement in this aspect of geography education. However, as the discussion in chapter two suggested, the tendency within geography education to view the world 'scientifically' promotes the view that geographers can achieve an understanding of the world that stands above concerns of race, class, and gender, and as a result other perspectives tend to get ignored or excluded from the curriculum and textbooks. Against this, Agyeman (1989) has argued that the countryside is popularly perceived as a 'white' landscape. Agyeman and Spooner (1997) state that:

"Representations of the countryside are controlled by white (mainly male and middle-class) people. They construct images reflecting a concern with the reproduction of a mythical and nostalgic white heritage"(p.197).

The role of schooling in reproducing this rural heritage has been noted. The argument is that people of colour are effectively written out of rural history, and denied a similar sense of attachment to the countryside (and, arguably, to the nation). This has important implications for geography teachers who teach about the need for the preservation of rural England. One way to introduce these issues may be to seek to question commonsense representations of the countryside. Ingrid Pollard, a black British woman, has used her own body as a form of transgression into the landscape of the Lake District. When she enters the Lake District, the meaning of the landscape is brought into question. It raises the question of whether the 'Englishness' of the countryside has been constructed as essentially white, since black people in Britain are overwhelmingly associated with the inner city. The pictures of Pollard in the 'natural' environment are thus startling. Pollard's work shows her in various hiking poses with the green scenery as backdrop and accompanied by text, which links the history of the slave trade with her presence in the countryside, which is owned and used by a predominantly white population. Pollard points out that while others may feel relaxed and 'at home' in such surroundings, her own experience is one of unease and dread. These pictures have the potential to disrupt our 'imagined geographies' of the rural. Cresswell (1996) notes how Pollard's photographs allow the viewer to reenvision the English countryside as a 'topography of exclusion'. By prompting the viewer to look back at earlier experiences of the countryside and reflect on the fact that there were few black faces in these landscapes, Pollard's work forces us to rethink the extent to which the way we view the landscape is constructed for us through a particular 'way of seeing'. The

deceptively simple technique Pollard uses is to insert black people into what have hitherto been portrayed as quintessentially 'white' landscapes.

A more recent series of images explores the relationships between old/new, nature/culture, country/city. As Lola Young has pointed out, much of the concern about cities and the countryside is to do with the rate of rapid, visible change. The panoramic view of the Lea Valley for example, does not necessarily look 'ugly' - with its sheep, cows, shed, lorries, telegraph poles and pylons. In fact, future generations may not see these man-made structures as architectural scars. Young suggests that much of the dissent about the trappings of modern life is less to do with what they are and more to do with the meanings attached to them. Telegraph poles are not inherently ugly but signify change, something that unsettles and disrupts, serving to remind people of 'the differences between an imaginary ideal past and a demonised present'(Young and Pollard 1995).

This 'imaginary ideal past' tends to feed into a 'national environmental ideology' which associated rurality with the nation and ideas about national belonging. After all, as Bunce (1993) notes, the word 'country' has the double meaning of both the 'countryside' and the nation. Sibley (1995:108) notes that:

"the countryside, as it is represented by those who have a privileged place within it, is the essence of Englishness... It is those parts of national territory that are pictured as stable, culturally homogeneous, historically unchanging which are taken to represent the nation in nationalistic discourse".

As cultural geographers have noted, in recent years 'Englishness' has become a contested identity. Rose (1995) has noted that one way in which this context has been expressed is through a particular sense of place. She notes that as the nineteenth century progressed, England was more and more often being pictured in terms of a landscape that is still resonant today: a landscape of green rolling hills, shady nook, copses, winding lanes and nested thatched cottages. This was the landscape painted by Constable, and the Haywain and Willy Lott's cottage came to symbolise all that was worthy and decent about England. Significantly, it was these soft 'southern' landscapes, rather than the industrial north, or urbanized London, which came to represent the quintessential England. As Rose puts it:

"The soft hills, small villages around a green, winding lanes and church steeple, of the English southern counties came to represent England and all the qualities the culturally dominant classes desired"(Rose 1995:107)

According to Lowenthal (1991), the 'south country' landscape conveyed three qualities: consensus, continuity, and the nation itself. By consensus, he means that this landscape was represented as one where social life was harmonious and free of conflict. Social hierarchies

existed, but everyone knew their place in the social order and was content with it. This social structure was legitimated as part of a long tradition which had endured over the centuries. This landscape was argued to stand for all of England. These ideas are illustrated by Gainsborough's portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Andrews. In this painting, the landscape is gently rolling, and there is an ordered settled agriculture, with neat fields yielding a bountiful harvest, and evidence of agricultural improvement. However, the social relations implicit in this picture can also be discerned: there is a distinct absence of people working in the fields.

These points are important for geography teachers to grasp since there is a risk of simply accepting the dominant social order and excluding the role of other social and cultural groups in the creation and maintenance of the countryside. A key issue for teachers committed to a critical multiculturalism is to make visible 'white ethnicities'. There is a tendency to avoid seeing 'whiteness' as a socially constructed category, and therefore see rural areas as the 'norm'. As Agyeman and Spooner (1997: 212) state:

"Studies of ethnicity in the countryside should turn towards constructions of whiteness, and how it is related to questions of power and exclusion as well as exposing its whitewashing as simplistic and false"

This is the importance of Pollard's work, since it makes us realise that the countryside has been made in the image of whiteness. However, there are alternative histories which can be recovered and highlighted in the classroom. These are difficult issues, since geography education has avoided questions of power and social construction, preferring to see the world as 'out there', waiting to be described by the neutral observer. The importance of critiques of geography has been to raise questions about the 'positionality' of the observer, in order to show that the model of the scientist privileges the viewpoint of the white, middle-class, male academic, whilst excluding the voices of others who fail to meet these requirements. Developing a 'pedagogy of whiteness' requires teachers to address these issues (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to outline a model of pedagogy that takes on the concerns developed in the rest of this study. The concerns of the previous three chapters are evident in this discussion of teaching about rural England, and this conclusion clarifies and draws out the implications of the postmodern critique for geography education.

