

CHAPTER 5

Spaces and Places

Introduction: exploring the connotations of place

Early on in James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, we find the central character, Stephen Dedalus, day-dreaming during a geography lesson:

He turned to the flyleaf of the geography and read what he had written there: himself, his name and where he was.

Stephen Dedalus
Class of Elements
Clongowes Wood College
Sallins
County Kildare
Ireland
Europe
The World
The Universe
(Joyce, 1916, pp. 212–13)

Stephen's sense of identity ('himself') is closely linked to his name ('Stephen Dedalus') and, importantly for our purposes, a listing of ever larger geographical spaces. Just as they affirm his own identity, the places in which he locates himself also shape our response to him, because we take into account the connotations of the places he mentions. How would your view of him alter if the address was Tokyo, Japan, or Cape Town, South Africa or, even, Eton, Berkshire, England? As we saw in chapter 2, a sense of identity is derived from a number of sources, one of which will be the connotations that given locale or region has for an individual. What cultural geography does is to focus on the context from which such connotations arise. It is concerned with teasing out the ways in which places and spaces are shaped by and can themselves come to shape the beliefs and values of those who inhabit them. As Peter Jackson (1989, p. 23) argues, 'cultural geography . . . focuses on the way cultures are produced and reproduced through actual social practices that take place in historically contingent and geographically specific contexts.'

In this chapter we will be discussing some of the ways in which an awareness of the role and meanings of place in shaping individual and group identities can help you to study both represented and actual environments.

5.1



Work with someone else if you can – preferably someone from a different part of the world or country to you. Jot down a list of places or locations which have particular meaning for you (and your community), and then get your partner to write down his or her views of the same places. We have started you off with an example.

<i>Place/locale</i>	<i>Your view</i>	<i>Partner's view</i>
● Majorca	Holiday place	Place of employment
●		
●		
●		
●		

Take an example on which you had particularly divergent opinions and discuss what differences emerged? What caused these?

What we imagine this exercise points up is that you have different views about a particular place. For a Christian, the local church might be a location with associations of communal support, a place of particular significance as a space in which one's beliefs and values can be nourished. For an atheist, the church might be an architecturally interesting old building, but is unlikely to be seen to have any bearing upon her or his behaviour in and around it. Another perspective on this emerges if you talk to people from different generations: your grandmother, for example, may well have very different ideas about the meaning and purpose of a pub from your own.

Places are filled with meanings, and cultural geography is concerned to ensure that the relationship between places and the meanings that adhere to them are not lost sight of. It has also been interested in exploring the ways in which places take on and are shaped by ideas and beliefs which may run counter to those of the people inhabiting a given locale. We can examine this further by thinking about the relationship between maps and the places they represent.

Maps and mapping

Representations of spaces, whether in our minds or in the material form of map or plan, are abstractions (on this distinction see Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 33–46) that emerge from a particular cultural context. For example, what we may have imagined the location 'university' to be like will depend upon our experience of 'universities' and the experiences (and beliefs and values) of our immediate networks of family, friends and social contacts. Real or imagined, places are products of specific cultural conditions and as such not simply arenas for action but actually always a part of the action and its meanings. Over time a place becomes part of what Raymond Williams calls the documentary record of a society. At this point,

you might look again at Williams's description of his bus journey in reading 1.5. In conducting a cultural geography one is often re-reading other people's representations – in the form of maps, reflections, paintings, photographs etc. – in the hope of producing a fuller sense of the complex processes by which a given culture can be characterized; in effect, the cultural geographer makes a map of the cultural phenomenon being investigated.

Such maps do not, it must be stressed, claim to be complete or direct reflections of 'reality'. As Smith and Katz (1993, p. 70) explain,

Although geographers and cartographers habitually give lip service to the selectiveness involved in mapping and to the realisation that maps are strategic social constructions, they more often proceed in practice from traditionally realist assumptions. Only recently have a few geographers and cartographers begun a . . . critique of cartographic conventions of positioning, framing, scale, absence and presence on the map, and, a critique of the absent if omniscient cartographer.



5.2

Can you suggest what is meant by the 'absent if omniscient cartographer'?

Now read the following extract from an influential book on spatial politics by the French social theorist Henri Lefebvre.



5.1

To compare different maps of a region or country . . . is to be struck by the remarkable diversity among them. Some, such as maps that show 'beauty spots' and historical sites and monuments to the accompaniment of an appropriate rhetoric, aim to mystify in fairly obvious ways. This kind of map designates places where a ravenous consumption picks over the last remains of nature and of the past in search of whatever nourishment may be obtained from the *signs* of anything historical or original. If the maps and guides are to be believed, a veritable feast of authenticity awaits the tourist. The conventional signs used in these documents constitute a code even more deceptive than the things themselves, for they are at one more remove from reality. Next, consider an ordinary map of roads and other communications . . . What such a map reveals, its meaning – not, perhaps, to the most ingenious inspection, but certainly to an intelligent perusal with even minimal preparation – is at once clear and hard to decipher . . .

These spaces are *produced*. The 'raw material' from which they are produced is nature. They are products of an activity which involves the economic and technical realms but which extends well beyond them, for these are also political products, and strategic spaces. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 84)

5.3



- What would you say was the main point of Lefebvre's argument?
- Lefebvre was writing in France in the 1970s: to what extent can his remarks about the relation to the past here be applied to contemporary Britain's attitudes towards its national monuments and other 'historic' places? (On this you might like to refer back to chapter 4.)
- In what ways can a space be a strategic or political product? You might like to think about, say, the building of a by-pass or the development of housing on green-belt land in relation to this issue. Another example to think about would be the Rock of Gibraltar at the entry to the Mediterranean.

The extract from Lefebvre suggested that the meanings of spaces/places on a given map are produced in complex ways. You can test his claim, and the argument he puts forward in the extract as a whole, by examining a sequence of maps.

