

# Introduction: Situating Social Geographies

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The label ‘social geography’ is more than a century old. As evidenced in correspondence, French geographer Élisée Reclus appears to have coined the term around 1895 (Dunbar, 1977). He wrote about it in the early drafts and final versions of his six-volume work *L’Homme et la Terre* (*Man and the Earth*), which was published posthumously in 1905 (see also Kropotkin, 1902). Concerned with the way space mediates the production and reproduction of key social divides – such as class, race, gender, age, sexuality and disability – social geography eventually became broadly established as ‘the study of social relations and the spatial structures that underpin those relations’ (Jackson, 2000b: 753). Within that broad rubric, different authors have approached the subject in a variety of ways: Jackson and Smith (1984) set out its philosophical underpinnings; Cater and Jones (1989) opt for a focus on social problems; Valentine (2001) concentrates on the many scales of inclusion, exclusion and identity; Pain et al. (2001), like Ley (1983) and Knox (2000), explore the production of inequality;

and Panelli (2004) turns attention, theoretically and empirically, to the many facets of difference. Social geographies can be specialized – as in Peach’s (1975) version of ‘spatial sociology’; but they can also be so wide-ranging as to subsume the whole of human geography, as evidenced in the several edited collections that profile the eclecticism of the subject (see, for example, Eyles, 1986; Pacione, 1987; Hamnett, 1996).

Like every other part of geography, social geographies have changed with the times: methodological signatures have shifted, and intellectual fortunes have waxed and waned, as topics that once seemed cutting-edge turn out to be mundane. In recent years, moreover, the volatility of politics and economy has unsettled existing intellectual traditions, demanding a radical overhaul of nearly every way of knowing and being; and social geographies are not exempt. Successive ‘turns’ to culture, politics, environment and economy have, indeed, frequently eclipsed geographers’ identification with the social. During the 1990s, for example, there was a sense that

human geographers had become so caught up in the circulation of discourses and the instability of representations that they were unable to recognize the material practices sustaining social exclusion. In response, Smith (1993), Gregson (1995) and Peach (2002) all – in their different ways – expressed concern that social geographers' radical commitment to tackling oppression, inequality and poverty was weakening. More recently, in a world where culture merges with nature, humanity is wired to technology, genetics blur into experience, and the human and non-human form complex material and affective assemblages, even the idea of 'the social' seems less persuasive than it once was.

At the start of the twenty-first century, the 'social' has certainly begun to be articulated in new (and renewed) ways. For example, alongside a resurgence of concern for social justice, 'the social' has been reframed to express more directly the materiality of social life (Gregson, 2003); social geographies have begun to build capacity for more moral, caring and politically aware research (Cloke, 2002); and the subject has been reinvigorated by ideas, drawn from philosophers such as Deleuze, Guattari and Latour, which have prompted geographers interested in non-representational theory to interpret 'the social' in quite different ways. In short, understandings of the social have, on the one hand, splintered (creating both tensions and complementarities in the subject), but on the other hand, they have also become more nuanced and (often) increasingly relevant (Del Casino and Marston, 2006).

Questions of relevance, in particular, have acquired a new urgency as critiques of globalization and neoliberalism have called for practical action from inside as well as outside the academy. While combining research and activism has been a longstanding interest for a minority of social geographers, an editorial published in *Area* by Kitchin and Hubbard (1999) marked a sea-change of interest in this aspect of the subdiscipline (see also Fuller and Kitchin, 2004; Pain, 2003; Kondon et al., 2007). One result is that, across a wide range of contexts, inclusive, participatory

action research in social geography is gaining momentum in a bid to develop fully collaborative research, publication and intervention, in partnership with those who have traditionally been the 'subjects' of research.

There is, of course, no singular history or unified trajectory for the subject: social geographies, like all forms of knowledge and knowing, are diverse. Notably, there is a 'geography of social geography'. The generalizations above, and indeed those which follow, refer especially to the Anglo-American geographies about which this handbook has most to say. But it is important to recognize that, beyond the Anglo-American realms and which seem still to marginalize the geographies that are produced elsewhere and other ways of approaching the subject are taking centre stage. These are, as might be expected, highly diverse (Kitchin, 2007). Particularly exciting are developments in the Antipodes, where attempts to integrate various indigenous perspectives into geographical scholarship present a fundamental challenge to ideas rooted in the 'global north' (Kearns and Panelli, 2007; Kondon and Latham, 2002; Panelli, 2008). In some parts of Europe, in contrast, social geographies are barely visible: a poor relation to economic or cultural geographies (see Garcia-Ramón et al., 2007, on Spain); And where they do thrive they often lack the critical edge that is so much their hallmark elsewhere (see, for example, Musterd and de Pater, 2007, on Holland; Timár, 2007, on Hungary). These multiple social geographies reflect both national traditions and the intellectual and political trajectories of individual authors. As Kitchin's (2007) collection shows, they all contribute in valuable ways to the patchwork of social geographies whose whole – we will now argue – adds up to much more than the sum of its parts. Importantly, while the Handbook that follows is mainly written by Anglo-American social geographers for an English-reading audience, it also draws from wider traditions which are altering what social geographies are and redefining who these geographies are for (see, for example, in this volume, Kobayashi

and de Leeuw (Chapter 4), and Kindon and others (Section 23)).

## MOTIVATIONS

Scholarship self-consciously labelled ‘social geography’ may be radical or conservative, life changing or mundane, engagingly relevant, comprehensively bland or uniquely quirky. It is above all diverse, covering many topics, embracing a mix of methods, rooted in a variety of places and practised in different, multiple, ways. Hence the title: a *Handbook of Social Geographies*. But why collect so many snippets of such a wide-ranging subject into a single volume? It is certainly not the desire to revive, define or narrate a particular vision or version of social geography that inspired this work. The time when defining what is and is not appropriate for scholars to research has long passed. So too has the space for positioning the social ‘turn’ as a means of, for example, reconstituting geography as a social science, or placing social problems at the heart of the subject, or creating any singular role for academic geography. Compiling a historiography of social geography might have been an interesting option, but more compelling was a sense of the urgency – and timeliness – expressed by colleagues and authors for considering what social geography might *become*. So, this collection is, above all, a commentary on what social geographers can do for the projects of social science in general and for the conduct of geography in particular.