First, the way in which the 'rural' is approached in this chapter reflects the argument that places can be conceptualized in a variety of ways. Places are socially constructed and cannot be thought of without reference to questions of class, gender, and race. For instance, the study of rural England can be used to develop the type of geography education advocated by Nicholas Tate in that rural

England can be imagined to display those characteristics that 'bind people into distinctive communities'. The rural can serve as a key resource in the project of imagining the nation. Thus, during the 1980s and into the 1990s the rural came to signify places in which people could be happy, healthy, self-reliant and close-to-nature, exactly the opposite to urban areas marked by crime, pollution, riots, and inhabited by the 'undeserving poor'. James Donald (1992) suggests that the National Curriculum served to promote an idea of:

"Englishness as heritage, as mythical identity, as the sensual experience of an imagined past embodied not just in the language, but *in the English countryside*, in certain styles of architecture, and in English Literature"(Donald 1992:53-54).

Such a representation ignores the role of power in the structuring of the lives of people in rural England. It celebrates the existing social order with all its inequalities and suggests that rural England is marked by a kind of 'friendly' capitalism, regulated by market forces and cultures of self-help that deny the need for government intervention. Against this representation it can be argued that rural areas tend to be poor relations in the operations of capitalism. Thinking back to Harvey's (1993) discussion of the fire at the Imperial Foods chicken-processing plant in Hamlet, North Carolina which was discussed in chapter one, he explains how industrial interests exploited inequalities between the countryside and the city by preying on rural poverty in order to provide cheap food for urban workers. People in rural areas have little chance of employment, and so are forced to accept low wages, poor working conditions and agreements to not join trade unions. North Carolina promotes itself as having a 'business friendly climate' which keeps unions at bay, promotes low wages, and fails to enforce health and safety legislation. Harvey points out that working conditions at the Hamlet plant were not much different from the conditions Marx described in late nineteenth-century Europe.

The approach to place adopted in this chapter pays attention to the internal divisions of rural England. In other words, it stresses a pedagogy of differences which seeks to highlight that we cannot think of rural England as a singular, homogeneous place. However, the account here stresses that these differences cannot be understood outside of the structures of economic, racial, and gender inequality.

Following the argument in chapter two, this account of teaching about rural England has sought to highlight the selectivity of the school geography curriculum and give voice to perspectives that have traditionally been excluded. I have been concerned to deal with questions of difference and otherness, and have argued that it is not enough to talk about the average person living in rural England since there are important differences in people's experiences rural life that are based on class, gender and race. Teachers need to re-write the geography curriculum in order to incorporate other voices and recognise the constructedness of the categories that are found in any social geography textbook:

"all of us are constantly falling into the trap of assuming that our own view is obvious, no matter how hard we try to think beyond our own egocentricity, ethnocentricity or group solidarities. But as soon as we start to think about people who are not ourselves we lapse into the language of 'Othering' and, as one urges oneself to consider 'Others' or to see the 'Other' side of the question, those who are not like 'me' can start to slide into homogeneous mass of difference from 'me', *essentially* same as each other"(Shurmer-Smith and Hannam 1994:89).

Shurmer-Smith and Hannam's strategy for dealing with this problem is to constantly recognise the way in which the structures that are necessary in order to get a foothold in the world and be able to act are fabricated, flimsy and liable to fall apart at any moment. The problem facing a geography education informed by postmodern and post-structural ideas is to draw attention to the categories and classifications - the 'Otherings' - that are relied upon in the classroom. In this chapter I have presented some ideas about how we as geography teachers may be able to open up the geography classroom to various 'rural others', and, in doing so, bring to light some 'strange ruralities' (Murdoch and Pratt 1997). A helpful way of thinking about these 'strange ruralities' is provided by Murdoch and Pratt. They distinguish between three ways of conceptualising the 'rural'. *Region* is typical of the traditional way of conceptualising the rural as a bounded, purified space. *Network* refers to those ways of thinking about the rural which highlight the activities of the powerful as they order the rural and marginalize others. *Fluidity* references the approach favoured here, where identities are unstable, boundaries are provisional and the rural is hard to pin down. It is this notion of fluidity that Shurmer-Smith and Hannam seem to favour, and which serves as a way of making the geography classroom a place where other rurals can exist. There are similarities here with the notion of 'border pedagogy' advocated by Henry Giroux (Giroux 1992, 1994) and discussed in chapter two in that it opens the classroom to other stories and other voices, and allows students to encounter difference.

Thirdly, this approach to teaching about rural England has explored the ways in which a 'cultural pedagogy' might be developed. It has taken as its raw materials a wide variety of representations of rural England and shown how they can be read by teachers and students. As such the chapter is a tentative step towards the type of geography education discussed in chapter three.

This chapter can be read as a 'deconstruction' of the 'rural'. Like the other chapters in this study, the method has been to re-read an aspect of geography education against literature from social, cultural and educational theory. In this instance I have taken a particular place or topic that is commonly taught in school geography, and discussed how postmodern arguments in rural studies have the potential to significantly alter how 'rural England' can be understood. I would argue that this method can be usefully applied by geography teachers to allow them to critically reflect on their current practice. There is no postmodern geography curriculum as such, but the

postmodern critique does impinge on questions of curriculum planning, resourcing and teaching. This chapter suggests that, in planning a series of lessons on rural England, teachers should be constantly aware of the implications of postmodernism. This implies an awareness that we are involved in the textual constitution of rural England: offering students perspectives on rural England that are partial. These perspectives cannot tell a complete story, and at the same time, our own geographical imaginations lead us to present a particular view of rural England. The textbooks used need to be analysed for the silences they contain. This does not mean abandoning the quest to 'teach geography for a better world', but it does mean constantly appraising what this means in the light of the postmodern critique.