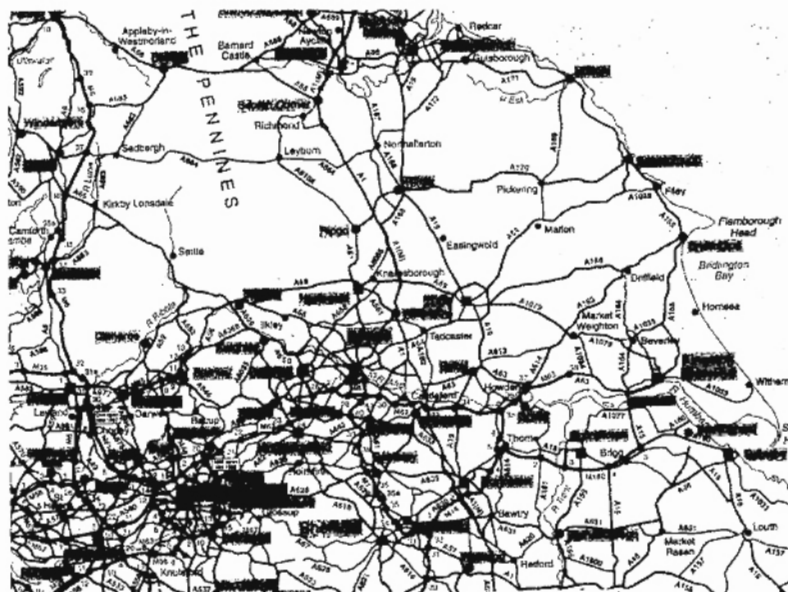


Figure 5.1 Ordnance Survey map of North East England

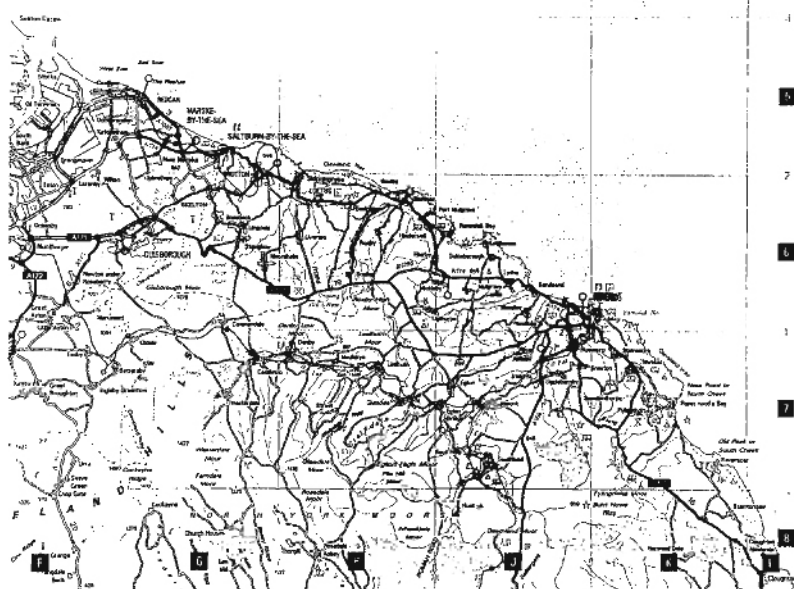


Figure 5.2 Ordnance Survey map of the North York Moors



5.4

- Look at the map in figure 5.1. What features strike you? What does it tell you about the area?
- Now look at the larger scale map of the North York Moors (figure 5.2): what information do we get here that was absent from the previous map; in addition to the detailing of towns, villages, roads and landscape features, note and comment upon the proliferation of symbols.
- Finally, look at the very large scale map of the Moors showing Goathland and the surrounding area (figure 5.3) and compare this with the previous two maps.

It is perhaps worth noting that the area marked 'MOD Property' at the bottom right of figure 5.3 is, in fact, Fylingdales Listening Station, and that from the road you would see a huge white pyramid and a collection of buildings, rather than the featureless moorland the map suggests is there. You may also want to reflect upon the fact that the village of Goathland has an alternative existence as the village in Yorkshire TV's *Heartbeat*: thus adding another layer to the meanings of the place.

Lefebvre's approach to maps seeks to unpack the ways in which what may

appear to be a fixed, stable locale is in fact overlain and shaped by ideology. As Peter Vujakovic notes, 'All maps can be regarded as "propagandist" in the widest sense of the world . . . [and] national atlases can be seen as important ideological devices, telling the story of a nation and locating the national identity in both time and space' (Vujakovic, 1995, pp. 129–30); this is as true of the *Ordnance Survey Motoring Atlas of Britain* as it is of the *Concise Atlas of the Republic of Croatia*, which Vujakovic analyses. The Route Planning Map (figure 5.1) suggests that neither Pickering nor Malton is a Primary Route destination, yet if you are interested in steam trains you might be making a trip to the North Yorkshire Moors Railway in Pickering, so your use of the map and relationship with the place would be different from that which we might want to attribute to the map maker. The route planning map prioritizes getting from A to B, usually by car, and, as such, omits much detail. By contrast, the next map (figure 5.2) is packed with information: it designates not only towns, roads, and villages but also viewpoints, tourist features, caravan and camp sites, youth hostels, railway stations and picnic sites. This map constructs a landscape whose primary function might seem to be leisure – looking at the view, camping, eating sandwiches etc. The highly detailed map (figure 5.3) reveals something of this location's economic life beyond tourism and leisure – we see various farms, sheep pens, disused quarries and grouse butts, as well as schools, hotels and the like – but once again it is a representation that foregrounds certain uses of the landscape (it is taken from a map 'specially designed' (cover blurb) by the Ordnance Survey to promote the recreational use of the area). This map tells us much about contemporary British culture's perception of the countryside as a site of leisure, but tells us very little about the experiences of the people who live and work in the landscape. Thus a concern with the representation of culture through maps depends to a large extent on an assessment of whom the map was made for and the purposes of the map-maker.