To this end, it is worth remembering that, in the past, social geographies often gained their momentum by exploring a wide range of specialist subjects, all of which are inspired, first, by a pressing interest in how the social world works, and second by a common respect for the power of geography – of arrangements in time and space – in accounting for this (Buttimer, 1968). Social geographers might, then, have specialist knowledge about the laws against discrimination, but their

underlying aim will be to provide new interpretations of, say, residential segregation or the spaces of citizenship. Similarly, social geographers might know a lot about the interweaving of genetic, behavioural and environmental precursors of disease, but in disentangling these factors, their aim is to account for the enduring link between place and health. One of the key achievements of social geography over the years has, indeed, been to speak powerfully to the policies and practices that have made experiencing different kinds of spaces – at home, at work, in cities, in rural communities, in schools, hospitals and prisons – so divided and unequal.

The challenge for the 21st century is that these issues – of exclusion, inequality and welfare – not only persist but have tended to become both entrenched and unexceptional. A series of successive human and environmental catastrophes has prompted a crisis of justice, politics and ethics, demanding a radical overhaul of nearly every way of knowing and being. For geography, the disciplinary practicalities of this are compounded by the extent to which traditional appeals to space, either in its own right or in its entanglements with time, have been far too successful. No discipline escaped the ‘spatial turn’ into the new millennium, and since then, time has similarly repositioned itself at the centre of the social stage. Geography’s perpetual identity crisis is back on the agenda, callously stripping away a once-neat spatio-temporal container from the ‘selection of different things’ whose coherence it formerly secured. Human geography in general and social geography in particular have merged into other subject specialisms; disciplinary space is fractured, its role fragmented across a new intellectual division of labour.

The editors and authors in this Handbook offer some thoughts about what comes next by using social geography as a prism, refracting a subfield whose specialisms were once linked by a common concern with ‘space and place’ into a spectrum of approaches whose central theme is that of ‘making connections’. This focus on connectivity (across space, place,

sites, situations and positionings) combines the varieties of social geographies into an outward-looking enterprise whose momentum comes from forging connections, crossing intellectual horizons and being committed to making a difference. The remainder of this essay amplifies this point.

We begin by offering some *reflections* on the rich archive assembled in the name of social geography. This archive is not presented as a systematic historiography but rather as a commentary on a series of foundational propositions – around society and space, social inequality and welfare, ethics, morality and justice, and methodological diversity – that have intruded insistently into the lexicon of social geography for at least a hundred years. Sifting through the debris of days long gone, we present a selection of themes which, far from being locked in the past, speak actively to the future.

The second section of this introduction turns attention more squarely onto the *connections* scholars now trace between social geographies, on the one hand, and the subject matter of geography's other subfields, indeed of the varied specialisms of social science as a whole, on the other. By profiling four nodes in this web of connectivity – social–nature, social–economic, social–political and social–cultural – we suggest that social geographies today are, above all, about the possibilities and limitations of relatedness; about the spaces of creativity forged 'in between' established approaches and ideas. These, at least, are the kinds of social geographies that run through this collection, as the authors explore the construction, production and practice of ideas that reach across old boundaries, seek out new alliances and perhaps help create a new kind of world.

Finally, the third section of this overview essay concludes with some *projections* – a taste of the sections comprising the five parts of the handbook, which, far from representing a stylized account of 'progress' in social geography, are very much about the multiple lines of flight that are now poised to materialize. Each of these sections has a short editorial introduction of its own, which immediately

prefaces the chapters concerned. The discussion here is therefore intended simply to give a flavour of what is to come as we – the editors, and the 37 other authors who have contributed to this work – attempt to capture, perhaps create, the shape of the future. To that end, we offer a passing comment on the changing landscapes of difference and diversity, the intercalation of economy and society, the vexed question of well-being, the urgency of revisiting social justice, and the challenge of actually *doing* social geographies.

## REFLECTIONS

It is always tempting to cling to the idea that disciplines and their constituencies 'progress'; that knowledge is cumulative; that what we know now (and how we learn about it) must be somehow better – more refined, ethically improved, more fitted to the times – than anything that has gone before. And it would be worrying if there were not some grain of truth in the progressive thesis. But the history of ideas is a fractured, even murky, affair. As writings, reputations, careers and fashions come and go, great ideas often do displace mediocrity, and enduring truths can nudge passing fashions out of the limelight; but, equally, things of value are lost, trivia have a habit of taking centre stage, average ideas are too often stripped from old contexts and made to look new, and some of the least inspiring themes can be surprisingly sticky. Turning to the past is, therefore, anything but straightforward. Yet the central themes of this book owe a considerable debt to earlier generations, and it is worth attending to these sources not just as historical documents, but also to consider what lessons they hold for today. In this section we consider four enduring and important foundations for social geography – themes that have come to define the subfield as a distinct enterprise within and beyond geography.

First we address the truism that social geography has always been committed to – well – *the idea of the social*. Initially, as we see

below, this meant documenting the structures and processes that connect societies with space and thereby infuse the different modes of engagement and avoidance among people. Increasingly, as the essays that follow show, it is about exploring the social and emotional content of relations that tie people to the elements of nature and to the object-world of things.

Second, there is a longstanding pre-occupation among social geographers (much more so, ironically, than among economic geographers) with the *hard edge of inequality and the uneven experience of welfare*. Whether to its credit or not (and it has been criticized for this), social geography has tended to be associated with a multi-dimensional view of inequality: with a vision of social structure in which income does not map directly onto class, and where class is not the only axis of inclusion; but where, nevertheless, all relations are power filled, and where inequalities, which may be shifting, are always systematic and are enacted through the medium of space.