The approach suggested in this chapter can be seen to be post-modern in its insistence on the plurality of knowledge and the inability to pin down once and for all some truths about the 'rural'. As I suggested in the introduction to this thesis, my own geographical imagination is fuelled by social issues such as poverty. I am convinced of the need for geographers to 'teach for a better world' (Fien and Gerber 1988). In the case of my teaching about rural England this meant questioning the tendency for the 'rural' and the 'countryside' to evoke images of consensus and harmony, the so-called 'rural idyll'. The question must be raised as to the purpose of such a pedagogy.

As noted in chapter two, the aim of critical pedagogy is to mobilise students to transformative action by removing the sources of 'false consciousness' or ideology that prevent them from acting to create a 'better world'. The ultimate test of geography lessons is whether they encourage the creation of creative, active citizens able and willing to participate in democratic social life. The task of the critical geography teacher is to remove the blinkers of 'false consciousness' that prevent people from acting to establish a just society. Lather (1991:141) describes the main characteristics of the 'object of emancipatory pedagogy':

"she is both victimised and capable of agency; while she has something approximating false consciousness, that consciousness is unified and capable of Frierean conscientization, knowing the world in order to set herself free from it. Finally, a basic assumption in the construction of this subject is that it is knowledge that will set her free".

The phrase 'Frierean conscientization' refers to the work of the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Friere, whose **Pedagogy of the Oppressed** (1973) has been influential in the development of a radical geography education. The role of the teacher in Friere's pedagogy is to side with the oppressed, acting collaboratively to understand their location within structures that limit their lives. The teacher is a catalyst who works with students to enable them to understand the nature of the world. However, some important questions are raised here. What claims can I, as a urban-based teacher, make to understanding the experiences of rural people? Would they share my interpretations of their lives? In critical pedagogy, the teacher is assumed to share the interests of

the oppressed, is assumed to be 'on the same side'. However, this is an abstract conception of the teacher, who is a man or woman of particular ethnicity, class, age and sexuality, and will see the world in a particular way. Under such circumstances, what authority do I have to speak for others, living different lives in different places (Weiler 1991) ? In **Geographical Imaginations** Gregory talks about the question of authorization:

"By what right and on whose authority does one claim to speak for those 'others' ? On whose terms is a space created in which 'they' are called upon to speak?...*These are urgent questions, as important in the classroom as they are in the field*" (Gregory 1994:205 emphasis added).

By arguing for an approach to teaching about rural England that stresses differences and a range of identities, is there a danger of ignoring the need to uncover the relations that led to the marginalization of these identities in the first place:

"what follows from this concern to 'give voice' are a set of issues which Philo does not really consider...Simply 'giving voice' to 'others' by no means guarantees that we will uncover the relations which lead to marginalization or neglect"(Murdoch and Pratt 1993:422).

In his reply to Murdoch and Pratt, Philo is worried about the 'assertive modernist impulse' that allows the rural geographer to claim to know what injustices people experience and have a ready made explanation for these injustices. The danger for Philo is that the geographer gets involved in assessing 'other lives' against standards of good/bad or right/wrong with little reference to the actual people and places concerned. Cloke (1994) considers that this exchange reveals fundamental differences in the motives which underlie rural research. Thus Philo is concerned with allowing particular people in particular places to speak for themselves, whilst Murdoch and Pratt want to include a progressive vision for change in their research:

"Should we not attempt to reveal the ways of the 'powerful', exploring the means by which they make and sustain their domination (perhaps in the hope that such knowledge could become a reservoir to be drawn upon by oppositional actors)?"(Murdoch and Pratt 1994:85).

This reflects the debate between a progressive 'modernism', which asserts the existence of a fundamental truth about the world and articulates a clear political vision, and 'postmodernism' which is sceptical of such claims. The attempts here to foreground 'rural others' based on a variety of identities raises the important question of whether this entails a move away from a politics of conviction to a politics of identity where anything goes (Keith and Pile 1993). Is there a danger of trivialising vital issues such as race, gender and sexuality by 'othering' them within a relativist framework? There are also questions of how some identities tend to get privileged over others. Thus Cloke and Little (1997) provide an 'off-the-hip' list of otherness -which includes gender,

sexuality, race, age and disability- which risks the oversimplification and exclusion of other 'others'.



## CONCLUSION

What are the implications of postmodernism for school geography, and specifically, for the development of a critical geography education ?

On one level, there is a sense in which geography education remains untouched by the debates surrounding postmodernism that have been a feature of the wider discipline over the last ten years. A glance at some of the titles of recent collections by geographers - *Place and the politics of identity*, *Mapping the Subject*, *Mapping Desire*, *Geographies of Resistance* - appears to have little to offer the busy geography teacher. As John Bale (1996) has suggested, it is difficult to imagine the average school geography department sitting around to discuss the role of postmodernism in the curriculum. As a result, postmodernism tends to get treated in a fairly simplistic manner. On the one hand, it can be accepted quite unproblematically as ushering in a cheerful plurality of approaches to the study of geography. In this version, geography as a discipline has been characterised by a series of paradigms, and postmodernism is simply the latest in a line of intellectual fashions. Thus, it is possible to imagine that in the future, textbooks for A Level students will refer to 'postmodern views of urban structure' (this is the approach that has been taken by Sociology A Level). On the other hand, postmodernism can be viewed negatively as promoting relativism within school geography. This view is found in both popular and educational discourses. According to one popular view, the traditional approaches to the subject have been hijacked by forces of progressivism. The most obvious symbol of this is the concern with place-knowledge. An example of the backlash against progressivism in school geography is provided by an article published in *The Daily Telegraph* (January 1997) entitled 'Marx seizes the Rift Valleys'. Its author, Ross Clark, complained that, 'Geography, literally 'study of the earth', has abandoned its original territory in favour of people and politics'. He recalled the time when the Royal Geographical Society was 'one of the intellectual hothouses of London. It was the skill and wisdom of geographers that opened up continents, established the world's great navigational routes and found a way to the poles. To possess a good knowledge of geography was to understand how the trade winds had shaped the global economy and why the industrial revolution had erupted in Europe rather than Borneo. Geography was the art upon which the wealth of the West was founded'.