Real spaces are no less constructed or shaped by powerful ideologies than maps. In the next section we examine the phenomenon of supermarket shopping from a cultural geography point of view.

Going shopping

The great expansion of retail parks and out-of-town shopping centres may, in the late 1990s, have slowed, but many people still spend a great deal of time shopping and increasingly many people shop at these centres. Out-of-town shopping centres offer a constructed locale and a site of consumption (see chapter 9) which can tell us much about contemporary culture – not least because they are sites that are so often utilized in ways which subvert the intentions of their planners and owners. Much recent work on shopping centres has focused upon them as a specific phenomenon of contemporary culture in industrialized societies (Kowinski, 1985; Morris, 1988). In particular, shopping centres have been studied as spaces in which individuals interact with powerful, often global, commercial forces at a local level. As John Fiske comments in an essay on the culture of everyday life,

'The supermarket is an arena full of the goods and information produced by the political economy of capitalism, but within it, shoppers construct for the period and purposes of shopping their own settings' (Fiske, 1992, p. 160). Fiske examines the ways in which individuals redefine the space of a supermarket in their own terms and distinguishes between setting and arena – settings are defined as 'repeatedly experienced, personally ordered and edited versions of the arena' (Lave, 1988, p. 151, cited in Fiske, 1992, p. 160) – linking these ideas to the distinction between place and space found in the work of Michael de Certeau (1984). Fiske's summary can help us think through the ways in which individuals can use space in a subversive or, at least, unintended way.

5.2

For ... [de Certeau] place is an ordered structure provided by the dominant order through which its power to organise and control is exerted. It is often physical. So cities are places built to organise and control the lives and movements of the 'city subjects' in the interests of the dominant. So, too, supermarkets, apartment blocks, and universities are places. But within and against them, the various formations of the people construct their spaces by the practices of living. So renters make the apartment, the place of the landlord, into their space by the practices of living; the textures of objects, relationships, and behaviors with which they occupy and possess it for the period of the renting. Space is practiced place, and space is produced by the creativity of the people using the resources of the other. De Certeau stresses the political conflict involved, the confrontation of opposing social interests that is central to the construction of space out of place. Lave focuses more on the functional creativity of the activities involved in constructing a setting out of an arena. But her argument shows that a setting is a material and cognitive space where the inhabitant or shopper is in control, is able to cope successfully. (Fiske, 1992, p. 160)

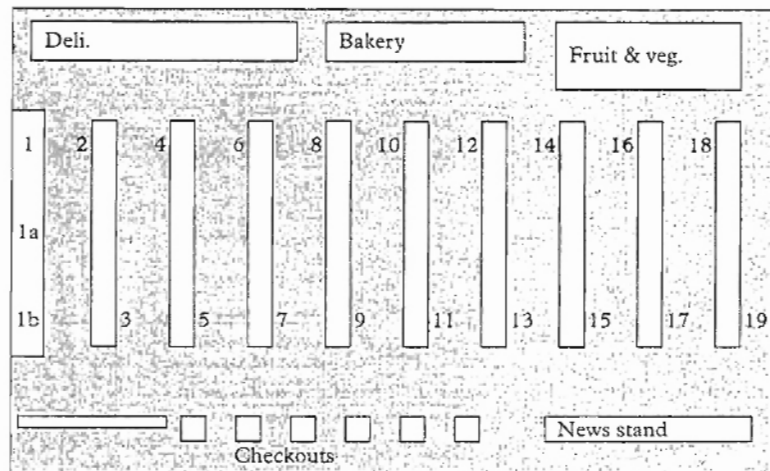


5.5

- Can you think of any ways in which Fiske's claims about the freedom of the shopper might be challenged?
- Fiske suggests that renters can make a place their own space: can you think of some constraints on their ability to do this?
- Think about a place which you habitually utilize: are there ways in which you use it that suggest that you are creating your own space? Are there any constraints on your ability to do this?
- As Meaghan Morris notes, individual stores often work to create settings in the wider arena of a shopping centre (Morris, 1988, p. 316). Can you think of some examples from your own experience of shopping, and perhaps suggest some reasons for why they might do this?



Let us debate further Fiske's arguments about the creation of personal space via some more detailed work on supermarket shopping.



Key: shelf number and stock

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Beers and ciders. | 13 Biscuits, chocolate and cakes. |
| 1a Wines. | 14 Washing liquid, powder etc.; cleaning products. |
| 1b Spirits. | 15 Soap, shampoo, sanitary towels, deodorant, toothpaste, non-prescription medicine and health care (including condoms and femidoms). |
| 2 Soft drinks, crisps and snacks. | 16 Household: bin liners, cloths, food wrap, foil, toilet paper, kitchen paper. Eggs. |
| 3 Dairy, fruit juices, milk yoghurt. | 17 Jam, honey, spreads. |
| 4 Chilled meals, including pizza, curries etc. | 18 Organic produce: dried and tinned; organic beer and wine. |
| 5 Frozen veg./frozen foods | 19 Organic fruit and vegetables; organic chilled products, butter, milk meat. |
| 6 Fresh poultry and speciality meats (game and exotic, e.g. ostrich). | |
| 7 Beef, lamb, pork. | |
| 8 Dried herbs, spices, cooking sauces etc. | |
| 9 Cooking oils, vinegars. | |
| 10 Tinned vegetables and cooking sauces, dried pasta and rice. | |
| 11 Tinned meat and fish, dried vegetables, pulses. | |
| 12 Tea, coffee and other beverages; flour and home baking. | |

The fruit and vegetables unit stocks basic varieties and bunched flowers.

The bakery stocks fresh and pre-wrapped bread, cakes etc.