Third, enlarging on this, social geography has always been *a moral enterprise*, characterized above all by a drive for the principles and practicalities of justice. Some of this work has focused primarily on critique: on 'simply' trying to understand how unequal the world might be, and aiming to document the extent and experience of injustice. Increasingly, however, social geographies are drawn into a normative 'turn' in social research, and there is growing interest not only in how things are, but also in what they should become.

Finally, social geographies have acquired *a reputation for methodological eclecticism*. In the past, this may have been cast as a weakness: a failure to grasp the importance of theory; a tendency to lapse into unthinking empiricism. But more recently this eclecticism is being positioned as a strength: not just because mixed methods are coming into their own, but because of the space this opens up for a wider range of tactics of encounter, partnership and activism. The methods of social geography are increasingly geared to enhancing its practical relevance and exploiting its normative leanings.

### ***Society and space together***

First, then, social geography has always been committed to integrating 'the social' with 'the spatial'. This seems like an obvious point, given the combination of terms that identify 'social geography' as a distinct subfield. But connecting society and space is not that simple: the materialities and concepts registered by these terms have seen considerable theoretical disruption over the past century. Society, for its part, was often the taken-for-granted empirical description of the characteristics of a population, typically demarcated by national, linguistic, environmental or other boundaries (Vidal de la Blache, 1911; see Buttner, 1971). As the residual of cultural traits, and particularly when constrained by national and sub-national boundaries in data collection, characteristics of 'the social' were often reduced to demographic data on birth rates, death rates, 'racial' composition, sex ratios, age structure and the like (Hettner, 1977; Trewartha, 1953).

Under the theoretical influences of modern sociology, however, the study of society in social geography took both an institutional and a relational 'turn' in the post-war era. On the one hand, society became increasingly distinguished from culture through a focus on institutions like the family, the school and the workplace. On the other hand, a concentration on social relations between people, rather than simple descriptions of their socio-demographic characteristics, led to a more interesting set of questions regarding the status of the individual within society (Giddens, 1984), including her or his relationship to social structures and to the institutions that embed and perpetuate them. All of these orientations led sociologists in particular to amass a large body of theory orientated around the concept of 'stratification' – the study of the differential allocation of and access to resources, including power, among different social groups. 'Society' was further differentiated – destabilized is perhaps a better descriptor – by the social constructivist approaches developed in the 1980s and 1990s

(see Jackson and Penrose, 1993; S.J. Smith, 1989).

Like the idea of the social, the concept of geography also had its unfurlings. Early on, 'space' was reduced to topographical or climatological regions that underwrote sweeping approximations of cultural and social differences (see 'Social/Nature' below). This view of containerized space fits well with the undifferentiated view of society, as national and sub-national boundaries were convenient demarcations for simplifying the collection of data on populations and enabling the cartographic description of spatial variations. Against the backdrop of the 'quantitative revolution' of the 1960s, however, social geographers came to embrace the mapping and analysis of spatial variations, using what for many were the new tools of statistics – with factor analysis and regression leading the way. Social geographic research during this period focused on the geography of poverty (Morrill and Wohlenberg, 1971), social inequality (D. Smith, 1973), residential differentiation (Murdie, 1969), ghetto formation (H.M. Rose, 1971), residential relocation (Brown and Moore, 1970) and migration (Roseman, 1977), among other topics. Central, and controversial, questions in these studies were the nature and direction of spatial correlates: how did racial distributions relate to spatial patterns of poverty, for example? Whether or not the quantitative 'spatial sociologies' inspired by such questions could ever yield a definitive answer – could measures of the intensity of segregation or the extent of isolation say anything about the degree of 'choice' or 'constraint' structured into residential patterns, for example – geographers made an important empirical contribution as they experimented with different techniques, sought cross-contextual validation of findings, and engaged with mainstream theories in sociology, economics and political science in formulating their hypotheses (see Del Casino and Jones III, 2007).

It was not until the rise of dialectical spatiality in the mid-to-late 1970s (Harvey, 1973; Soja, 1980; Massey, 1984; McDowell, 1983; S.J. Smith, 1984) that geographers began to

conceptualize new approaches to linking society and space: not a space in which social characteristics are mapped and relations unfold *on space*, but a geography that is integral to and formed by those characteristics and relations. An overview of this shift is given in S.J. Smith (1999, 2005). The more contemporary view – which drew in large measure on interpretations of Henri Lefebvre's 'production of space' (1991, originally 1974) – holds that social and spatial relations are co-determinate. Thus, for example, a social relation such as patriarchy cannot be described or analyzed outside of the segregated spaces of the home, which in traditional architecture has tended to separate and thereby reinforce the gendered character of different social and work activities (Hayden, 1984). Likewise, a city's geography – its spatial distributions of homes, day-care facilities and workspaces – can produce a triple-day, a constrained time-geography that adds commuting to a workday already burdened by the time spent in production and social reproduction (England, 1993; Hanson and Pratt, 1995; Preston and McLafferty, 1993). Not that these relations and spatialities are uncontested: indeed, older patriarchies are challenged by modern housing designs, and by partners who do their share of coordinating the demands of social reproduction. But, under the dialectical view, any shift in social relations requires some sort of spatial reorganization, some new form of *socio-spatial* practice that brings into being new possibilities, including new social spaces.

This conjoined emphasis on space and society finds adherents in other social disciplines, especially in sociology following Giddens (1984), with stratification scholars undertaking what amounts to a spatial 'turn' (Gans, 2002; Gieryn, 2000; Lobao, 1993, 2004; Tickamyer, 2000). As a recent book aimed at integrating contemporary stratification theory with theories of space, scale and place proclaims: 'Increasingly, sociologists view geographic space alongside race, class, gender, age and sexuality as an important source of differential access to resources and

opportunities ...' (Lobao et al., 2007: 3). This is, perhaps encouragingly, very similar to definitions of social geography written as much as a decade before, and it is a reminder of the extent to which the sub-fields of human geography can be a catalyst, as well as a crucible, for cross-disciplinary and intra-disciplinary engagement.