According to Clark, geography has become the study of deprivation: "Whichever part of the world they study modern geographers appear to work on the assumption that if you look hard enough there is always a huge underclass of people being exploited by capitalism". What is more, this focus seems to be 'filtering into the teaching of school geography'. Clark advises his readers that the next time they receive a questionnaire from a geography student asking how many cars they own or the last time they went to a cinema, 'it is worth asking him (sic) exactly what point he has been told to prove by his geography teachers'.

To cultural conservatives such as Clark, any attempt to broaden the epistemological base of the geography curriculum are unwelcome, and this is the position that has been adopted by a number of prominent geography educators in their pronouncements on postmodernism. Postmodernism therefore comes to represent a divisive and relativistic force. Thus, Marsden (1996) finds the concept:

“so ill-defined and idiosyncratically used, it is difficult to offer guidance on how it might be accommodated in the school setting”(p.211).

In a later article, Marsden (1997) blames the ‘forces of structuralism, radicalism and postmodernism’ for undermining a distinctive subject focus for geography. Walford and Haggett, in a rejoinder to Edwards’ (1996) reply to their article on the future of geography and geography education, reject postmodernism on the grounds that it has a ‘relative and largely negative outlook’. Rawling (1996), while acknowledging the benefits of a diversity of approaches to the study of geography offered by postmodernism, worries that the ‘core’ of the subject might get lost if teachers follow this road.

Whilst these few comments about postmodernism and school geography are interesting, they are slightly removed from the concerns of this study: namely, the implications of postmodernism for a critical geography education. The project of critical geography education can be seen as a response to the introduction, from the 1970s, of theories from the ‘new’ geography. The ‘new’ geography was dominated by positivism and theories derived from neo-classical economics. It stressed the role of geography as a science, and its influence is still seen today in school textbooks which present the geographer as involved in the pursuit of classification, objectivity, hypothesizing and generalisation. Similarly, examiners reports bemoan the lack of knowledge of known facts, locations and detailed examples with which to illustrate understandings of the generalisations that count as geographical knowledge. The mixture of empiricism and positivism provides a foundation for the curriculum. This tendency is evidenced by attempts in recent years to encapsulate the essence or ‘core’ of the subject. The domination of school geography by positivism has led to a series of dualisms that define ‘good’ geography and ‘bad’ geography. These include: measurement, counting and prediction against understanding and description; causation against meaning; objectivity against subjectivity; generalisation against particularisation. However, in the past two decades, in the face of social and cultural change, some critical geography educators have argued that the geography curriculum should be more responsive to calls for racial, class and gender justice. They have argued that school geography has elevated the privileged world-views of a dominant minority of white, middle-class males to the status of ‘Truth’.

This study was motivated by my own interest in and attempts to practise critical pedagogy in teaching geography in schools and colleges. As a young geography teacher, inspired by the

literature of radical education - *Teaching as a subversive activity*, *Deschooling Society* and *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*- I went out to 'teach geography for a better world'. Books such as *Teaching Geography for a Better World* (Fien and Gerber 1988), *Education for Peace* (Hicks 1988) and the work of John Huckle (1988) provided me with a practical approach to teaching a form of critical geography. Ten years on, everything is more contradictory and confused. There is a sense of personal failure in that I have consistently failed to make a difference where I thought it really mattered. In addition, the growth of radical approaches to school geography has been largely halted - there are few people writing about critical forms of geography education at a school level. It could be argued that this reflects the dramatic rightward shift in educational policy over the last decade, but equally it could reflect an inability to translate the promises of radical educational theory into a workable alternative in schools.

This study adopts Patti Lather's (1991) suggestion that postmodernism should be seen as part of a struggle to both problematise and advance critical pedagogy. Her work is exemplary in that it attempts to question her own positionality as a researcher and teacher, seeking to provide alternative readings of the classroom research she was involved with. This study can be read as an attempt to adopt Lather's stance in relation to a critical geography education. Whilst I remain committed to 'teaching geography for a better world', I am concerned to understand why my attempts so often fail. In conclusion, I offer a few final comments on how this reading of postmodernism fits in with my own activities as a teacher.

Looking back on my experience of attempting to teach a critical pedagogy in geography, I am struck by the amount of time and effort spent on preparing materials that incorporated a radical perspective - which challenged commonsense understandings of people-environment relations- and the speed with which students rejected or, at best, passively accepted the content of what I set out to teach. I would now suggest that critical pedagogy implicitly assumes that presenting students with forms of radicalized knowledge will lead to transformations of consciousness. Postmodernism challenges the status of the knowledge on which a critical pedagogy is based. Thus, Alison Lee (1996) calls for socially-critical educators to consider the question of learning in the geography classroom. She is interested in 'student productions' by which she means not just 'what students get - the materials of the curriculum - but what different students make of what they get'. I am conscious that, in my own teaching at least, this task has hardly begun. The focus is too often on the 'content' of the radical curriculum, at the expense of student reactions to what they do in geography lessons. In chapter 2 there was a move away from the literature of ideology critique to stress the way in which the geography curriculum can be viewed as a 'text' and subject to a variety of readings, and space was opened up for other geographies traditionally excluded from the curriculum. However, the chapter is open to exactly the charge made by Lee. The difficult question is what happens when a geography curriculum that aims to include a range of other voices is rejected by students:

"There are clearly problems in store for middle-class teachers who attempt to 'empower' working-class students through class analysis, for male teachers who seek to enlighten female students about sexism, or for white teachers who set out to inform their black students about the evils of racism"(Buckingham 1998: 5).

