

**Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift  
(eds), *Thinking Space:  
Critical Geographies***

(London and New York: Routledge, 2000)

By Bridie Lonie

*Thinking Space* is not new but it has proved extremely valuable for students as an example of interdisciplinary thinking, bridging as it does spatial, philosophical and social disciplines. Its centre is, however, within geography, the discipline which was first most concerned with space and place in terms of their specificities of measurement and material.

Each essay in *Thinking Space* suggests that in some sense the theorist in question is already thinking in terms relevant to geography, because their work depends upon a concept which is spatial in nature. But, as spatial metaphors are a constant in philosophical thought, structures are built up and torn down in terms of their implication for the key ideas of the theorist in question. These ideas cover most human experience. The slightly breathless introduction moves through these sub-topics: species of spaces; spaces of language; spaces of self and other; interiority and exteriority; metonymic spaces; agitated spaces; spaces of experience; and spaces of writing. These are identifiable as the key issues for post-structural thought. Theorists considered are, for example, Georg Simmel, Mikhail Bakhtin, Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

The selection begins with 'Ur-texts' or foundational theorists of the earlier twentieth century, and then leaps to the mid- and late-twentieth century. The Ur-texts focus on the

investigation of the implications of the city, celebrated as the centre of modernity but challenged by Benjamin and Simmel who find melancholy and dissociation in it. This sets the ground for an elastic reading of space, a sense that space is social as well as material, conceptual as well as physical. Most of the discussions which follow see space as active, as a set of co-ordinates in shifting relationship to one another and inseparable from issues of power of one kind or another. This becomes increasingly politicised as social behaviour is increasingly connected to economic and political factors in a structural sense. Bakhtin is the third of the four 'Ur-text and starting points', explicitly establishing a structural model for the project; while Wittgenstein, whose inclusion is a pleasant surprise, offers the first non-site-specific critical and philosophical analysis.

From the 'Ur-texts' there is a leap to 1968 and by definition post-structural thought with its frequent use of rhetorical tropes, used performatively and relished for their own sake. Avoiding as they do allegories associated with humanist values, these tropes are invariably spatial: dialectic, field, monad, rhizome, habitus. Wittgenstein's relevance becomes clear as concerns with space itself are increasingly commingled with questions about what it can possibly mean to represent a lived situation by a diagram, a map or a picture of any kind. Several of those map-like, or rebus-like structures which theorists use to demonstrate their positions are identified, challenged, endorsed or deconstructed. Deleuze's concern with rhizomatic (horizontal, non-hierarchical, field-like) structures is likened to Dr Seuss' *Cat in the Hat*'s ability to "unglunk" congested power structures in the only mode possible: a rhetorical mimicry.

The use of spatial models gives rise to the question of the relationship between representation and practice. Virginia Blum and Heidi Nast's "Jaques Lacan's Two-Dimensional subjectivity" (pp. 183-204) use Lacan's fascination with optical analogies to undo to some extent the dominance of his thought for film theory, by demonstrating that position's inability to imagine/conceive of the body in space, and therefore in its maternal plenitude. They suggest that the very notions of the mirror and screen imply a two-dimensionality in his reading of the mother-child experience; and they argue that he cannot imagine the child moving through space, toward or away from the mother, seeing rather all actions as if imagined only in the mind's eye. While this is perhaps a simplistic reading of what the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott could happily imagine as a holistic rather than a two-dimensional metaphor, the writers' concern with Lacan's misogyny is well argued. But, given the breadth of the discussion, it would have been useful to cite Martin Jay's well-known consideration of this issue in his *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*<sup>1</sup>, where he considers the significance of the visually focused Surrealists for Lacan's thinking.

Each writer's concern to situate, contextualise and complement or critique the theorists s/he is engaged with leads to a richly allusive collection which can be read and cross-read. The theorists Bourdieu and Wittgenstein, Fanon and Lefebvre and Lacan, Foucault and Serres, Said and Foucault are connected within and across texts. There is a range of writing styles and some reflect their genesis as conference presentations; for instance Chris Philo's "Foucault's Geography". This is a passionate and urgent argument addressed to a slightly differently focused audience; but

that adds to the collection's liveliness. There is an interesting gender imbalance: does this reflect geography as a discipline? Unless I have been misled by inter-gender names, there are only two women out of sixteen theorists and three women contributors out of twenty. Cixous and Minh-Ha are there, though not well represented, but where are Haraway, Kristeva and Spivak?

The frequency of metaphors of dispersal gives to many of the texts the anti-hierarchical, diasporic flavour of post-structural theory. Most of the thinkers in this text were in some way positioned as resistant or subaltern by the dominant ideologies. So their work argues for a sense of liberation, implying infinity, rather than fixed end-points or teleological systems. Often it's about moving elsewhere, about becoming or being seen as different. Thus key figures are those who have critiqued the way classes of people are characterised as "other"; and so Frantz Fanon and Edward Said are considered with care. However, sometimes difference is not sufficiently acknowledged. Alistair Bonnet's analysis of Trinh T Minh-ha places her within Western traditions of film-making in a way which appears to selectively ignore the Buddhist tenets of much of her work; while the critique of Hélène Cixous does not so much engage with the colour of her thought on the relationships between writing and gender as argue that it is inconsistent.

Nonetheless, this is a key text, alive with its own concerns for geographers while also of proven worth for students in art theory and cultural studies.

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- 1 Martin Jay (ed.), *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994).