The deli stocks cold meat, cheese, bacon, sausages etc.

The news stand stocks local and national papers and magazines.

Figure 5.4 A small supermarket

5.6

Copy the diagram in figure 5.4 and then track the likely routes of the shoppers listed below when they complete a shopping trip; using different coloured pens will help you to keep each shopper's journey distinct (you could work on an acetate). Shoppers:



- A family (Mum, Dad, two small children) doing a weekly shop
- A single person doing a weekly shop
- A vegetarian doing a weekly shop
- A well off couple preparing for a dinner party
- A student buying lunch
- An office worker buying lunch

Having tracked each shopper's journey read the following quote and then consider the questions below:

We all make meanings with the commodities we use and bestow. But the meaning possibilities are already inscribed in the history of commodity production and exchange. The school of popular culture criticism that promotes meaning-making as the redemptive aspect of our relationship to a commodified culture sometimes goes so far as to imply that we can make wholly new meanings. (Willis, 1991, p. 136)

- How far does the supermarket as a space ultimately differ for each shopper? How far does an individual's use of the place actually represent the creation of the kind of personal space that Fiske discussed?
- What factors operate when you do your own shopping (ethical, financial, moral, religious, racial, gendered etc.). How far is your 'journey' around the supermarket determined by these factors; how is it determined by the supermarket itself; how much free choice do you have about how you use the supermarket?

We need to strike a judicious balance between seemingly optimistic claims that we are free agents who can boldly remake in our own image the places we inhabit and move through, and apparently pessimistic claims that we are all the pawns of a capitalist system (for further discussion of these issues see chapters 8 and 9).

In the act of going shopping in the kind of setting we have been discussing individuals are fundamentally implicated in the processes of late twentieth-century Western consumer culture. Not only does what we buy have meanings through which we signal identity and are identified by others, in going shopping we are actors in a corporate space which stages encounters. The various people who work in a supermarket are carefully constructed by their employers through particular uniforms or specific activities. Susan Willis writes about this in an American context.

5.3



The current practice in many supermarkets is to put a theatrical form of production on display, while the real work that goes in to maintaining the store and serving the customers is either hidden from view or made to appear trivial because of deskilling. The work of pricing the merchandise, stocking the shelves, cleaning the store, and preparing the meat and produce for sale is accomplished by a largely invisible workforce, whose members labor behind the scene in a backroom warehouse, or at night after the store is closed. The work of managing, which includes decisions over purchases and personnel, is conducted by a number of upper-level employees whose photos sometimes decorate the store's service counter, but who are seldom seen by shoppers. The work of checking, which in a bygone era would have anchored the customer's apprehension of work in the supermarket, has today been greatly undermined by the installation of computerized scanners that weigh and price the commodities and often speak to the customer. The supermarket checker has been deskilled to the point of becoming a human robotoid extension of the checkout system.

As if to compensate for the marginalization and in some cases the erasure, of productive labor, the supermarket offers an array of theatrical labors, whose importance has more to do with the spectacle they create than the actual services they render. Most supermarkets today offer in-store bakeries, deli-counters, florist shops, and gourmet food sections. These are staffed by a corps of store-personnel whose uniforms are more theatrical than practical. Often, the employees' pert hats and aprons mimic the colours and patterns of the store's interior decor, making the supermarket something of a stage for sales and the costumed employees the actors enacting service. If we take the supermarket as the place where we most commonly come into contact with the fetishized commodities of daily life, then all the strategies developed by a supermarket to render service personal, to make it visible, rebound in a theatricality whose effect is to create the appearance of use value in the commodities we buy. (Willis, 1991, p. 17)

5.7



- Think about the organization of supermarkets you have visited. Can you identify any of the features Willis discusses?
- Do you agree that the labour on show is purely theatrical? How does buying bread from a section of a store labelled Bakery or meat from a section labelled Butchers give a different set of meanings to the transaction and product from what would adhere if we simply picked the items out of a chill cabinet or off a shelf? Note down some of the meanings that are 'added' by the kind of theatrical organization Willis describes.

Willis offers a Marxist reading of capitalism (for more on this see chapter 9) which seems to suggest that everyone is positioned and defined by the vast impersonal forces of economics. Meghan Morris has argued: 'Shopping centres illustrate very well, I think, the argument that you can't treat a public at a cultural

event as directly expressive of social groups and classes, or their supposed sensibility. Publics aren't stable, homogenous entities' (Morris, 1988, p. 304). This is because when we shop we do so in our own terms, and central to our experience of shopping centres is the construction of our own mental map of the place determined by our habitual needs (Fiske, 1992, p. 160). That this map is never simply of our own making underlines the ways in which our experience of culture is very much built upon processes and interactions.

Place and identity

By focusing upon the competing and changing meanings of places for different individuals, cultural geography focuses upon the contingent nature of identity. The problem of identity as either complicit with or subversive of the ideologies which shape a given locale is, at root, based on the logic of **binary opposition**. What might be needed, then, is a way of thinking which doesn't stop at 'either/or' but allows many more shades of opinion: for example, hot *and* cold, rather than hot *or* cold. It is exactly this kind of non-binary based logic that can be identified in the postmodern Marxism of Laclau: 'Identity depends on conditions of existence which are contingent, its relationship with them is absolutely necessary' (Laclau, 1990, p. 21, cited in Keith and Pile, 1993, pp. 27–9).

As we move into different arenas of activity, the shifting meanings attached to these locations inform the ways in which we operate and, as such, help to shape our experience of a given place. For Laclau, the ethical dilemma we may experience over whether or not to buy imported fresh vegetables produced as a cash crop in a country whose need for foreign currency outweighs the needs of its people for food staples is an important factor of our identity. That we can both buy the mange tout and be opposed to the extension of airport runways is part of the way in which we can operate across different settings and actually present different identities (for more on this see chapter 8). As Keith and Pile (1993, p. 30) argue, by accepting the multiplicity of identities an individual can inhabit we must not lose sight of the ways in which location informs a subject's identity.