### ***Social inequality and welfare***

When social geography emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, it was during a period of popular political ferment and revolutionary hope in Europe and the Americas and in response to a myth about the inevitability of 'progress'. It was in this context that Élysée Reclus, who was pivotal to the emerging field, wrote *L'Homme et la Terre*. In effect this means that the first comprehensive statement about social geography was aimed at opposing all forms of domination of people and nature (Clark and Martin, 2004). Reclus attempted to synthesize social theory, social and environmental geography and anarchism, in order to 'help humanity discover its meaning as a historical being and as an aspect of the earth's larger processes of self-realization' and to demonstrate that 'the discovery of these truths about ourselves can also help us to act consciously and responsibly as part of a developing human community and a developing earth community' (Clark and Martin, 2004: 3). In light of this, it is particularly interesting to note, as Dunbar (1977) has pointed out, that in nineteenth century France 'socialist' and 'social' were synonymous terms and that, from its first appearance as a distinct concept, social geography was, within a larger discipline, the orientation most committed to understanding and addressing social ills.

This mantle has subsequently been worn by a number of key figures who might be thought of as social geographers. While it is fair to say that social geography has been dominated by scholars arranged from the centre to the Left of the political spectrum, it

is pointless to look for political agreement, because there is little to find (although there is, as we later suggest, scope to build productive alliances around morality and ethics across diverse socialist, feminist and anti-racist research agendas). What is important here is the extent to which social geography – whatever its politics – has been concerned with the multi-dimensionality of inequality, whether forged through the spatial relations of production (income and class), embedded in patterns of distribution (the provision and consumption of education, health care, housing, and financial services, as well as the acquisition of commodities and experiences), or ingrained in the structures of participation (the entitlements and obligations of citizenship).

Inevitably, handling these many dimensions of inequality means that, at some times, in some places, and among some authors, certain themes have been privileged over others. There is, for example, a rich archive of research focusing on *either* race, *or* gender, *or* sexuality, *or* religion, *or* age, *or* health, *or* disability. Whether for practical reasons, or for heuristic purposes, or to make an important political point, there has been a tendency to separate out different axes of oppression; and these enduring markers of inequality (race, gender, class, age and disability) continue to be interrogated in this collection. Amongst other things, this orientation reflects and extends a tradition that has always been interested in the intersection of social structures with income or class, but which equally has resisted the temptation to reduce everything to these financial markers.

In practice, of course, most scholars also recognize that even the most entrenched and enduring markers of difference (which are both symbols of identification and principles of inclusion or exclusion) are not separate. All social relations are gendered, *and* racialized, *and* about ability/disability, *and* structured by age, *and* mediated by income and class, and so on. The challenge is to ask whether and when the many categories of social life should be held together, and to establish when, where and why it might be appropriate

to focus on one of them and not another. It is particularly important to grasp the first as well as the second element of this challenge, at a time when the systematic, overlapping and interacting character of different styles of discrimination and exclusion tends – partly through a valid concern to recognize qualities of difference and expressions of diversity – to be fragmented and dispersed. So the editors and authors of this collection seek explicitly to recognize and address the splintering of social life, not only embracing the extent to which difference and inequality are multidimensional, but grasping the significance of their intersectionality and engaging in an ongoing struggle to recognize and confront the complex *disequalizing* practices embedded in struggles for welfare and wellbeing.

One of the things the diverse social structurings of human life share is, of course, the fact that they are mediated by geography. Space and place (as materials and as metaphors) have accordingly been powerful routes into a better understanding of just how inequality works. David Smith recognized this in the early 1970s when he coined the much-quoted phrase ‘Who gets what, where and how?’ (Smith 1973, 1977). The core of the question is plucked from the heart of moral philosophy, but Smith’s attempt to operationalize it in geography drew attention to the distributional inequalities that inspired a generation of ‘welfare geographies’. This achieved a number of important things, two of which merit particular attention.

First, the broad focus on ‘who gets what’ underlined the extent to which societies are structured not just by markets, incomes and employments, but also by inequalities in entitlements to, and the materials of, welfare. That is, while some of the key divides that have preoccupied social geography can be accounted for with reference to the workings of economy, this is only true to the extent that economies are structured, tempered and divided by a politics of welfare. Race-making works, and gender divisions and other inequalities are reproduced through the interaction and interconnection of labour markets, housing

systems, educational structures and welfare transfers: none of these is entirely reducible to the other; each demands interrogation. Recognizing this inspired a generation of research on welfare geography which, amongst other things, pointed to the merits of distributing goods and services according to need rather than ability to pay (see Smith and Easterlow (2004) for a critique and reaffirmation of this tradition). And when welfare states came under attack from the political Right this tradition, in turn, informed a new wave of critical research on geographies of welfare restructuring, whose momentum was established well before the label ‘neo-liberalism’ gained the notoriety it has today.

Second, this work on welfare geographies helped identify the challenge of promoting well-being as a goal that is separate from (if related to) poverty, and which requires its own research agenda. This was part of a rallying cry for a shift from medical to health geographies (Kearns and Moon 2002), and it sowed the seeds of a new interest in geographies of well-being and contentment, which is taken up in this volume.

### ***Ethics, morality and justice***

A third thread that binds the history and geography of socio-geographical research is the positioning of such scholarship as part of an ethical and moral enterprise. The subdiscipline has always been characterized by a drive for justice, through strands of work that carry a strong sense both of morality (what is wrong or right with the world) and of ethics (what our responsibilities toward others are). Such scholarship is concerned above all to employ moral and ethical sensibilities to question the relevance of geography in the pursuit of fairness and equity (see, for example, Cloke, 2002; Proctor and Smith, 1999; D. Smith, 2000).