This postmodern questioning of authority is discussed in both chapter 2 and chapter 4. In writing both chapters I have struggled with my desire as a teacher to want to teach students something, to challenge them and correct their (mis)understandings, and my position as a teacher-researcher who wants to adopt a less interventionist stance. For example, I desperately want students to see that the travel brochures produced by a clothing company such as River Island insert consumers into a potentially racist geographical imagination, or that the dominant representations of the English countryside are essentially a 'landscape of exclusion', but at the same time I want to allow or recognise the range of meanings that students may bring to these resources. In the end, I must perhaps recognise a certain rigidity in my professional identity as a teacher, which owes much to the position I find myself in everyday of my working life - having to be seen to know, to be an authority (Richards 1994). It could be that school geography classrooms as presently constituted provide a range of teacher-student identities, routines of work and curricular prescriptions that impose significant constraints on the development of a critical pedagogy. The chapters that make up this study suggest that the postmodern notion that there are a multiplicity of perspectives on the world and that all knowledge is a social construction might provide resources whereby teachers and students can open up a curricular space in which new forms of identity and other geographies can be examined. For example, the various accounts of place considered in chapter 1 might allow for more open discussion of the meaning of places and allow a move away from forms of geographic literacy that depend on transparent forms of writing or favour measurement over meaning. Similarly, opening up the geography classroom to forms of media production might allow students to develop a wider range of skills and experiences than at present. This ultimately, is the postmodern challenge: postmodernism provides geography educators with a set of questions and intellectual resources with which to examine current practices and develop new approaches to teaching and learning. This thesis, to the extent that it might be read by other teachers, is an attempt to contribute to a discussion about the kind of teachers we want to be and the forms of knowledge we want to value and develop in our dialogues with students.

## APPENDIX ONE

The type of pedagogy discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis requires an understanding of issues surrounding the use of texts. This question has been relatively neglected in geography education to date. In what follows, I provide a summary of some geographical accounts of filmic and literary texts (advertising texts are discussed in Chapter 3) and discuss some issues about how they might be used in geography education.

### *Film and Geography education*

Given that geography is a subject dominated by visual representations, it is surprising that there has been little discussion of the ways in which films might be used in the geography classroom. In a review of the use of films in university teaching, Stuart Aitken (1994:291) notes:

“It would be rare for a first-year geography student to escape at least one lecture given over to a film which presents some exotic people or place”.

This statement is arguably even more true of school geography, where video is part of the staple diet of geography education. There is an ever-growing output of programmes for schools, and documentaries and news footage are useful sources for enlivening teaching about the human and natural worlds. Aitken makes a distinction between ‘educational’ or documentary programmes that serve to ‘facilitate curriculum planning and enliven tedious lecture material’ and narrative or fictional programmes. In the main, teachers have been reluctant to use the latter as a resource. One possible explanation of this division is that geographers have made a distinction between ‘first-hand’ and ‘second-hand’ experiences. Behaviourist approaches have suggested that individual views of the world are dependent on the cognition of reality. Individuals assimilate information from their environment and construct their own psychological representations of reality (‘images’, ‘mental maps’, ‘cognitive maps’). The construction of that imagery is regarded as a learning process that develops with age and depends upon the nature, amount, and quality of information. The emphasis on sensory perception in this process led to a distinction between primary or direct experiences (person-environment) and secondary or indirect (person-media-environment) experiences. There are connotations about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sources of information attached to these experiences, and Burgess and Gold suggest that it fails to recognise that: ‘mediated information is central rather than secondary in the information environment of the modern world’(1985:7).

Burgess and Gold’s view is in line with recent developments in social and cultural theory which suggest that our everyday experiences are not immediately felt but instead are re-presented to us. It is widely accepted that representations are not innocent, but contribute to the processes of

hegemony and ideology (Rose 1994, provides an example of how hegemonic and counter-hegemonic representations can exist of the same place in films). These ideas have important implications for geography education where documentaries and educational films are part of the standard fare of geography lessons. These are widely used because they appear to be more factual representations than those of popular film. As Kennedy and Lukinbeal (1997:40) say:

“Documentary films...presuppose a certain level of factual objectivity within the narrative realism”.

This was the view taken by the writers of the 1950s series of articles in the **Geographical Magazine** which stressed the educational value of both documentary and popular films which supposedly could provide an accurate portrayal of reality and gave students a living vision of the ‘earth and its people’. Cultural studies would suggest that students and teachers should regard these as socially produced representations. In line with this, Burgess (1982) suggests that there are two types of documentaries: first, there are those that present themselves as objective and impartial; and second, there are personal documentaries, where a single narrative voice offers an opinion about a topic. The question of their use in geography education requires further research. The lack of research in this area reflects two concerns that teachers may have about media studies. These are a belief that popular culture is not worthy of serious study, and the belief that primary experience is more valuable than secondary or mediated experience. However, there is a need to examine the potential for the use of popular film in geography education since films are a powerful medium for the construction of meanings about human and natural environments, and in recent years geographers have become increasingly interested in films. For example, Gold (1985) discussed urban visions of the future city in the cinema of the inter-war period, Harvey (1989) provides a famous analysis of the postmodern city depicted in the film *Bladerunner*, Jenkins (1990) discusses documentary representations of the English countryside (see also Youngs 1985) and the production of films about China in the *Disappearing World* series, Short (1991) provides examples of films which depict the city either as Babylon or Jerusalem (such as *Play it again Sam*, in which Woody Allen refers to the city as ‘a metaphor for the decay of contemporary culture’), puncture the idyllic image of small town America (such as David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet*, or more recently, *Twin Peaks*), and portray the American west in cowboy movies. Shields (1991) discusses representations of northern-ness in ‘kitchen-sink’ dramas such as *A Taste of Honey*, and Bell (1997) has discussed ‘behind the sofa’ rurality in which films such as *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* portray rural places as full of axemen, bogeymen, psychos and freaks. Ford (1994) provides an interesting account of the way US cities have been represented in the movies, whilst Benton (1995) compared three very different filmic representations of Los Angeles in *Grand Canyon* (also discussed by Giroux 1994), *Boyz ‘n’ the Hood*, and *LA Story*. Showing students the first few minutes of these films provides much useful material for discussion. *LA Story* portrays a ‘Disneyfied’ landscape of romance, fun, sunshine and prosperity, whereas *Boyz N The Hood* depicts city under siege, focusing on the landscapes inhabited by the black lower

middle classes, marked by random acts of violence as black youth kills black youth, economic power is located outside the 'hood', and women appear weak and inconsequential in a culture where young black males lack role models. *Grand Canyon* explores the question of racial segregation and the spaces of contact between blacks and whites in a city polarised along axes of affluence and poverty, violence and safety. The task for geography educators is to develop strategies for using popular films in the classroom, since students are increasingly adept at reading the signs of the city encoded in such representations. The films mentioned here represent just a few considerations of films by geographers but there other films that could be used in geography, such as the films of Spike Lee (see Kellner 1995), or Jane Campion's *The Piano* (see Dyson 1995). In addition, television programmes such as soap operas (Gill Valentine (1995) recently made some interesting comments about what the popular soap-opera *Eastenders* can teach us about the geography of everyday life) or travel shows could form part of a school geography that takes culture seriously.

