

UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

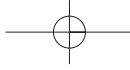
This new and comprehensive book offers a holistic introduction to cultural geography. It integrates the broad range of theories and practices of the discipline by arguing that the essential focus of cultural geography is *place*. The book builds an accessible and engaging configuration of this important concept through arguing that place should be understood as an *ongoing composition of traces*.

The book presents specific chapters outlining the history of cultural geography, before and beyond representation, as well as the methods and techniques of doing cultural geography. It investigates the places and traces of corporate capitalism, nationalism, ethnicity, youth culture and the place of the body. Throughout these chapters case study examples will be used to illustrate how these places are taken and made by particular cultures, examples include the Freedom Tower in New York City, the Berlin Wall, the Gaza Strip, Banksy graffiti, and anti-capitalist protest movements. The book discusses the role of power in cultural place-making, as well as the ethical dimensions of doing cultural geography.

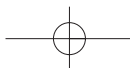
Understanding Cultural Geography: Places and Traces offers a broad-based overview of cultural geography, ideal for students being introduced to the discipline through either undergraduate or postgraduate degree courses. The book outlines how the theoretical ideas, empirical foci and methodological techniques of cultural geography illuminate and make sense of the places we inhabit and contribute to. This is a timely synthesis that aims to be incorporate a vast knowledge foundation and by doing so it will also prove invaluable for lecturers and academics alike.

Jon Anderson is a Lecturer in Human Geography at the School of City and Regional Planning, Cardiff University. His research interests focus on the relations between identity, culture and place, in particular the actions, practices and politics that such relations produce.

FIRST PROOFS - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



FIRST PROOFS - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



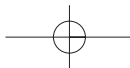
UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Places and traces

Jon Anderson

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

FIRST PROOFS - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



First published 2009 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2009 Jon Anderson
Typeset in Adobe Garamond and Futura by
Keystroke, 28 High Street, Tettenhall, Wolverhampton
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
the MPG Books Group in the UK

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised
in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or
hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information
storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data
Anderson, Jon, 1973–
Understanding cultural geography : places and traces / Jon Anderson.
p. cm.

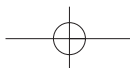
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Cultural geography. 2. Human geography. I. Title.

GF41.A475 2009
304.2—dc22
2009008209

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-43054-8 (hbk)
ISBN 13: 978-0-415-43055-5 (pbk)
ISBN 13: 978-0-203-87237-6 (ebk)

ISBN 10: 0-415-99286-9 (hbk)
ISBN 10: 0-415-43055-5 (pbk)
ISBN 10: 0-203-87237-1 (ebk)

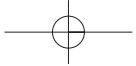
FIRST PROOFS - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



CONTENTS

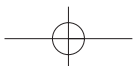
<i>List of figures</i>	vii
<i>List of tables</i>	ix
<i>List of boxes</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 THE HISTORY OF CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY	13
3 BRANCHING OUT: TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FAMILY TREE OF CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY	26
4 KNOWING (YOUR) PLACE	37
5 TAKING AND MAKING PLACE: THE STUFF OF POWER	53
6 COUNTER-CULTURES: GLOBAL, CORPORATE AND ANTI-CAPITALISMS	68
7 THE PLACE OF NATURE	89
8 THE PLACE OF ETHNICITY	104
9 SENSES OF PLACE: SCALES AND BELIEFS	119
10 MAKING AND MARKING NEW PLACES: THE CULTURAL GEOGRAPHIES OF YOUTH	132

FIRST PROOFS - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



vi CONTENTS

11 (B)ORDERING THE BODY	153
12 SWIMMING IN CONTEXT: DOING CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY IN PRACTICE	166
13 A CULTURALLY GEOGRAPHICAL APPROACH TO PLACE	176
<i>Bibliography</i>	183
<i>Index</i>	00



FIGURES

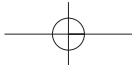
1.1	The place of Trafalgar Square	6
1.2	The traces of Alison Lapper	7
1.3	Post-imperial traces in Trafalgar Square	7
1.4	'Poll tax' riots, Trafalgar Square, 1990	8
1.5	Criminal Justice Bill demonstrations, Trafalgar Square, 1994	8
1.6	Iraq war protests, Trafalgar Square, 2003	9
1.7	Designated Riot Area, Trafalgar Square	9
2.1	Inspirations for the American branch of the cultural geography family tree	20
2.2	Artefacts in the cultural landscape	21
4.1	The reopened Mostar Bridge	42
6.1	Commodifying patriotism	74
6.2	Diesel 'protest'	87
7.1	The place of Uluru	89
7.2	The Three Gorges Dam, Yangtze River, China	94
9.1	Traces of belonging in Belfast	122
9.2	Belfast's (b)orders	123
9.3	Boxed in Amir Khan	128
10.1	Traceurs and traces: free-running places	140
10.2	Graffiti messages	144
10.3	A head full of facts . . .	148
10.4	The graffiti artist graffiti-ed	149
10.5	A 'completely pointless and mindless piece of vandalism'?	151

viii FIGURES

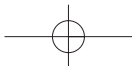
11.1	Hybrid and transgressive genders	159
13.1	The World Trade Center	178
13.2	The 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center	179
13.3	The Freedom Tower	181