The impulse for this comes from several overlapping directions, all of them radical geographies in the sense of wanting to break with complacency and to use both practice

and critique to create a better world. This commitment was, in a sense, institutionalized though the establishment of *Antipode: a Radical Journal of Geography* in 1969 at Clark University in the USA. At first, this journal reflected the era's Marxist and socialist geographical critiques of capitalist societies and their inequitable class relations (e.g. Harvey, 1973; Peet, 1977). Later feminist geographers exposed the inequalities in gender relations that also underpin cultures, societies and spaces (e.g. Hanson and Monk 1982; McDowell 1983); such work also helped strengthen understandings of the everyday experiential dimensions of inequality, forcing a shift of attention from power-wielders to various forms of resistance to power in social life (see Pain et al., 2001; Panelli, 2004; Valentine, 2001). More recently, anti-racist, postcolonial and indigenous geographies have questioned the whiteness and imperialism that remain ingrained within the discipline, preserving and recreating spaces of racist and neo-imperialist oppression (Blunt and Rose, 1994; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Shaw et al., 2006). And now there is a growing interest among radical geographers in working between the boundaries of feminist, postcolonial and anti-racist geographies, exploring their intersections with sexualities, age and (dis)ability. These various related leanings – which have, arguably, become mainstream in critical/radical social geography scholarship – have common ground in being drawn towards a new 'normative turn' in academia, acknowledging and forefronting the goals of equality, justice and human rights. This ongoing encounter between radical geographies and normative theory is, significantly, profiled in a recent volume of *Antipode* (Olson and Sayer, 2009).

This encounter is important because, whilst much of the history of (radical) social geography has been about diagnosing what is wrong and establishing what scholarship is against, arguably we have had less to say about what social geography is *for*. This is of course an overstatement, but it is certainly the case that disagreements over the roots of

key problems, arguments over desirable ends, and debates on the most appropriate or workable means of achieving them, have made normative theorizing (imaging, debating and practising how the world *should* be) difficult and, to an extent, unpopular. What is exciting, however, is the growing possibility of a convergence of interest across domains of radical, moral and ethical geographies in the idea and practice of an ethics of care. S.J. Smith (2005), for example, points to a possible alliance of socialist idealism with critical feminism in the drive to place care at the centre of social and welfare policies, extending this even into the heart of the marketplace. In the same way, Clark et al. (2007) draw attention to the ethical dimensions of consumption which are changing the way goods are produced and sold. In ways too numerous to list here, the centrality of care-giving and receiving to all of human life – to the constitution of the social – is now widely recognized and is beginning to occupy centre stage in accounts of society and social geography.

On the one hand, this has prompted a rethink of the quality of social relations in the spaces of homes, institutions and national jurisdictions. This quest to construct more care-full spaces has brought together scholars interested in informal care (highlighting in particular its gendered character through, for example, the idea of 'caringscapes' (McKie et al., 2002)), in the institutionalization of an ethic of care, within and beyond social policy, and in the challenge of putting the principle of caring into practice in every sphere of life. On the other hand, this interest in an ethic of care has drawn attention to a new kind of social geography, prompting scholars to wrestle with the question: what are our human responsibilities not just for those nearby (with whom our interdependence is readily recognizable) but also for *distant* others (those who are geographically removed from our direct experience) who are the victims of exploitation, abuse, repression or violence? How *far*, asks David Smith (1998, 2000), can and should we care Barnett (2005) offers a helpful philosophical and theoretical

comment on possible answers, while Gerhardt (2008) illustrates the urgent practicalities of this with respect to the genocide in Darfur, Sudan. This growing body of work is attempting to engage issues in moral philosophy and social theory, and to develop a concept, practice and ethics of care which recognizes the embeddedness of human life within complex webs of geographically varying norms and values.

It is around issues of justice and fairness that social geography is, perhaps, at its most practically engaged. In seeking to use social geographic research as a way into questions of justice, some use their work to try to inform policy, locally, nationally or even internationally; some provide support for the specific redistributive objectives which their lay collaborators are working towards; others use the knowledge produced to motivate through their writing, dissemination and teaching. As recent debates about 'public geographies' have suggested (Hawkins et al., forthcoming; Fuller, 2008), geographers as a whole could be much better at influencing public debates and shaping what goes on outside the academy. Though this potential is not yet fully realized, there is no question that many social geographers continue to be engaged with struggles for a better world.

### ***Methodological diversity***

Finally, as befits such a rich and varied history, social geographies are methodologically diverse, and have generally sustained this diversity even as technological innovation or intellectual fashion favour some elements of the methodological toolkit over others. Empirics have always been of fundamental importance here: a longstanding tradition of fieldwork accompanied the early development of the sub-discipline, and all kinds of fieldwork remain popular today. Quantification has always been of interest, though the technical skills required to use quantitative methods wisely and effectively remain unevenly spread. Qualitative research of all kinds has

proved increasingly popular, and, not surprisingly for a lexicon that spans interviews, encounter, textual interpretation, historical analysis, visual practices, action research and much, much more, these approaches have, together, been a hallmark of social geography for the past fifteen years. It is, nevertheless, possible to think of this methodological diversity as embracing perhaps four major 'shifts' over the past half century; it may even be fair to characterize these shifts as 'progressive' in some way.