Kennedy and Lukinbeal (1997:40) conclude their review of the literature on film and geography with the following comment:

"Further research on the construction of meaning and accuracy of representation in film is called for. Documentaries and popular film have been viewed as opposites based on their relative level of objectivity and accuracy of representation. In actuality, neither are unbiased representations of reality. Realism and objectivity play key roles for geographic educators. There is a need to evaluate critically popular and documentary films for intended and unintended messages especially as they are increasingly used as classroom tools. Study of film should empower students and others by allowing them to analyse critically images presented to them"(p.46).

The recent collection of essays in **The Cinematic City** (Clarke 1997) may be useful for geography teachers interested in developing new ways of incorporating film in their teaching. Film theory tends to operate at a fairly high level of theoretical abstraction, and there has been a tendency to focus on 'authentic', avant garde films at the expense of 'inauthentic', popular films produced by Hollywood, but teachers should be able to develop their own approaches. In **The Cinematic City**, for instance, McArthur (1997) traces the way in which the structural opposition between the city and the countryside has been used in a whole range of films, paying attention to the contexts in which this opposition has been constructed. Gold and Ward (1997) discuss the ways in which documentary films in the period 1935-52 portrayed town planning. Their chapter suggests the need to pay attention to the political, economic and cultural contexts in which these films were made and the ways in which they represent plans and planners (i.e. as serious, trustworthy, and 'scientific'). Mahoney's (1997) chapter deals with the way in which films represent the use of space. Her examples are popular contemporary movies. In the film *Night on Earth*, she points to the way in which women are assigned traditional roles, either as glamorous and

sensual, or as transgressive ( 'feisty, fast-talking and uncontrollable'). Other films allow a less constrained use of space by women. In the film *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.*, the lead character Chantal is seen travelling across the city, narrating to the camera with a backdrop of movement. Mahoney suggests that in this scene 'there is a sense of ownership, articulation and visibility which is extremely rare in representations of women in urban space. The city is opened up to include other voices and experiences..' (p.182). Mahoney uses these films to make links with the work of geographers such as Soja and Massey (see chapter one) who have theorised the postmodern city, and the challenge for geography teachers is to use these insights to bring together popular understandings of the city and geographers' accounts. There are practical difficulties involved in the use of film within classrooms, but more important are the problems associated with adopting a view of the world that sees images as simply more data to be described and quantified. Such an approach will be ultimately unsatisfying to students who are already advanced in their ability to map the meanings encoded symbolically in the output of the mass media.

### *Geography and literature*

There is a long tradition of academic geographers' engagement with literature, though early work was in the chorographic tradition of the reconstruction of places represented in novels (Darby 1948). Humanistic geography has developed the most interest in literature, viewing it as providing insights about the nature of place, about the ways in which we can write about and present ideas about places in an artistic fashion, and gives us an insight into the 'subjective' experience of place. In the school curriculum English is concerned with the study of books, but has tended to focus only on those books it chooses to define as 'literature'. Though the canon of texts deemed to merit the term 'literature' has widened in recent years, the use of popular literature is comparatively rare in English teaching. This distinction between 'high culture' and 'popular culture' has been reproduced in geographical studies of literature. There is a need to consider the ways in which certain books are selected for study, since this is inevitably a process in which certain people's tastes are validated and others' are dismissed. As noted in Chapter three there appears to be a similarity between the ideology of English and humanistic geographers, in which 'literature' is seen to have broadly humanising effects on the reader: encouraging a sensitivity to language, culture and human relationships (or in the case of geography, to human-environment relationships). The major criticism of such work in geography is the failure to conceptualise the social and economic context of literature.

In recent years there have developed more complex understandings of the relationship between geography and literature (Barnes and Duncan 1992). Teather (1991) considers the novel **Harp in the South**, a best-selling description of the slums and ghettos of Sydney in the 1940s. Its portrayals of poverty challenged the image of the city as a paradise for immigrants offered by official pamphlets produced by the Australian government, and led to angry reactions from



Sydney residents. This account raises some fascinating questions about the representation of places, official versus unofficial representations, and the power of certain groups to claim to represent the place. However, Teather's account fails to focus on these issues, and emphasises instead the ability of novels to portray life in a place better than other discourses. A more challenging approach is offered by Monk and Norwood (1994) in their discussion of the representation of Australia as a world of outback. They argue that this outlook is not shared by working class urban women in Australia. As a contrast, they analyse a series of popular novels written by women about their experience of life in the suburbs, where they were trapped by their relations to men and relatively powerless to create their own landscapes. This account raises difficult and important questions about how an image of a place becomes dominant, how such images can be contested and undermined, and the role that literature plays in the struggle over the meanings of a place.