TABLES

2.1.	Environments and cultures: determinism and possibilism	19
2.2.	Geographies of the cultural landscape	23
3.1.	Representational cultural geography	30
3.2.	Non-representational cultural geography	33
5.1.	Defining traces	57



FIRST PROOFS - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



BOXES

1.1	Culture in context: the case of Laos	2
1.2	No bikes on the sidewalk: all geographies are regulated	4
2.1	Places as palimpsests	22
4.1	The cultural geographies of location	39
4.2	A bridge between people and place: the case of Mostar	41
4.3	Expressions of a sense of place	43
4.4	'If I wanted to be disturbed I'd go and stay in a nightclub'	45
4.5	Typical Cardiff? The world in One City Road	48
4.6	Dreaming past places: detecting Victorian London today	50
4.7	Trace-chains: 'Castles 641 Starbucks 6'	51
5.1	Regulating cultural places: acts of dominating power	55
5.2	Ordering places: punishments and penalties	56
5.3	The creation of cultural orthodoxy: ordering and bordering the trains of South Wales	57
5.4	To dominate is to define	58
5.5	What's in a name?	59
5.6	Do you always do as you are told?	60
5.7	Acts of resistance	62
5.8	Freedom of speech as both domination and resistance	63
5.9	The trace-chains from one act of resistance: the case of Brian Haw	65
6.1	Breaking (b)orders: the fall of the Berlin Wall	69
6.2	Minimising labour costs: a case in Jakarta	70
6.3	Big Macs and big profits: the merging of capitalism and music culture	73

FIRST PROOFS - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

xii BOXES

6.4	The power behind transnationals' power: the Bretton Woods organisations and the growth of corporation culture	76
6.5	Whose town is this?	78
6.6	Cultural and geographical (b)orders of Freeport Mine, Indonesia	79
6.7	Power and dis/organisation in anti-capitalist movements	82
6.8	The methods and means of taking place in anti-capitalism	83
6.9	Debating and destabilising doxa	86
7.1	Should you climb Uluru?	90
7.2	Nature as other to human culture: a place to be protected	92
7.3	Nature as other to human culture: a place to be tamed	93
7.4	Nature as other to human culture: a place to be exploited	93
7.5	Temples and trees in Ankor Wat, Cambodia	98
7.6	A 'compromise' with nature: humans and nature at Lake Minnewanka, Banff, Canada	98
7.7	'How the canyon became grand	99
7.8	This is how I feel it	101
7.9	Killing nature or killing culture?	102
8.1	Tight control: the (b)ordering affects of barbed wire on Native Americans	107
8.2	Diversity <i>and</i> segregation?	111
8.3	Cultural racism: aborigines in Australia	112
8.4	Cultural racism: gypsies in the UK	113
8.5	Cultural racism: blacks in America	113
8.6	Cultural racism in wartime	115
8.7	Mixophobia and mixophilia at the Notting Hill Carnival	116
9.1	Birds nests, homes and Olympic dreams	125
9.2	A place of tension: geographical and religious disputes in Israel/Palestine	126
9.3	Senses of place in tension: hybridity hidden?	130
10.1	The mall as a cultural boundary zone	135
10.2	Scallies taking and making place	137
10.3	Youths in the hood, up to no good	138
10.4	Graffiti traces	142
10.5	This is my place: graffiti as a sign of cultural and geographical ownership	145
10.6	Field diary: graffiti on Queen's Walk, London	146
10.7	Graffiti brands the London Olympics	149
11.1	'If we don't smoke, they will call us feminine': smoking and masculinity in Indonesia	156
11.2	Re(b)ordering the feminine body	160
11.3	Patriarchy re-(b)ordered? Women rule okay in Chongqing, China	164

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As John Donne famously identified ‘no man is an *Iland*’ and, in a similar way, no book has one author. In light of these truths, I would like to gratefully acknowledge those who although may not be cited on the cover, have nevertheless contributed key traces to these pages.