The first significant turn was to a positivist epistemology from the 1960s onwards. During this 'quantitative revolution' the assumptions of pure science (such as generalizability and law-building) were applied to the study of social problems, underpinned by a belief that this would allow geographers to make significant contributions to progressive social change. This kind of hope had long characterized empirical social science, especially in Europe where turn-of-the-twentieth-century social reformists such as William Booth placed great faith in the power of numbers to resolve the problem of what to do politically about poverty. By the 1960s, however, the possibility of using new and rapidly developing survey, statistical and computational methods to add precision, confidence and authority to the process gave new impetus to this quest (Billinge et al., 1984; S.J. Smith, 1986). At the same time, quantitative methods were seen as a unifying force for geography as the discipline moved through one of its many identity crises. For a mix of reasons, therefore, the quantitative tradition became, and in certain parts of the sub-discipline remains, extremely popular. Before too long, however, these approaches were critiqued: first, because their application too often proved inconclusive; second, for their failure to identify the deeper causes of social inequalities; and finally, because of the unreasonable claim that quantitative, 'scientific' researchers might be thought of as neutral, objective 'disinterested observers' whose findings were especially authoritative (see Mercer, 1984; Rose, 1993). It was this 'value-free' myth that

radical approaches, including Marxist and feminist geographies, quickly began to challenge (Blunt and Wills, 2000) as a critical tradition displaced the claims of inductivism on social geographers' imaginations.

However, positivism and its spinoffs have a long and diverse history (Hoggart et al., 2002), and dismissing their many epistemological or methodological manifestations on these grounds alone is too simple. Recently, some have argued for a return to quantitative methods on the grounds that they may – as their early practitioners had hoped – be useful for challenging inequality simply because they are the tools most widely acceptable to politicians and policy-makers (Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi, 1995); others seek to increase the validity and purchase of quantitative techniques by using them alongside qualitative methods (McKendrick 1999); some distinguish quantitative methods from positivist approaches (see Kwan in Chapter 26) or uncouple quantitative approaches from masculinist versions of science by challenging the quantitative/qualitative dualism itself (Lawson, 1995). In short, quantitative social geography is alive, well, and could do more for us in the future than it has in the past.

The empirical tradition in social geography was preserved by a second 'turn', this time towards qualitative methods, in the early 1980s. This had its origins in the advent of humanistic geography (see Ley, 1974; Tuan, 1976) which itself arose in response to positivism, challenging deterministic explanations and eschewing the idea of researchers as independent or value-free. Qualitative research, in contrast, focuses on direct engagement with the meaning and interpretation of complex social and spatial relations; it uses inductive theory emergently and reflexively, attaching value to logical or substantive, rather than statistical, significance, and using detailed case studies or extensive interviews to illustrate the breadth and depth of human experience. Qualitative methods may initially have been as implicated as the 'quantitative revolution' in the inherent masculinism of the discipline – a masculinism powerfully exposed by Gillian

Rose (1993) in her book on the gender of geography. But these qualitative tools were well suited to the conceptual and political aims of feminist geographers, who used them to give voice to social groups frequently marginalized in and through academic research, and to turn attention to questions of ethics and positionality (McDowell, 1992; Women and Geography Study Group, 1997). This feminist critique of who social geographers are – and of the impact of their work on researchers' own social identities, working methods, theories and other outcomes – is one echoed in anti-racist and postcolonial research (Driver, 1992; Kobayashi, 1994; Sidaway, 1992).

Through the 1980s and 1990s, qualitative research became the new orthodoxy across the discipline (Crang, 2002), though it did not always realize the political potential that some feminist geographers had hoped for. So, despite the rich seam of qualitative work that continues to infuse social geographies, such approaches have sometimes been criticized for their lack of rigour and limited validity (Martin and Sunley, 2001), and for being self-referential rather than effecting change for respondents or having wider policy impacts (Pain and Kindon, 2007). That qualitative methods were also associated with an increasingly disparate 'cultural' frame also drew them into critiques of a sometimes introverted, esoteric style of knowing (Peach, 2002). The lesson here is that no method inherently has more political potential than any other, and all methodologies demand and deserve rigorous application.

The third shift of interest for the practice of social geographies is the 'non-representational' turn of the last decade, which has steered the methodological emphasis away from meaning and interpretation and toward theories of everyday practice (Thrift, 1997, 2004). In contrast to these earlier reflective approaches, non-representational social geographies require methods of investigation that hinge on bodily engagement: on affective and material relationships and practices which do not mirror or mine the empirical world but rather experience, enact, perform and create it

(e.g., Kraftl and Adey, 2008). Like all innovations, the practicalities are much debated. Geographers such as Bondi (2005), Thien (2005) and Tolia-Kelly (2006), for example, have questioned some non-representational approaches, suggesting that they can, paradoxically, *distance* emotion and embodiment from scholarship and the public arena whilst begging important questions about authority and who is speaking for whom (for a response, see Woodward and Lea in Chapter 6).

Nevertheless, by revisiting an earlier engagement with pragmatism (S.J. Smith, 1984) and combining it with other philosophies of encounter (as described in Smith, 2001), non-representational geographies achieve at least two very important methodological goals. First, by emphasizing the way knowledge is acquired and produced through whole bodies, these approaches challenge the dominance of the visual in the creation of geographical knowledge, turning attention to what can be known through the domains of sound, smell and touch (see Crang, 2003; Dewsbury et al., 2002; Smith, 1994; Thrift, 2002). Second, by identifying the performativity of the world – recognizing that it has constantly to be made – these methods of encounter open up the possibility that the future can, through practical acts, be made differently (just as it can also deliberately be kept the same).

The salience of human agency, and the prospect of research and writing actually having effects, are themes which can be traced across at least forty years of social geography. If there is a fourth shift currently under way, however, it is towards a growing suite of increasingly empowering action epistemologies. Recently, calls encouraging wider participation in human geography research have become louder. This is not about recruiting research subjects more carefully or inclusively (though this is important); it refers rather to forging research partnerships, pursuing joint research with activists and engaging in critical policy research that seeks to radically change agendas (e.g. Fuller and Kitchin, 2004; Kindon et al.,

2007; Pain, 2003; Elwood, 2006a, 2006b). These debates around the wider ethics and politics of research have in some ways served to put methods into perspective. The argument is that however well-honed are traditional methods and forms of analysis, they all operate within the same tight epistemological frame: knowledge production by academics for academics. In an attempt to break free of this, social geographers have led the turn to participatory methods involving joint knowledge production with ‘the researched’ (Kindon et al., 2007), which is discussed in detail in Section 5 of the Handbook. This turn is firmly underpinned by feminist theory and practice, and while it is a difficult endeavour which is open to criticism (see Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Kesby, 2007), embrace it does the early ideals of feminist research and harness some strengths of qualitative approaches that have not always been realized in social geographical practice (see Kindon et al., 2007).