The act of leaving your home to go shopping does not seem a very huge shift in location, and so may appear unlikely to occasion any great change in identity. In fact, as Michael de Certeau has argued (cited in Doring, 1993, pp. 157–8), to trace an individual's actions – glancing in store windows, stopping to look at an item, reading an advertising hoarding, asking a sales assistant for information, interacting with other shoppers – and their impact upon identity is almost impossible. If, as we suggested in chapter 3, everything signifies, then all the action and interactions of an individual shopper become part of the shifting arena in which his or her identity ought to be read. At a simplified level, you can trace the larger shifts by thinking through the ways in which who you are subtly changes as you move through a set of locations.

 ACTIVITIES

5.8

Think about the different ways in which you see yourself and are seen by others in the following settings. Try to identify as many factors as possible informing the way in which a given setting informs your identity.

- 1 At the bus queue
- 2 Queuing in the university library to return textbooks
- 3 Queuing in the student union shop
- 4 Discussing a film in a seminar group
- 5 Discussing the same film with friends in a pub
- 6 Visiting a foreign country for a holiday
- 7 Working or studying in a foreign country

The differences you are able to identify may be slight, but we should not neglect these micro details of daily life as part of the 'structure of feeling' of our culture. Sometimes historical distance or a shift in context may allow the ways in which place impacts upon identity to become much more visible for analysis. In this area we would direct you to the extensive work that has been done on colonialism and on travel and exploration as occasions when we are often actively mapping (literally and metaphorically) a new terrain, but often at a loss to make sense of our experiences because the relationship which exists between context and identity has become so removed that we struggle to bring the two together. (For an introduction see Boehmer, 1995. For more detailed work see, among others, Bhabha, 1994, Ryan, 1994.) Even in our daily lives we can experience something of this dislocation: when we first start school, university or a job there is a short period when the strangeness of our environment has an impact on how we feel and interact with others. This dislocation can lead to an intensification of the rituals and practices which shaped an individual's identity in another context; to bafflement or, even, madness. All three responses can be found in Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, which examines the impact of colonial practices in Africa on various white men and the native peoples they encounter and exploit.

Heart of Darkness was first published in Britain in a conservative literary magazine called *Blackwood's* in 1899. The narrative centres on Charlie Marlow, an English sea captain, who is telling the story of his adventures in Africa to a group of friends on board a sailing ship which is moored on the Thames. Marlow travels from Europe to Africa and then journeys up-river in search of the enigmatic Mr Kurtz. For Marlow, the journey to the river's 'farthest point of navigation' (Conrad, 1902, p. 141) marks 'the culminating point in my experience'. Marlow's initial interest in Africa is the result of his encounter with a map:

Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one

that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there.' . . . there was one . . . the biggest, the most blank, so to speak – that I had a hankering after.

True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery – a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness. (Conrad, 1902, p. 142)

Marlow already has ideas about the nature of the place he is to travel to, and some of these appear as the oppositions which are a feature of this extract (and of the book as a whole): between emptiness and fullness, between whiteness and darkness. Marlow, the white Englishman, already has a very clear set of expectations about what the reality of Africa will be and, initially, it would seem that these are borne out in his experiences there. In this second extract, Marlow has just arrived at the company's base in Africa:

I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear.

I shook hands with this miracle, and I learned he was the Company's chief accountant, and that all the book-keeping was done at this station. He had come out for a moment, he said, 'to get a breath of fresh air.' The expression sounded wonderfully odd, with its suggestion of sedentary desk-life . . . I respected the fellow. Yes; I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser's dummy; but in the great demoralisation of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone. (Conrad, 1902, pp. 157–8).

In this next extract Marlow describes the African who works as the fireman on the ship he takes up-river:

He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on its hind legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the steam-gauge and at the water-gauge with an evident effort of intrepidity – and he had filed teeth, too, the poor devil, and the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns, and three ornamental scars on each cheek. He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge. He was useful because he had been instructed; and what he knew was this – that should the water in that transparent thing disappear, the evil spirit inside the boiler would get angry through the greatness of his thirst, and take a terrible vengeance. So he sweated and fired up and watched the glass fearfully (with an impromptu charm, made of rags, tied to his arm, and a piece of polished bone, as big as a watch, stuck flat-ways through his lower lip). (Conrad, 1902, pp. 187–8)



5.9

In his important essay on the novella, Chinua Achebe remarks that much of the story uses the idea of Africa as a 'place of negation' (Achebe 1977, p. 250), in which European values are shown to be superior. Compare the descriptions of the two men and comment on the ways in which Marlow's perception of them is grounded in his English origins.

To get to grips with the ways in which perceptions of place are shaped by an individual's tendency to 'map' new terrain in terms of that which is already familiar to him or her, you might like to read the whole novella or Conrad's short story 'An outpost of progress', and then to consider to what extent the representation of places is dependent upon specifically English or European values. In his highly influential book, *Orientalism*, Edward Said, speaking not of Africa but of the Far and Middle East, observes that

the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences . . . The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. (Said, 1978, p. 1)

Africa, 'the Orient' and Europe are geographically contingent land masses, but they are also places that 'form a reservoir of meanings which people can draw upon to tell stories about and thereby define themselves' (Thrift, 1997, p. 160). You could usefully spend some time thinking about the meanings that have been and are circulated about Africa, Europe, America, China, Japan or the Middle East, and from whose point of view these 'stories' are told.

Now read the extract from an article by the cultural geographer Doreen Massey.