Thanks go to those who have kindly given permission for the use of their photography, including: Christian Bortes, David Nurse, Ed Lovelock, Luca Belletti, Robin Hamman, Neil Hester, Peter Forsland, Austin Taylor-Labourn, Neil France, Senol Demir, SchNEWS, JG Basar, Rebecca Jackman, Debbie Elnahas and Kathy Doucette, Etherflyer, Mike Gregory, James Mattil at Woodkern Images, Chris Harris, Ian Cowe, David Glaves, Joel R. Altschuler, Steve Kaiser, Andy and Joel Saunders, Yuko Kootnikoff, Shayne Marchese, Susan Moore, Karen Chalk, and Claire Cutforth. Every effort has been made to contact the rights holders of images used. For those not mentioned, we will be pleased to include their names in any future editions of the book. Thanks also go to the editorial team at Routledge for egging me on towards the finish line.

I would like to personally thank Susan Moore for lending her ear to my moaning, Katie Jones for her inspiration on youth cultures, and Heather Morecroft for her ability with Endnote. Most importantly, I want to thank Claire Cutforth for her patience and support, and my family, for always being there.

FIRST PROOFS - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



FIRST PROOFS - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



1

INTRODUCTION

KEY

We live in a world of cultural places. You and I, and that person across from you in the library/café/bedroom (delete as appropriate) are in the cultural world. We live in it, we survive it (hopefully), and we contribute to it, everyday and night. The purpose of this book is to help us get a handle on why our world is like it is, what our role in it might be, and how we can sustain or change it. To this end, this book offers a culturally geographical approach to place. It exists to give us insights, feelings and understandings of our place in the world.

'... DOES NOT TAKE PLACE IN A VACUUM'

Working out a culturally geographical approach to place involves thinking about the terms 'culture' and 'geography'. Let's start with 'geography' first. Geography can often seem an abstract term, an abstract discipline even. Useful perhaps for knowing the capital of Iceland for Christmas games of *Trivial Pursuit*, but not much else. This book argues that geography is anything but

abstract. One way we can evidence this argument is through using a popular cliché borrowed from high school science classes, 'X [in this case, "cultural life"] *does not take place in a vacuum*'. Things, ideas, practices, and emotions all occur in a context, in a broader world that influences, values, celebrates, regulates, criminalises, sneers or tuts at particular activities and objects. Interest in this context, and how it influences, values, celebrates etc. is one thing that geography and geographers do. As Cook (in Clifford and Valentine, 2003: 127) identifies, 'so much depends on the context'. Context can influence what actions we choose to make and how we choose to make them, it can influence how these actions are judged by ourselves and others, and thus how successful and significant they turn out to be. Context is therefore vital to take notice of and understand, yet in everyday life it is something we often ignore – we are so used to it that it becomes ordinary, obvious, and even natural. Cresswell (2000: 263) describes this through using the South East Asian phrase 'the fish don't talk about the water'; in normal life we are often like fish in that we don't talk about our geographical context. Geographers, however, are weird fish, we seek to sensitise ourselves to the 'water'. Geographers swim in and investigate context.

2 INTRODUCTION

So, what are the appropriate contexts for geographical study? Context can be thought about in a variety of ways. Geographical context is often thought about in terms of national or political territories, physical landscapes or exotic places. These contexts are often clear, identifiable spaces which may be hotter or drier, colder or wetter, and defined by particular languages, laws, and customs that may be different or similar to our own. Each context will have an influence – and often

be influenced by – the activities occurring in that place. For example: in many countries religious, cultural or political laws influence what clothes are appropriate for different genders (see Box 1.1 for an example); in others seasonal conditions influence working and sleep patterns; whilst in yet other contexts ideologies of freedom and technologies of movement coincide to influence the degree of mobility within and between territories.

Box 1.1

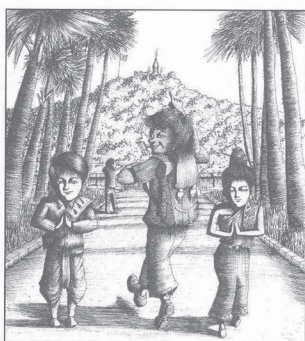
CULTURE IN CONTEXT: THE CASE OF LAOS

In Laos, South East Asia, the Provincial Tourist Department of Luang Prabang offers advice to visitors to sensitise them to the geographical and cultural context of the country. As excerpts from their advice

leaflet illustrate, the cultural context of Laos outlines appropriate ways to dress in particular places, and how the dominant religion influences how our bodies should stand in this place.



Luang Prabang
Provincial Tourism
Department
and
Big Brother Mouse



Sabai dee!

Welcome to one of the friendliest countries on the planet.

These ten suggestions will help you enjoy your visit, while helping us preserve our culture and traditions.

1

TEMPLES ARE BEAUTIFUL, and interesting, but most of all, they are holy places. Please visit, but dress appropriately, covering shoulders, knees, and everything in between. (Yes, that stomach, too!) Whether in a temple or on the street, women who wear a traditional *sihn* (long skirt) will find the gesture much appreciated.