Accounts of literature such as these are part of a more radical literature, applying ideas from Marxist theory to understand the production of literary texts. Examples of such studies would include Newby (1981), Silk and Silk (1985), and Cook (1981). Newby discusses the role of literature in the fashioning of tourism in the Lake District and Mediterranean, while Silk and Silk analyse the ideological function of the literary production that followed the American Civil War. They examine how a group of publishers and distributors contributed, through magazines and popular literature, to the moulding of a national ideology and to the creation of a mythical representation of the 'south' (pp.179-180). More recently, in what might be called a 'radical cultural geography' of the making of the Californian landscape, Mitchell argues that John Steinbeck's **The Grapes of Wrath** clearly illustrated 'the costs of capitalist agricultural development both in terms of the violence done to workers' lives and the violence done to cherished American ideals of yeomanry and the good life' (1996:p.16). Mitchell reminds us that Steinbeck's book was banned and burned in Bakersfield, and he was condemned as un-American by agribusiness and industrial concerns throughout the state. A final example of this Marxist-inspired critique of literature is Ian Cook's (1981) discussion of the novels of D.H. Lawrence. Cook was involved in the movement to construct an alternative school geography in the early 1980s and advocated the use of literature in geography teaching. He argues that any use of novels by critical geographers must face the issue of 'bias' and attempt to develop a critical analysis that is fully cognizant of the text's 'defects and limitations'. Central to any such analysis is the notion of 'consciousness'. Cook distinguishes between humanist and radical notions of consciousness. In the humanist version, consciousness is generated from within the individual reader, it is concerned with the individual's interpretation of the world, their experience of life, values, attitudes and beliefs. The radical version sees consciousness as the product of external, social processes that impinge on the individual. It is concerned with issues of class, and 'false consciousness' is that which 'bears no relationship to external reality, being a product of the ruling class manipulation of information flows, societal institutions and the like' (Cook 1981:p.67). If the geographer adopts a humanistic consciousness the novel will be accepted as a means of enhancing the geographical imagination and an appreciation

of a sense of place. Adopting a radical consciousness sees the project primarily as a social product, leading to a more critical analysis of the novel and the novelist. Cook makes it clear that anything other than radical consciousness is 'false consciousness':

"In scrutinising the novel for evidence that it promotes false consciousness one is essentially searching for evidence of class bias in its writing..."(p.87).

Cook evaluates Lawrence's novels against Parkin's (1972) three value systems. Parkin distinguishes between dominant value systems which promote the endorsement of existing inequality, subordinate value systems which, through having their source in the local working-class community, promote accommodation to the facts of inequality, and a radical value system, one that adopts an oppositional position. The use of the novel by the radical geographer requires him or her to discover whether the novel is supportive of existing economic and social relationships. Cook raises the question of fact or fiction in D.H.Lawrence's novels, by which he means the extent to which the novels contain degrees of truth or verisimilitude. In other words, what consciousness do they arouse in the reader. This is an important pedagogical point: an evaluation must be attempted otherwise we risk passing students off with false consciousness. Cook finds Lawrence's novels to have a strong portrayal of place:

"Those...passages concerned with the physical fabric of place can thus be accepted at face value, and can thus be used to enhance our consciousness of the beauty of nature, the dangers of urbanisation and industrialisation"(p.80).

However, when it comes to the links between the individual and society, 'often characters seem to exist in a society-less vacuum, with nothing being presented to show that their problems and difficulties reflect societal conditions'(p.80-81). Cook argues that Lawrence shied away from the analysis of society in his writing due to his individualism and his alienation from his own working-class background, which led him to seek solutions to social problems via unconventional paths. As a result, for the radical geographer, Lawrence's writings tend to lead to false consciousness as far as social problems are concerned. In his review of 'geography's literature', Brosseau (1994) takes issue with this type of analysis on the part of geographers. Too often, he suggests, there is a form of instrumentalism whereby geographers merely find what they are looking for in the text, and too little attention is paid to the text itself. He suggests the need to:

"spend more time on the text itself- its general structure, composition, narrative modes, variety of languages, style etc. - before embarking on any type of interpretation whatsoever"(p.347).

Brosseau favours attempts that seek to understand how a novel defines its reader, how it creates an 'eye', and how it writes people and places, society and space. An example of this is provided by

Cresswell's (1993) reading of Jack Kerouac's 'Beat' novel **On the Road**. Cresswell shows how Kerouac uses jazz as a stylistic metaphor to write about mobility both as a way of being and as a way of resisting the cultural hegemony of a settled, monogamous, suburban life in post-war America. The subsequent replies from McDowell (1996) and Rycroft (1996) illustrate neatly the variety of possible readings that can be made of any text. A second example is provided by Daniels and Rycroft (1993) in their account of the geographies of Alan Sillitoe's novels set in the city of Nottingham. They start from the position that as a literary form, the novel is inherently geographical, in that the world of the novel is made up of locations and settings, arenas and boundaries, perspectives and horizons. Geography and literature are not essentially distinct coherent disciplines or orders of knowledge, but as part of a field of 'textual genres' - the novel, the poem, travel guide, map, regional monograph. They avoid privileging one over the others, seeing each as a valid, if partial, form of geographical knowledge. This more open and fluid approach to reading texts is illustrated by Phillips (1997) in his **Mapping Men and Empire**. His project is to 'map' the geography of adventure in texts such as Robinson Crusoe, Jules Verne, and adventure stories for young boys and girls. Phillips notes that the golden age of adventure stories was roughly coincident with the European age of exploration, when Europeans were exploring and mapping what they called the New World. Cartographers charted areas of geographical knowledge and *terra incognita*, and through their maps they 'possessed real geography'. However, Phillips adopts a broad definition of mapping to include both cartographic and literary maps, following the literary critic Edward Said (1993) who argues that Europeans charted the world then colonised it. Phillips argues that adventure stories constructed a concrete cultural space that mapped a social totality that was imaginatively appealing and accessible to the public. These maps were motivated by a clear political agenda: imperialism:

'Adventure stories constructed cultural space in which imperial geographies and imperial masculinities were conceived'(Phillips 1997:p.12)

At first glance this is not so different from the position adopted by Cook in relation to Lawrence's novels. However, it soon becomes apparent that Phillips adopts a more fluid approach to these adventure novels, with the post-structuralist assertion that the intentions of these map-makers and writers do not determine the ways in which their maps work. Once in cultural circulation, the maps may have unintended consequences. This argument has been given force by the writings of the cartographer Brian Harley, who took it upon himself to 'deconstruct' the authority of the map. Maps have the power to naturalise constructions of geography and identity, by claiming to represent the world as it really is:

"Most people do not deconstruct maps, they accept them as fact. The taken-for-granted world of the map naturalises ways of seeing, ways of reading the world. It also naturalises the social relations embedded in those ways of seeing" (Phillips 1997:15)

Phillips explains how adventure stories map the world. For example, the realistic plain language of **Robinson Crusoe** appears to report the 'truth' about the adventures and their settings. Defoe adopted a geographic realism which included a naturalistic language and realistic maps to locate the adventures, replete with place names and lines of longitude and latitude. Adventure stories were normally conservative, serving to naturalise constructions of Britain and Empire. Crusoe's island was a white, middle class, Christian man's utopia. It maps a world view with Britain at the (imperial) centre and colonies like Crusoe's island at the margins. In addition it maps constructions of race (the white Crusoe in relation to the 'savage' Friday), gender (Crusoe as masculine, nature as feminine) and class (Crusoe as master, Friday as slave). Another writer of adventure stories considered by Phillips is R.M. Ballantyne, especially his book **The Young Fur Traders** (1856). Phillips shows how Ballantyne was praised by teachers, parents and critics for educating his readers in geography. However, his brand of geography was not neutral and static:

"It was space in which he articulated an ideology of masculinity, specifically a variation on the mid-century construction of masculinity known as Christian manliness"(Phillips 1997:18)

In his readings of the geography of adventure, Phillips is unwilling to attribute a single authoritative meaning to a text. Though he recognises ideologies and authoritarian images that are conservative in the texts, he also thinks that these texts open up a conceptual space for a more critical politics. The texts, or maps, are inherently unstable, their meanings open to challenge and change. In this he is following the work of cultural geographers such as James and Nancy Duncan, and Trevor Barnes who argue that the meaning(s) of any text (and they include landscapes, maps and books) are not determined by the intentional author, but is historically and socially constituted. The meanings of an adventure story like **Robinson Crusoe** for instance, have changed over time. It may be that texts may be read as promoting authority, or reinforcing hegemonic imperialism or masculinity, but equally, texts may be a 'point of departure for critical politics'(p.19). Thus, in Bessie Marchant's adventure stories for girls, the common notion that girls are supposed to be domesticated and home-centred is questioned and a degree of ambivalence over gender roles is introduced, challenging male domination of travel and emigration. At the same time, the heroines of Marchant's adventures are conventional colonists, supporting British imperialism by planting British society in North America. Phillips wants to highlight the 'power of certain readers to determine the meanings of the texts'. Here is the notion of the active reader, rejecting the classic liberal idea that texts have an 'essence', and accepting the idea that any reading is made by geographically, socially and historically situated people. Phillips uses the example of the adventure stories of Foigny and Verne to offer some resistant readings. Traditionally Verne's voyages have been read (in Britain at least) as pro-imperial, conservative and masculinist narratives, but Phillips shows how other anarchist, anti-imperialist readings are possible.

Phillips' work can provide a basis for thinking through both a politics and practice of teaching geography. For a start, I wish to adopt his use of the concept of 'mapping' as both literal and metaphorical in thinking about the geography curriculum. Phillips expresses the potential of maps thus:

"The authority of maps lies in their ability to circumscribe geography, by enclosing, defining, coding, orienting, structuring and controlling space. It also lies in their propensity to ignore, suppress and negate alternative geographical imaginations"(Phillips 1997:15).

Phillips uses the term to include much more than the maps of cartographers. Popular texts, travel literature and television programmes also 'map' the world, providing the imaginative resources within which people can locate themselves. Phillips does not avoid the difficult question of the politics of such maps. He recognises the socially conservative nature of the texts he considers and is also aware of the way in which such 'imaginative geographies' may have had real, tangible effects on the way people colonised places such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada. If such texts are tainted by racism, imperialism and masculinism, how should critical geographers react to them? One option is to ignore them or de-legitimise such texts, which is what geographers have traditionally done in excluding them from definitions of what counts as geography. Another option, favoured by Phillips, is to acknowledge the popular appeal of such texts, and their resilience in the face of condemnation. After all, Phillips notes, parents, teachers, and librarians have regularly sought to ban some of the books and cultural forms enjoyed by children on the grounds that they promote racism, sexism or classism. Instead we must recognise that in addition to choosing what to read, readers chose how they read, sometimes receiving and accepting the images and messages intended by the author and publisher, sometimes actively challenging and reinterpreting them. These texts construct an imaginative space but do not determine what goes on within that space, as they allow their readers a measure of agency, an active part in the construction and reconstruction of meanings. In adopting this approach to the reading of texts or 'maps', Phillips avoids arriving at any single, fixed meaning. He pays great attention to the actual stories of adventure in his readings, and as such provides a model for using texts in the classroom. In the end Phillips does have to make a reading or take up a position in relation to these stories. He does make judgments on them, and these are judgments based on a desire to go beyond the sexism and imperialism found in the stories. I think this approach which seeks to multiply the range of meanings that can be made and highlight the provisionality of these meanings is one that we can seek to emulate in the geography classroom. I have discussed the approaches of Ian Cook and Richard Phillips in some detail because I want to highlight some of the key differences in the way they read geographically. They represent the shift from a structuralist view of language to a post-structuralist view where there is no one meaning to a text that can be assured, or, in the terminology adopted in Chapter three of this thesis, Cook's approach is essentially concerned with 'de-mystification', whilst Phillips is more open to the possibility of a

range of readings.

The task for geography educators seeking to use popular cultural texts in their classrooms is to build upon the insights of cultural studies and media education which seek to pay attention to what students already know about the media, and which move away from assuming that students are 'mystified', and that the role of the teacher is to reveal the truth to students. The task is to pay attention to media learning through developing analyses of students' work and of the social dynamics of classroom practice. It is this that Kellner (1997) hints at in his discussion of the effects of the television programme **Beavis and Butthead**:

"This [critical media literacy] involves watching the show with children, discussing its images and messages and its potential effects on the audience"(p.98)

To date, most of the work produced in the new cultural geography and critical pedagogy has shown little concern with questions of pedagogy. This appendix is intended as a guide for geography educators who wish to take up the challenge.



















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