5.4

This is an era – it is often said – when things are speeding up, and spreading out. Capital is going through a new phase of internationalization, especially in its financial parts. More people travel more frequently and for longer distances. Your clothes have probably been made in a range of countries from Latin America to South East Asia. Dinner consists of food shipped in from all over the world. And if you have a screen in your office, instead of opening a letter which – care of Her Majesty's Post Office – has taken some days to wend its way across the country, you now get interrupted by e-mail . . .

It is a phenomenon which has been called 'time-space-compression'. And the general acceptance that something of the sort is going on is marked by the almost obligatory use in the literature of terms and phrases such as speed-up, global village, overcoming spatial barriers, the disruption of horizons, and so forth . . .

To begin with, there are some questions to be asked about time-space-compression itself. Who is it that experiences it, and how? Do we all benefit and suffer from it in the same way.

... We also need to ask about its causes: what is it that determines our degrees of mobility, that influences the sense we have of space and place? Time-space-compression refers to movement and communication across space, to the geographical stretching-out of social relations, and to our experience of all this. The usual interpretation is that it results overwhelmingly from the actions of capital, and from its currently increasing internationalization. On this interpretation, then, it is time space and money which make the world go round, and us go round (or not) the world. It is capitalism and its developments which are argued to determine our understanding and our experience of space.

But surely this is insufficient. Among the many other things which clearly influence that experience, there are for instance, race and gender. The degree to which we can move between countries, or walk about the streets at night, or venture out of hotels in foreign cities, is not just influenced by 'capital'. Survey after survey has shown how women's mobility, for instance, is restricted – in a thousand different ways, from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel quite simply 'out of place' – not by 'capital' but by men. (Massey, 1991, pp. 232–3)

5.10

- Can you suggest which social groups from which parts of the world are more likely to be mobile in the sense described in the first paragraph of the reading?
- Can you think of groups who move around the world but are less in charge of their mobility? Who or what does control the mobility of such groups?
- Massey mentions race and gender as things that influence our experience of time-space-compression. Can you think of an example of how race might determine this? Can you think of other social factors that might influence the experience of time-space-compression?



Your answers to these questions are likely to have suggested that the ways in which people experience time-space-compression are varied and complex. It is not enough to say that it is caused solely by the effects of global capitalism: for example, global corporations such as Mars, Coca-Cola or McDonalds or global networks of communication like the Internet, MTV and Hollywood. Those who control, organize and distribute international currency, international markets or international media are often those who have access to electronic technology, long-haul flights and worldwide contacts through fax, e-mail and conference calling. These groups are the ones who see the benefits of time-space-compression and whose power and influence is increased by the growth of global economies and global media. However, there are other groups, such as refugees from the recent war in Rwanda, whose mobility is enforced not by the movements of international 'capital', but by tribal war and fears of genocide. Moreover, even where

the movement of a group from one place to another is the result of economic forces, as in the case of migrant workers from Mexico who attempt to enter the USA in search of work, the people 'on the move' may not be in control of this mobility or its outcomes. Their movements are as likely to be controlled by immigration laws and racial prejudices as by capitalism. Massey also notes another group: those on the receiving end of time-space-compression. She cites as an example the pensioner trapped in an inner-city bedsit by fear of what lurks outside, who eats British fish and chips from a Chinese take-away and watches an American film on a television made in Japan. The cosmopolitanization of culture has done little to improve the lives of people like this.

We touched on the issues around globalization in chapter 2 and will return to these in chapter 9 in the context of consumerism and chapter 10 in relation to electronic technology. For now, you could think about the ways in which the world appears to be becoming a 'smaller' space or, as some commentators call it, 'a global village'. Do you think this is true for you or the people you know? Do you see it as a positive or negative thing? Can you see any evidence that people are trying, in the face of this, to retain or imagine a sense of **local**, individual place in which they can counter the supposedly homogenizing effects of global cultures? For example, might the popularity of soap operas like *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* be to do with the fictional 'communities' they create? How important is place to these 'communities' and do they represent homogeneity or diversity or what? What about the place you live – where are the meeting places, what connections do you make with this place and the rest of the world by phone, by letter, through your memories and in your imagination?

Space and place in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*

We want to end this chapter with an analysis of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*: to suggest how some of the ideas of cultural geography may be used to illuminate a literary text; to offer you a fictional representation of place at a moment when new ideas about space and time were emerging (as they are also at the end of the twentieth century – see the discussion in the previous section about globalization); and to suggest the ways in which writers of fiction can act as cartographers of the imagination. Hardy's Wessex is as much a part of contemporary culture as of the late nineteenth century, though differently understood, as anyone who has visited Dorset recently could testify. You might pause here and think about the ways in which areas of Britain have been identified with writers, famous people or fiction: Warwickshire is 'Shakespeare's county'; the area around Tyneside and Newcastle is called 'Catherine Cookson country'; Nottinghamshire is linked with Robin Hood; and Swaledale in the north Pennines is 'James Herriot country'.

Hardy's late fiction was written and produced at the end of the nineteenth century, a time in which a 'distinctively different culture and consciousness of space, time and modernity emerged' (Soja, 1989, p. 31), and *Jude the Obscure* can be seen to offer an account of subjectivity in the context of a changing social

order. It tracks Jude's movement through the fictional Wessex from the village of Marygreen to the city of Christminster, and on to the towns of Melchester, Shaston and Aldbrickham. In each case Hardy's narrator is at pains to set out the social structures of these locales and their associated ideologies, not as the backdrop to Jude's situation but as fundamental factors which shape and structure his experiences. As Hardy noted,

the book is all contrasts – or was meant to be in its originally conception. Alas, what a miserable accomplishment it is, when I compare it with what I meant to make it – e.g. Sue and her heathen gods set against Jude's reading the Greek testament. Christminster academical, Christminster in the slums; Jude the saint, Jude the sinner, Sue the pagan, Sue the saint, marriage, no marriage, etc. etc. (Cited in Hardy, 1928, pp. 272–3)

The novel obsessively stages the encounter of self and society via a registration of the tensions which are generated between an individual and the space that he or she inhabits. Below is reprinted the opening chapter of *Jude the Obscure*: as you read through think carefully about the ways in which various places are given particular meanings or associations.