IN BUDDHIST CULTURES, the head is high and the feet are low. Use your feet only for walking. (Okay, we'll make an exception if you're a kick-boxer!) Pointing your feet at someone – for example, by putting your feet up on a stool – is rude. So is stepping over someone seated on the floor.

2



FIRST PROOFS - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Political territories or physical landscapes are, however, not the only contexts that geographers can study. Any place or area, at any scale, or in any circumstance, could be thought about as a geographical context. For example, on a macro scale, we could think of Planet Earth as a context and how it influences and is influenced by the activities going on within it. At a micro scale, we could think of the room in which I am typing these words as a geographical context, or even the messy desk on which my computer rests – and explore how it influences and is influenced by the activities going on here. (If you are interested, there is lovely July sunshine coming through my office window, making it a rather nice day for life generally, thanks. This means that in all probability the desk won't be tidied today and not much more will be written! Sorry Ed.) Alternatively and imaginatively, we could think of other contexts for geographical exploration. A public square – and how it seems to encourage some uses and users rather than others, a field (ditto, but maybe for non-humans too?), a home, a wall, a coastline. What about the contexts of a classroom, a street, a pub, or a sports field? What about a theatre, a mine, a museum, a library . . . ? What activities are accepted as normal in these places? what behaviours are frowned upon? how are they regulated? do people conform to these regulations, and what happens if they don't? These are all crucial critical questions that geographers employ to analyse the contexts they study (see Box 1.2).

Alongside political spaces, physical landscapes and socially engineered places – at a variety of scales – are other forms of geographical context that we could study. Perhaps we could think about contexts of communication as relevant 'media spaces' for investigation. We could for example study the mainstream media or virtual space, spoken languages, written codes, or even non-verbal communications and how these influence (and are influenced by) particular groups. Other geographical contexts could include places of the body, for example the head, the heart, the skin even, in both material and metaphorical senses. These are perhaps unorthodox but nevertheless fascinating geographical contexts, and maybe you can think of others. In sum, geographical contexts can exist wherever there are human (and non-human) activities; the trick is to acknowledge them, work out what produces them, and what effect they have.

X MARKS . . .

We have established then that geographers have an interest in context. But if we turn back to our initial cliché, 'X [in this case, "cultural life"] *does not take place in a vacuum*', we should identify that this statement has other key components to it. We have focused on the vacuum (or context) component, but there is, of course, the initial activity – the X – that occurs too. Geography is equally concerned with this X, as it marks the spot where this activity interconnects with context. As this book deals with cultural geography, the question arises: what are appropriate cultural activities for geographers to study? The book argues that culture includes the material things, the social ideas, the performative practices, and the emotional responses that we participate in, produce, resist, celebrate, deny or ignore. Culture is therefore the constituted amalgam of human activity – *culture is what humans do*. In this light culture can include a range, perhaps even an endless range, of things. It includes aspects of society, politics and the economy, and can be identified or categorised by a range of different (and sometimes overlapping) groups. It is commonplace, for example, to hear the word culture being prefixed by terms such as 'pop', 'chav' or 'high'; by 'capitalist', 'democratic' or 'class'; by 'western', 'dance' or 'nomadic'; by 'Islamic', or 'sporting' or 'youth'. Cultures can be 'mainstream', 'sub-' or 'counter-'. Culture then can be seen as encompassing a wide spectrum of human life, it is not a separate entity from society, politics or the economy, but influences (and is influenced by) them all.

What cultural geography seeks to do, therefore, is explore the intersections of context and culture. It asks why cultural activities happen in particular ways in particular contexts. It is interested in exploring how cultural activities and contexts interact, influence and perhaps even become synonymous with one another. It operationalises this interest through identifying that the product of the intersection between context and culture is *place*. As our introductory cliché tells us: 'X [in this case, "cultural life"] *does not take place in a vacuum*.' In this (final) instance, the key component of this cliché is 'take place'. This component confers two important meanings. The first is that the incident in question took place, in the sense that it occurred, it happened. Secondly,

4 INTRODUCTION

Box 1.2**NO BIKES ON THE SIDEWALK: ALL GEOGRAPHIES ARE REGULATED**

The following images outline the regulations imposed on a range of geographical contexts. In the municipality of Santa Cruz, California, all visitors are reminded that it is considered normal not to start fires or feed wildlife; in Thailand's parks it is accepted that people won't smoke or drink; and in Bangkok's Royal Palace you shouldn't sit on the walls.



however, there is a clearly geographical element to this phrase: the cultural activity literally *took place*. It aggressively, passively, intentionally, or otherwise, took a place and contributed to its meaning and identity. From a culturally geographical point of view, therefore, places come by their meanings and identities as a result of the complex intersections of culture and context that occur within that specific location. Cultural geography explores place – these confluences of culture and context – to help us to know and act better in the world around us.