None of these shifts can be analyzed separately from the shape of the theoretical knowledge that their advocates produce and want to see. So this mix of methods and approaches continues to develop, sometimes in tension and sometimes as productive collisions (Brown and Knopp, 2008), but always by way of an eclecticism, and a mix of methods, that is now being positioned as a strength. We return to these issues in the final section of the book.

## CONNECTIONS

The *Handbook of Social Geographies* is at first glance, and by its very title, about the multiplicity of approaches to appreciating and conducting social life. By definition, then, it is not intended to cover everything that might be construed as social geography: some areas are missing by accident (a question of who is able to deliver what, when) and others by design. In fact, this collection was originally offered as a ‘compendium’ of social geography; a *selection* of different

things in a single container; a bringing-together of core elements and new directions in a diverse but identifiable substantive field of enquiry. Rather than attempting to be comprehensive then this compendium-handbook is a work of connectivity. Instead of imagining social geography to be a coherent set of ideas and approaches that – at different times and places – ‘relate to’, overlap with or even merge into other subdisciplines (as for example in the celebrated alliance of social and cultural geography), we imagine the subject as existing *only* in and through the connections it inhabits. Social geography – like any other subdiscipline – is an experience of forging links, embracing tensions, and engaging in the uneasy alliances that the unfolding of knowledge demands. Four of these close encounters – the articulations of social/nature, social/economic, social/political and social/cultural – run through the entire volume, and we introduce them below.

### ***Social/nature***

The relationship between human life and the natural environment is more than a piece of connective tissue that complicates social geography: for many it has been and continues to be the defining pillar of geography itself (Glacken, 1967; Turner, 2002). With roots in natural histories, travel diaries, and the founding of the modern university, the modern human–environment tradition came to flourish in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the UK and continental Europe under the sway of geographers like Reclus, Kropotkin and Vidal, introduced earlier, as well as A.J. Herbertson, Alexander von Humboldt, Carl Ritter, Friedrich Ratzel and Ferdinand von Richthofen. In the US the tradition took hold through the work of naturalist George Perkins Marsh, historian Frederick Jackson Turner, and geographers Ellen Churchill Semple, William Morris Davis and Ellsworth Huntington. The diversity amongst these authors notwithstanding – they varied greatly in terms of their commitment to field

investigation, empirical detail and teleological design – they held in common an analytic approach focused on the scientific explanation of human–environment relationships. Yet, within that general rubric, history has recorded numerous approaches to theorizing the direction and force of the causal arrows.

### ***The ‘determinist influence’***

We can point famously to one such approach, that of environmental determinism, wherein the characteristics and forces of natural environments were seen to stand in a direct and exogenously causal relationship with those of their resident populations. In drawing variously on Darwinian, Lamarckian and Spencerian evolutionary traditions, the determinists were to select their causal language from different points along a continuum defined by strict deterministic ‘controls’ on the one hand to weaker ‘influences’ on the other. What united them was their use of environment to explain a diverse array of perceived social differences among population groups, including whether they were pantheistic or monotheistic, sedentary or nomadic, slovenly or energetic, civilized or barbaric, inventive or unimaginative, gay or melancholic, analytic or sensual, peaceful or unruly, irascible or agreeable (Livingstone, 1992). In spite of determinism’s scientific pretensions, the number of hypothesized arrows could prove too complicated to verify empirically, as is demonstrated in this quote from Ellen Churchill Semple:

The physical environment of a people consists of all the natural conditions to which they have been subjected, not merely a part. Geography admits no single blanket theory. The slow historical development of the Russian folk has been due to many geographic causes – to excess of cold and deficiency of rain, an outskirts location on the Asiatic border of Europe exposed to the attacks of nomadic hordes, a meager and, for the most part, ice-bound coast which was slowly acquired, an undiversified surface, a lack of segregated regions where an infant civilization might be cradled, and a vast area of unfenced plains wherein the national energies spread out thin and dissipated themselves (1911: 14).

It was not just that a few of the foundations of contemporary social geography – notably

social difference and diversity – were bulldozed by such banalities: determinism as it was often practised was also methodologically flawed, led by a strategy of empirical affirmation rather than falsification. Thus, even in the face of the counter-claim that some social characteristics might not be the product of, say, climate but of yet another social factor, explanations could be found to redouble on the environment, as in this defence of determinism by Semple:

Even so astute a geographer as Strabo, though he recognizes the influence of geographic isolation in differentiating dialects and customs in Greece, ascribes some national characteristics to the nature of the country, especially to its climate, and the others to education and institutions. He thinks that the nature of their respective lands had nothing to do with making the Athenians cultured, the Spartans and Thebans ignorant. ... But here arise the questions, how far custom and education in their turn depend upon environment; to what degree natural conditions, molding economic and political development, may through them fundamentally affect social customs, education, culture, and the dominant intellectual capacity of a people (Semple, 1911: 22–23).

### *Breaking the chains of nature*

Not that environment always ruled with the heavy fist or backdoor logics that Semple identified. Vidal (1899), in establishing the French tradition, put forth the concept of ‘possibilism’ to describe the limits and potentials set by the environment. He argued that how people respond to these depends on their traditional ways of living (*genre de vie*), a concept he employed not only to point to culture, institutions, technologies, etc., as operative agents of society, but also to open the door to different interpretations of the environment, presaging later concepts such as environmental perception. Similarly, in the UK, the influential town planner Patrick Geddes told geographers that:

... while circumstances modify man [*sic*], and that in mind as well as body, man, especially as he rises in material civilization, seems to escape from the grasp of environment, and to react, and that more and more deeply, upon nature, at length, as he develops his ideas and systematizes his ideals into the philosophy of religion of his place and time, he

affirms his superiority to fate, his moral responsibility and independence; his escape from slavery to nature into an increasing mastership (Geddes, 1898; as quoted in Livingstone, 1992: 274–5).