5.5



The schoolmaster was leaving the village, and everybody seemed sorry. The miller at Cresscombe lent him the small white tilted cart and horse to carry his goods to the city of his destination, about twenty miles off, such a vehicle proving of quite sufficient size for the departing teacher's effects. For the school house had been partly furnished by the managers, and the only cumbersome article possessed by the master, in addition to the packing case of books, was a cottage piano that he had bought at an auction during the year in which he thought of learning instrumental music. But the enthusiasm having waned he had never acquired any skill in playing, and the purchase article had been a perpetual trouble to him ever since in moving house.

The rector had gone away for the day, being a man who disliked the sight of changes. He did not mean to return till the evening, when the new school-teacher would have arrived and settled in, and everything would be smooth again.

The blacksmith, the farm bailiff, and the schoolmaster himself were standing in perplexed attitudes in the parlour before the instrument. The master had remarked that even if he got it into the cart he should not know what to do with it on his arrival at Christminster, the city he was bound for, since he was only going into temporary lodgings just at first.

A little boy of eleven, who had been thoughtfully assisting in the packing, joined the group of men, and as they rubbed their chins he spoke up, blushing at the sound of his own voice:

'Aunt have got a great fuel-house, and it could be put there, perhaps, till you've found a place to settle in, sir.'

'A proper good notion', said the blacksmith.

It was decided that a deputation should wait on the boy's aunt – an old maiden

resident – and ask her if she would house the piano till Mr Phillotson should send for it. The smith and the bailiff started to see the practicability of the suggested shelter, and the boy and the schoolmaster were left standing alone.

'Sorry I am going, Jude?' asked the latter kindly.

Tears rose into the boy's eyes, for he was not among the regular day scholars, who came unromantically close to the schoolmaster's life, but one who had attended the night school only during the present teacher's term of office. The regular scholars, if the truth must be told, stood at the present moment afar off, like certain historic disciples, indisposed to any enthusiastic volunteering of aid.

The boy awkwardly opened the book he held in his hand, which Mr Phillotson had bestowed on him as a parting gift, and admitted that he was sorry.

'So am I', said Mr Phillotson.

'Why do you go, sir?' asked the boy.

'Ah – that would be a long story. You wouldn't understand my reasons, Jude. You will, perhaps, when you are older.'

'I think I should now, sir.'

'Well – don't speak of this everywhere. You know what a university is, and a university degree? It is the necessary hall-mark of a man who wants to do anything in teaching. My scheme, or dream, is to be a university graduate, and then to be ordained. By going to live at Christminster, or near it, I shall be at headquarters, so to speak, and if my scheme is practicable at all, I consider that being on the spot will afford me a better chance of carrying it out than I should have elsewhere.'

The smith and his companion returned. Old Miss Fawley's fuel-house was dry, and eminently practicable; and she seemed willing to give the instrument standing room there. It was accordingly left in the school till the evening, when more hands would be available for removing it; and the schoolmaster gave a final glance round.

The boy Jude assisted in loading some small articles, and at nine o'clock Mr Phillotson mounted beside his box of books and other *impedimenta*, and bade his friends goodbye.

'I shan't forget you, Jude,' he said, smiling, as the cart moved off. 'Be a good boy, remember; and be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can. And if you ever come to Christminster remember you hunt me out for old acquaintance sake.'

The cart creaked across the green, and disappeared round the corner by the rectory-house. The boy returned to the draw-well at the edge of the greensward, where he had left his buckets when he went to help his patron and teacher in the loading. There was a quiver in his lip now, and after opening the well-cover to begin lowering the bucket he paused and leant with his forehead and arms against the frame-work, his face wearing the fixity of a thoughtful child's who has felt the pricks of life somewhat before his time. The well into which he was looking was as ancient as the village itself, and from his present position appeared as a long circular perspective ending in a shining disk of quivering water at a distance of a hundred feet down. There was a lining of green moss near the top, and nearer still the hart's-tongue fern.

He said to himself, in the melodramatic tones of a whimsical boy, that the schoolmaster had drawn at that well scores of times on a morning like this, and would never draw there any more. 'I've seen him look down into it, when he was tired, just as I do now, and when he rested a bit before carrying the buckets home. But he was too clever to bide here any longer – a small sleepy place like this!

A tear rolled from his eye into the depths of the well. The morning was a little foggy,

and the boy's breathing unfurled itself as a thicker fog upon the still and heavy air. His thoughts were interrupted by a sudden outcry.

'Bring on that water, will ye, you idle young harican!'

It came from an old woman who had emerged from her door towards the garden gate of a green-thatched cottage not far off. The boy quickly waved a signal of assent, drew the water with what was a great effort for one of his stature, landed and emptied the big bucket into his own pair of smaller ones, and pausing a moment for breath, started with them across the patch of clammy greensward whereon the well stood – nearly in the centre of the little village, or rather hamlet of Marygreen.