MAKING TRACES, MAKING PLACES

From a cultural geography perspective, places are taken and made by intersections of culture and context. In more detail, places are constituted by imbrolios of *traces*. Traces are marks, residues or remnants left in place by cultural life. Traces are most commonly considered as material in nature (material traces may include ‘things’ such as buildings, signs, statues, graffiti, i.e. discernible marks on physical surroundings), but they can also be non-material (non-material traces might include, for example, activities, events, performances or emotions). We can therefore see visible traces in places, but we can also sense them in other ways (we can hear them, smell them, even taste them or feel them), as well as being able to think on them, reflect on them, and perhaps – in our more sentimental moments – reminisce about them. Traces can therefore be durable in places both in a material sense (they have longevity due to their solidity and substance as things), but may also last due to their non-material substance (they may leave indelible marks on our memory or mind). As traces are constantly produced they continually influence the meanings and identities of places. In both material and non-material form they function as connections, tying the meaning of places to the identity of the cultural groups that make them. Traces therefore tie cultures and geographies together, influencing the identity of both. As a consequence of the constant production of traces, places become dynamic entities; they are in fluid states of transition as new traces react with existing or older ones to change the meaning and identity of the location. It is argued here, therefore, that places should be understood

as *ongoing compositions of traces*. Cultural geography interrogates these traces, their interactions, and repercussions. It critically appraises the cultural ideas and preferences motivating them, and the reasons for their significance, popularity and effect.

Let’s take an example to illustrate the culturally geographical approach to place advocated here (see Figure 1.1).

This is a photograph of a place. More specifically it’s a photograph of a place constituted by numerous traces: a statue, on a column, in a public square, with two fountains. Do you recognise where it is? What do you think these traces stand for? This is one of the first questions cultural geographers ask themselves: what do traces stand for? Taken literally, the statue, for example, is clearly standing on a column, which itself is standing in this square. (It is a material piece of cultural life standing in a geographical context.) But taken metaphorically, cultural geographers are asking what do traces stand for in the sense of what do they represent? Cultural geographers believe that traces can embody or represent ‘ideas’, and in this case this public statue was commissioned, developed, sited and maintained to foster particular value systems of particular groups. In other words, cultural geographers argue that traces are not neutral, they stand for particular cultural preferences or ideas about what the world should be like. Through doing this, these traces try to persuade us to agree with and support these cultural values too.

So let’s look at this photograph again. It’s a statue of Lord Admiral Horatio Nelson, raised to 61.5 metres altitude by the column that bears his name, in Trafalgar Square, London. The naming of the square is by no means incidental. It commemorates Nelson’s greatest naval victory over combined French and Spanish fleets in 1805. Why would the city planners of the 1800s want to create this statue and plaza? It has been argued that this place can be understood as a space of empire (Gilbert and Driver, 2000), built to commemorate British leadership and V/victory. It represents the military might and power of the British as a people and as a state. It seeks to inspire pride and patriotism in the country and demonstrate the values and urban design expertise of a civilised, industrial nation. So when cultural geographers look at this photograph, they do not simply see a statue, on a

6 INTRODUCTION



Figure 1.1 The place of Trafalgar Square

column, in a public square with two fountains, they see a material cultural trace, tightly bound up with a range of cultural ideas. These traces come together to constitute the place of Trafalgar Square.

In fixing our attention on the traces which constitute a place, geographers are in effect interpreting and translating places. They do so by interpreting and translating the traces (be they material or non-material) into the meanings intended by their 'trace-makers'. However, as we know in our own lives, there are many different opinions, thoughts and judgements about the meanings associated with any given trace. Translations may not only change with particular cultural groups, they may also change over time. We could ask ourselves, for example, whether the ideas of the nineteenth-century trace-makers

in Trafalgar Square still have currency and influence over us today? Do their ideas remain as strong and sturdy as Nelson's Column itself, or do they lurk in the shadows of the square which has been taken over by new trace-makers?

