

## CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS, PLACE & CONFLICT

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### Lecture Outline

- Defining culture
- Defining cultural geography
  - Linking culture & place: example of hip hop
- Cultural Categories – folk vs popular : reasons for caution
- Traditional cultural geography
  - The “superorganic” critique by Duncan
- New cultural geography
- Place as a social construction
- Place & ideology
- Example: evolution of “gendered landscapes”

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### Culture

- Culture is never any *thing*.
- **Culture:** shared set of meanings that are lived through the material & symbolic practices of everyday life
- Is dynamic
  - Example: text discusses evolution of traditional French folk music in North America
  - Example: Tatooing

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## Cultural Geography

- **Culture:** dynamic & ongoing process of producing shared meanings and practices
- **Geography:** dynamic context in which groups shape meaning & use place & space to shape meaning
- **Geography & culture:**
  - a) Geography interested in ways place and space shape culture –
  - b) & how culture shapes place & space
- What role does place or ideas about place play in shaping culture?
  - Example: elements of place in ideas about cultural "authenticity" or spatial (racial) segregation

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## Illustration: Culture of Hip Hop

- Discussed in text pp. 162-63
- Origins: artists like funkster George Clinton
- Bronx, NYC
- West African storytelling → griot
- Critiques of rap and gangsta rap more specifically
  - Counter interpretation of cultural critic bell hooks (understand her argument)

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## Categories of culture: reasons for caution

- *Folk culture:*
- *Popular culture:*
- Distinction between folk and popular culture problematic

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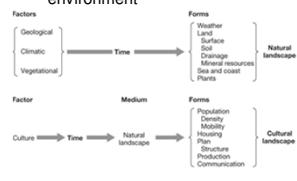
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## Traditional cultural geography

- Associated with geographer Carl Sauer (1889-1975)
  - “Berkeley School”
  - Focus on how a culture expresses itself in the “cultural landscape”
    - Complex interactions between human group & a natural environment



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## Traditional cultural geography critique

- James Duncan: the “Superorganic” critique of cultural geography
  - Argues that superorganicism wrongly *reified* culture as a THING rather than as a **PROCESS**
  - Duncan proposes a more sociological definition of culture

## New cultural geography

- Origins in Britain, not US
  - Draw some inspiration from social geography
  - Inspired by cultural studies (multicultural, political engagement)
  - Emphasis on need for geography to investigate:
    - The structure of experience in a changing world
  - Investigate “maps of meaning” → how space and place central to cultural experience

## Cultural geography & the local

- The Local: study of social life in all of its plurality
- Landscape studies → heavily critiqued as component of traditional cultural geography
  - New cultural geography: more interest in *interpretation* of the **symbolic** aspects of landscape
    - Strong emphasis on ideology
  - Emphasis on relationship between culture and landscape as outcome of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and eventually sexuality
    - Social contestation strong focal point of the work
    - Identity seen as always being a spatial social practice
      - What environments particular identities can be expressed in and why

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## Place as a Cultural or Social Location

- Often treats place as a metaphor
  - e.g., In place & out of place
- Concerned with social locations of people and groups
  - e.g., individuals or groups placed in webs of social, economic, cultural and/or political relations

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## Place as Socially Constructed through Time

- How economic, social, political relations build the characteristics of a place through time
- Social is emphasized
- Place as result of layering of activities that **make and remake it**
- Interactions between:
  - Webs of economic, social and political relations
  - Individuals positioned with respect to broad relations that occur in and through a particular place

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## Relationship of Ideology to Place

- Ideology not fixed, & many cultural geographers see place as an active construction of ideology
- Tim Cresswell → Ideologies define:
  1. What exists and what does not exist
  2. What is good, just and appropriate, and what is not
  3. What is possible and impossible

• *Place implicated at all three levels*

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## Ideology and Place

- Place is produced by practice (actions) that relies on ideological beliefs of what is the appropriate thing to do/act → giving actions meaning, giving places meanings (often multiple)

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## Ideology & Geography: "Gendered landscapes"

- Relations of gender are represented, reinforced, fetishized, & naturalized in landscapes
- Example: public space & monuments
  - In Australia, of more than 2,000 memorials to participation in WWI, only 3 depict any women

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### Ideology & geography: “Gendered Landscapes”

- Pre-industrial city: work was rarely separated from residence
  - Family: not primarily an emotional unit, it was an economic unit

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### Gendered Landscapes: suburbs

- 19<sup>th</sup> century, increasing desire for work – home separation
- Women’s role & “cult of domesticity”
- Concretization in landscapes of suburbia  
→ social isolation of women
- Landscape reflects “atomized” nuclear family

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### Creating the new suburban cultural landscape

- R. Fishman: in London suburbanization an ideal of the Evangelical sect strongly associated with merchant middle class
- Their idea of a *truly* Christian family associated with suburban residential environment
- Example: Clapham

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## Place and Ideology

- Ideology not only based on class position
  - Many ideologies define a position in a wider society → “positional ideologies”
  - *Place* one of easiest ways of being ‘included’ or placed in ‘other positions’
  - Geographical environments – places – force people to relate beliefs and actions

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