It was as old-fashioned as it was small, and rested in the lap of an undulating upland adjoining the North Wessex downs. Old as it was, however, the well-shaft was probably the only relic of the local history that remained absolutely unchanged. Many of the thatched and dormered dwelling houses had been pulled down of late years, and many trees felled on the green. Above all, the original church, hump-backed, wood-turreted, and quaintly hipped, had been taken down, and either cracked up into heaps of road-metal in the lane, or utilized as pig-sty walls, garden seats, guard-stones to fences, and rockeries in the flower-beds of the neighbourhood. In place of it a tall new building of modern gothic design, unfamiliar to English eyes, had been erected on a new piece of ground by a certain obliterator of historic records who had run down from London and back in a day. The site whereon so long had stood the ancient temple to the Christian divinities was not even recorded on the green and level grass plot that had immemorially been the church-yard, the obliterated graves being commemorated by eighteenpenny cast-iron crosses warranted to last five years. (Hardy, 1896, chapter I-i)

5.11

In the opening chapter, Hardy not only sets up the story, he also establishes the vital role of place in the novel. Having read the chapter, jot down the ideas and perspectives associated with:

- Marygreen
- Christminster
- London
- England



The novel begins by setting in motion a number of ideas which are going to be developed throughout the text. The community is losing its schoolmaster 'and everybody seemed sorry': the community is represented here by the blacksmith, a farm bailiff, the absent rector and a small boy. In itself this is a minor point but it does construct a place in which hierarchies exist (a farm bailiff collects rents and manages the land for a landowner) and in which the Church or, at least, its local representative is opposed to change. The community's sorrow is perhaps only superficial (the rector doesn't like change, so might be more angry than sad), but is genuinely felt by Jude, one of the teacher's night-school pupils who seems to be a favoured individual in as much as he has been given a present by the departing Mr Phillotson. Phillotson is leaving because his ambition to achieve impels him to move closer

to Christminster, where he may eventually become an undergraduate. This is regarded as a rather grand undertaking, and Phillotson asks Jude not to speak of his ambition publicly: thus intellectual advancement is set up as a subject for secrecy and embarrassment. The schoolmaster leaves having pledged to remember Jude and offered him the parting advice: 'be kind to animals and birds and read all you can'. These opening pages serve to establish some important facets of Jude's individuality: already we might identify a tacit opposition between Jude and the community he inhabits; for Jude, intellectual ability is now firmly in opposition to the culture of Marygreen; as he puts it, Phillotson 'was too clever to bide here any longer – a small sleepy place like this'.

As several commentators have pointed out, Jude is no simple peasant, and nor is Marygreen a crudely drawn cliché of rural England (Eagleton, 1974, p. 10). It is only its well that links the village to its history, for: 'Many of the thatched and dormered dwelling houses had been pulled down of late years and many trees felled on the green. Above all . . . the original church had been taken down, and either cracked up into road metal in the lane or utilised as pig sty walls, garden seats, guard stones to fences and rockeries.' This 'obliteration' of the historic centre of the village has occurred despite the rector disliking change and has, we note, been caused by a London architect. The chapter ends, then, by rewriting (albeit subtly) the placing of the church within this community: it now stands revealed as powerless; as no longer central. The last paragraph of the chapter changes the version of Marygreen we may have constructed at the start, and portrays a community in flux. Ironically, then, the act of moving away (of breaking up the village's social order) is not the oddity it might have at first seemed, as Marygreen stands revealed not as a seamless coherent 'community' but as a place that is in a state of near permanent flux.

ACTIVITIES



5.12

You could continue your investigation of places and spaces in Hardy's novel by thinking about some of the following locations.

- 1 Christminster: part I, chapter 3; compare part II, chapter 6 (the Crossway), part III, chapter 8
- 2 Christminster: part II, chapter 1; compare part II, chapter 2
- 3 Melchester (esp. the Training School): part III, chapters 1, 3
- 4 Shaston: part IV, chapter 1; compare part IV, chapter 6 (as a space in which to read Sue and Phillotson?)

In your work on these locales you might like to concentrate upon the following issues:

- How a place shapes an individual's opinions
- How a place is used to help us understand how an individual feels
- Note the ways in which we are given access to the dominant meanings of a place
- Comment on the extent to which an individual is in conflict with the dominant ideologies of the place – does anyone ever get to represent the multiple voices

and identities that constitute particular places, or is the dominant view of a locale too powerful?

- Do the central characters suffer because they have a utopian view of the places they inhabit, which fails to take into account the competing versions through which it takes on meaning?
- You could also consider the ideologies associated with places outside of Wessex (for example, Australia or London) or examine the ways in which even seemingly minor places are woven into the thematic concerns of the novel – think about places like Aldbrickham or Stoke Newington, and how they provide more than mere backdrops to the action.

Conclusions

Throughout this chapter we have focused upon the relationship between place and identity, and have drawn upon the work of social theorists and cultural geographers to help us to tease out the often complex ways in which human subjects interact with their physical environment. We have concentrated upon contemporary and historical examples mainly based in British culture, but many of the sources cited in the recommended further reading will help you to work on the intersection of place and identity in other cultures.

Our survey has not made much use of approaches to the geography of culture in terms of landscape studies. We have, however, tried to strike a balance between an engagement with the materiality of cultural experience and more abstract approaches to the processes at work in shaping individual identities. In this chapter we tackle one of the central problems for cultural studies: how to describe and analyse what is often fleeting, ephemeral and prosaic but none the less fundamental to the ways in which human subjects make sense of themselves and the world they inhabit. The importance of cultural geography to cultural studies is that it forcibly reminds us that a culture cannot be reduced to a set of discourses, but has to take account of the physical places in which those discourses operate. In order to explore some of these ideas further, you could do worse than reflect upon your own experience and understanding of a range of places and spaces – those you have lived in, those you have visited, those you have worked in, those you have imagined, those you have seen represented in pictures, films or TV, those you have read about, those you would like to visit, those you wouldn't, those that produce goods and services for you to purchase, those that are in the news. Think about the ways in which these places and spaces are linked in your consciousness – is it through memory or imagination, or through relatives, or by international media, or through what you buy? Think about the social relations that certain spaces produce (classrooms, for example) but also think about the ways in which a particular place or space could be produced as a result of a set of social relations (two friends sharing a house might produce a different 'place' to a married couple sharing a house). Some of the ideas in this chapter feed into discussions in chapters 6, 8 and 9, and there are suggestions for further reading if you are interested in this topic.