In 2005, a statue called 'Alison Lapper, Pregnant' by artist Marc Quinn was unveiled on a plinth in Trafalgar Square (see Figure 1.2). This material trace is a sculpture of a pregnant nude woman who has *phocomelia*, a condition which resulted in her being born with no arms and shortened legs. The conjunction of Alison Lapper and Horatio Nelson can be read as highlighting differences but also continuities between the nineteenth-century and twenty-first-century traces in Trafalgar Square. The statue of Alison Lapper clearly does not celebrate war

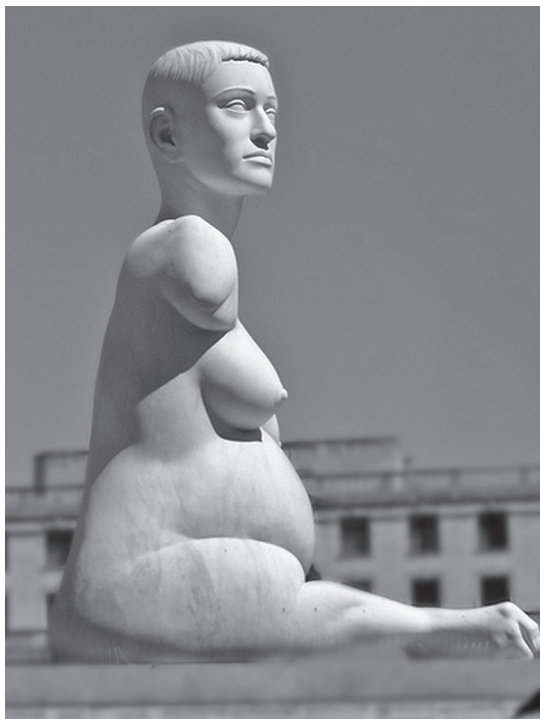


Figure 1.2 The traces of Alison Lapper

and victory (as Lapper herself stated, 'At least I didn't get there [Trafalgar Square] by slaying people' (Ebony, 2005: 37)), it may, therefore, celebrate a victory for a 'post-imperial' Britain (as Pile puts it, 2003: 30), where femininity, maternity and differences in ability are accepted and publicly endorsed. (It also perhaps draws our attention to the disabling injuries incurred by Nelson that are not conspicuous in his statued form.) Contemporary pride in victory is also now 'post-imperial' in nature as Trafalgar Square remains the focus for national festivities, as witnessed by the celebrations held for English wins in international competitions, be they the Rugby World Cup, the Cricket Ashes or London's Olympic Bid (see Figure 1.3).

Thus in fixing our attention on socially engineered places such as Trafalgar Square and the social ideas motivating them, we begin investigating the value systems and cultural preferences of these places' 'trace-makers'. We come to recognise that these places are made by many



Figure 1.3 Post-imperial traces in Trafalgar Square

8 INTRODUCTION

agents, not just the original planner, designer, or architect. We see that anyone who uses these places has the capacity to edit and re-edit them, adding their own cultural ideas through their specific cultural actions. In other words, with all the actions we participate in we inevitably take and make place (we, whether we like it or not, inevitably leave traces). In fixing our attention on the ways in which ideas, objects and actions take and make place we come to realise that places – and what they represent – are not fixed. As actions and ideas change over time, places become dynamic states of transition. In some places, the ideas, things and practices may change very slowly, almost imperceptibly, yet, in others, changes may occur by the season, the day of the week or by the hour of the day. One thing is certain, change is inevitable.

Be they relatively dynamic or relatively stable, the meanings and identities of places are often taken for granted, something we no longer consider and take notice of. Perhaps out of habit, custom or apathy, we often act in line with the dominant cultural ideas of a place, thus practising our agreement with or ambivalence towards them. In some cases, however, the cultural ideas motivating places are not taken for granted. In these cases the ideas may be highly contentious, generating disagreement and conflict among different cultural groups. In these cases, particular groups may no longer go along with the existing uses of these places, they may wish to challenge these uses and the ideas they stand for. Here the users of a place overtly change from being passive recipients of dominant place-makers' intent, into actors who purposely seek to edit places in new, contrasting ways. Through leaving their own traces in places, different groups can criticise one set of cultural ideas, and perhaps offer alternatives to them. Here are some examples from Trafalgar Square.

In each figure, particular traces have made Trafalgar Square into a different place. In Figure 1.4, members of the public riot against the Poll Tax (or Community Charge) in 1990. Here, rather than supporting and celebrating the British state, they take and make a Trafalgar Square that celebrates dissent, popular protest and even anarchy (see Mills *et al.*, 1990). Some may argue that free speech and assembly are bastions of British democracy, and thus such demonstrations emphasise the strengths of the British political system. However, Figure 1.5 illustrates



Figure 1.4 'Poll tax' riots, Trafalgar Square, 1990



Figure 1.5 Criminal Justice Bill demonstrations, Trafalgar Square, 1994

a rally in 1994 against the Criminal Justice Act, a piece of British legislation which criminalised this precise form of free speech and assembly. In further defiance of this legal statute, Figure 1.6 depicts the Anti-Iraq War demonstration of 2004 where British and American foreign policy was the focus of dissent. Each of these incidents creates a different challenge to the dominant interpretation of Trafalgar Square as a place of national pride and unity. Taken together they symbolise a place that has come to represent a site of recurrent division and disenfranchisement between the public and politicians, it stands for the types of ideas the former hold and the cultural activities they will employ in order to confront the ideas and activities of the latter. This alternative translation of Trafalgar Square is recognised by the stencil from the political-artist Banksy on the plinth of Nelson's Column (Figure 1.7). In citing Trafalgar Square as a 'designated' riot area, Banksy intentionally plays with notions of power and authority, highlighting how the public is now authoring the cultural geography of the square in a way not sanctioned by the state. In sum, therefore, these examples show that the identity and meaning of Trafalgar Square is not straightforward. It is not simply a place of patriotism, but also a place of civil disobedience against the national state. It is, like all other places, a composite of cultural ideas, activities, histories, presents and possible futures. Due to the multiple traces that come together to



Figure 1.6 Iraq war protests, Trafalgar Square, 2003



Figure 1.7 Designated Riot Area, Trafalgar Square

10 INTRODUCTION

make it, Trafalgar Square is, as Gilbert and Driver (2000: 29) put it, a 'contradictory' place.

TRACES BEGET TRACES . . .

So cultural geographers translate the coming together of multiple traces in places. They interpret the material things, the cultural activities, the social ideas and the broader contexts that constitute places in order to make sense of the world around us. Although material things (such as Nelson's Column) may leave more durable traces in places, cultural activities such as celebrations or protests, even more mundane everyday activities like commuting or shopping, despite being more transient in nature, are equally important traces to investigate. These activities may themselves leave some material traces (such as property damage after riots, pollution after commuting, litter and waste after shopping), but they also leave non-material traces in people's hearts and minds. (A BBC Television documentary on the Poll Tax riots in Trafalgar Square stated, for example, that the activities of both protesters and police 'scarred the nation' (BBC, 2005).) Such emotional and psychological traces – be they individual or collective – may be emphasised, concealed or spun by other actions in different, but related, contexts (for example, through reportage and comment on events in media spaces). These 'trace-chains' of things, activities, emotions and contexts have significance not simply for that generation of place and its identity. As we live in the cultural world, our attachment to places can be strengthened or eroded through these traces. These trace-chains are also significant as they may motivate similar actions in other places. For example, they may prompt law changes which affect the cultural context in future, or may change cultural attitudes among protesters, politicians and the public which produce new spaces of understanding, repression or dialogue. Thus when cultural geographers study place they study material objects, cultural activities, social ideas and geographical contexts. They investigate how these material and non-material traces, these emotions and ideologies, come together with spatial contexts to constitute particular places in time, and how these places impact on other sites that may be geographically or temporally disparate.

NON-HUMAN TRACES

However, it is not simply humans that contribute traces to places. Non-human actions and interactions also shape the cultural geographies of places. This non-human activity may come in the form of 'natural' disasters, weather events or animal activity. If we continue our example of Trafalgar Square, pigeons and their interactions with context and culture have played a key role in shaping the cultural geography of place. Pigeons leave their own inimitable traces (guano) on the statues of Nelson and Lapper, and these traces react with rainwater to produce an acidic fungus which dissolves the masonry (McClure, 2005). How these traces and their perpetrators are dealt with by the authorities highlight key aspects of the cultural relations between humans and non-humans (in this case, living birds and non-living statues). Are these birds tolerated or celebrated, are they protected or killed? In practice, a range of tactics have been used to keep Trafalgar Square a pigeon-free zone. Falcons have been used to discourage pigeons, bird seed sale and pigeon-feeding have been outlawed, whilst netting and mesh is used to discourage roosting. As a consequence of the removal of the majority of pigeons from Trafalgar Square, not only are the monuments preserved, but the place is easier to market for other uses (such as a setting for feature films).

SUMMARY: ONGOING COMPOSITIONS OF TRACES

Cultural geographers therefore analyse and interrogate all the agents, activities, ideas and contexts that combine together to leave traces in places. In the example above we have focused on a material context in the case of Trafalgar Square, but as stated, cultural geographers focus on a wide range of contexts, not simply material, but also the non-material: for instance, emotional spaces, languages spaces, or virtual spaces. The traces left in this range of contexts may be material or non-material, durable or temporary, left by humans or non-humans. They may produce the intentions desired by the trace-makers, or have unintentional effects on the agents and their audiences. These traces may overlap one another, synergise

together, or come into conflict with one another. They may change over time, thus making the identities and meanings of places dynamic, but nevertheless these traces often remain in place as shadows and echoes of places past. The traces may generate other traces in other places, linking places and traces together in chains that may become entangled and (con)fused. By understanding place as an *ongoing composition of traces* it facilitates the interrogation of these traces and how they come to confer cultural meanings to geographical sites. We can come to understand and critically act in place through interrogating the ideas motivating traces, the frequency and manner in which these traces are repeated and reinforced, their popularity and persuasiveness, the influence of their composers, and how they react with other competing traces-in-place. Through doing so, this book maps a culturally geographical approach to place.

A CULTURALLY GEOGRAPHICAL APPROACH TO PLACE

A culturally geographical approach thus encourages us to take a critical understanding of the places around us, as well as our position within them. It critically evaluates places as ongoing compositions of traces. In summary, this approach asks the following questions:

- What cultural traces dominate a particular place? Who and what do these traces stand for? In other words, whose place is this anyway?
- Are the traces in this place challenged and resisted? If so how?
- What do these alternative traces stand for? Whose places do they seek to make, and what would these places be like?
- What are the consequences of this ongoing composition? What trace-chains are set in motion, and what cultural orders and geographical borders are being established, new or otherwise?

As the culturally geographical approach also positions us within our world, two further questions are raised:

- Do these changes have any effect on how we should think about place? and

- Do these changes have any effect on how we should act in place?

As you may have identified, the questions raised by culturally geographical approach to place can be remembered through the shorthand of the emboldened acronym found in these queries (*Trace: Traces?; Resisted?; Alternatives?; Consequences?; Effects?*). In the chapters that follow, this book will further interrogate these traces and places through a culturally geographical approach. In each chapter we will look at different cultures and geographical contexts and interrogate the ways in which traces come together to define places and peoples. In each chapter we will answer the questions posed above, and introduce both empirical examples and theoretical ideas which facilitate understanding about how the world around us is generated, and our role within it.

Before we employ our culturally geographical approach we begin this book by outlining two chapters on 'where cultural geography has been'. These chapters give us a clear overview of the history of the discipline, covering the development of the definitions of, and approaches to, the terms 'culture' and 'geography'. Chapter 2 outlines the main changes encountered by the discipline up to the late twentieth century. It begins with an investigation of the connections between culture and geography in this history of exploration, and journeys through to the artefactual approach of Carl Sauer. Chapter 3 charts the emergence of a 'new' cultural geography in the latter decades of the twentieth century. It outlines two contemporary approaches that are often seen in opposition: the representational and the non-representational. The chapter outlines the key differences – but also the important similarities – between these theories and emphasises how this book's approach to place as an ongoing composition of traces effectively combines them.

In Chapter 4 our focus turns directly to place. It outlines differing definitions and understandings of the term, and how places are central to human tracings of belonging and community. It will introduce notions of *orders* and *borders* to help explain how places come to unite human identities and cultural geographies, giving us our 'sense of place'. Chapter 5 explores the notion of power. This chapter interrogates conventional

12 INTRODUCTION

understandings of power as 'domination' and 'resistance', and how these are inevitably tied to culture and geography. It will illustrate how, in practice, these conventional terms are often entangled together, producing contestations and multiple traces in places.

The remaining chapters take these ideas and investigate how a range of different cultural traces combine to influence the places around us. Chapter 6 focuses on perhaps the dominant culture in the world today: the culture of capitalism. It investigates the contested traces of capitalism through mobilising the theoretical instruments of power and place, the geographical connections between places across the globe, and their impact on notions of community and identity. Chapter 7 explores the relation of cultures to nature. It investigates how different cultures naturalise 'nature' in different ways and to different ends. Chapter 8 investigates how ethnicity impacts on how places are taken and made. It explores a range of bordering tactics that seek to purify some but partner other ethnic traces to produce the ideal composition of place for particular cultural groups. Chapter 9 explores how senses of place can be created around geographical scales, but also around cultural ideas. It investigates how traces such as patriotism and religion can combine to strengthen but also complicate our own sense of place. Chapter 10 centres on the traces motivated and engendered by ideas of age. This chapter examines

how adult and youth cultures interact to take and make the places around them, focusing on examples of free running and graffiti. In Chapter 11 we explore the place of the body. Specifically we investigate the manner in which traces can be written on the body through our gender and sexuality. We see how these bodily categories can be culturally and geographically controlled through invented roles and relations, before exploring how these controls are subverted or resisted through processes of individualisation. From these chapters we see that we are inextricably part of the cultural world. We are part of this world as citizens, but also as cultural geographers. As it is important to consider how we relate to and act in this world Chapter 12 outlines a range of common methods for *doing* cultural geography. It begins by outlining key issues for any project on ethics and access, before giving a brief introduction to methodologies that seek to explore the language of the word (namely interviews and the analysis of cultural texts), and the language of the world (through embodied practices and ethnography). Finally, Chapter 13 brings together the threads outlined in *Understanding Cultural Geography: Places and Traces*. It encourages readers to think critically about their own experiences and perceptions of living in cultural places and contributing to cultural geography. Let's begin this book, therefore, by finding out where cultural geography has been.