Years later, once the reaction against determinism was in full swing, the president of the Association of American Geographers, Harlan H. Barrows, argued on behalf of a holistic ‘human ecology’ of ‘mutual relations’ that presupposed no directionality between the forces of society or environment. Barrows’s programmatic injunction (1923) did not prove to be much of a rallying point outside of the Chicago School of Environmental Geography from which he wrote, but it was nonetheless important to Gilbert White, who, along with his students, carried on Barrows’s torch for many decades (Burton et al., 1978). In addition to asking questions based on the reversal of the causal arrow, they also were noteworthy for their attention to the policy implications of their work (White, 1972) and for their groundbreaking studies in environmental perception (Saarinen, 1969).

A second environmental tradition in the US was anchored by Carl Sauer, who firmly rejected determinism in his seminal piece, ‘The morphology of landscape’, in 1925. He and his adherents went on to fashion a cultural geography that documented the ‘destructive exploitation’ of earth at the hands of ‘man’ (Mikesell, 1978; Thomas, 1956). Sauer disapprovingly witnessed these transformations throughout his life, as the ‘medium’ in his famous injunction – ‘Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result’ (1925, 46) – receded into yet another urban centre, industrial development or sprawling suburb. To be sure, even when he wrote ‘Morphology’ it might have been difficult to have found a ‘natural’ landscape composed of unmodified climates, landforms, water bodies and vegetation. Sauerian approaches to the environment have been accused of having a conservative bias – of being backward-looking, rural-favouring and unscientific. But the research is noteworthy for a number of reasons: for a historical approach centred on both socio-cultural and

environmental change and adaptation; for situating technology in a mediative role between society and environment; and for detailed field studies that traced the origins and diffusions of both material culture and environmental practices.

A related approach to the environment, cultural ecology, developed out of expeditions by anthropologists and geographers in the 1950s and 1960s. With time, the term was widely adopted by those cultural geographers whose work focused on the environment. More analytic than the individualistic and particularistic tradition it supplanted, cultural ecology was noteworthy for merging ecology with systems analysis, giving 'ecosystems' that included both the environment and the institutions and practices of human society. Its adherents tended to pay rigorous attention to the flows of energy and materials in these systems. Nature and society are, in this view, not 'separate entities or opposing forces, but rather interlocking components of a system' (Mikesell, 1978: 7–8). Most cultural ecologists – Karl Butzer, Billie Lee Turner II and Peter Vayda among them – retained with their predecessors a critical eye toward development, including a disdain for rampant consumerism, unbridled economic growth and unflinching faith in technocratic solutions to environmental problems. But beyond this, explanation tended to wither, for most held an aversion to deeper, structural explanations, particularly those offered by political economy. This, in turn, opened doors to another subfield, political ecology, where we find a resurgent conversation involving topics of interest to social geographers. Operating with a more vigorous commitment to theory that situates the use and destruction of the environment within larger socio-economic, political and cultural-discursive contexts, political ecologists are attentive to both social difference and the ways that capital, the state, and other institutions socially 'construct' and materially 'produce' natures (Robbins, 2004). Since the 1990s political ecology has been the subfield to turn to for: understandings of environmental conflict written in terms of race, class and gender;

critiques of conservation schemes and participatory development practices by considering the inevitable exclusions they embed; and discourse analyses of various environmental and social narratives (wilderness, Gaia, development, progress, etc.) at play in making bits of nature the object of environmental management strategies (Williems-Braun, 1997).

Tracing a long arc through this historiography, we see the following picture emerge. First, for the environmental determinists 'the social' was the excludendum, and not a very active or differentiated one at that. For complicated historical reasons, including the fact that many early modern geographers were trained in the natural sciences, researchers spent more of their efforts examining the active and variegated environmental drivers than the complications of the social responses. As a result, as Platt (1948) points out, determinists ignored extensive counter-evidence showing that the social characteristics of a people could vary greatly within the same environment. Nor were determinists capable of explaining why people hold on to certain habits long after they have changed their environments.

Second, following the obituaries of determinism written by Geddes, Vidal, Barrows, Sauer and others, there developed in social geography a profound suspicion of nature altogether. To cross the boundary of nature–society in the post-determinism era, one might risk being reminded of an embarrassing geographical period, particularly in terms of the discipline's treatment of race in its service to colonialism and imperialism (see Peet, 1984; Livingstone, 1992; Dwyer, 1997). Most social geographers at this time adopted the spatial-chorological view, which stressed integrative areal study and spatial variations (Turner, 2002) and which was readily adaptable to questions of inequality, social welfare and justice (e.g., D. Smith, 1973) – and, it turned out, largely without the need for environmental backup. So, as discussed elsewhere here, social geographers of the mid-century and beyond went out exploring other connections, such as those of culture, politics and economy. While a general mid-century neglect

of nature in human geography played out differently across the subfields, the recoil was particularly acute in social geography, where studies of urban social environments predominated. It wasn't until political ecology came along – with its tools of Marxism, feminism and postcolonialism – that critical social geographers could safely engage the environment without fear of being tarnished as determinists.

### *Rethorizing the social with nature*

And, for some, just in time. For, as many have noted, theorists of the human–environment connection now face some very tricky objects, as capital and technology combine to produce a hundred hybrid forms of new social/natures (Haraway, 1991; Whatmore, 2002). No longer separated by a dash ('-'), these are bits of social/nature that disrupt attempts at clean classification: the state-managed forest, the genetically modified tomato, the beloved family dog with his microchip implant. Even the designer baby (Fukuyama, 2002) is trotted out as a millennial example of troubling new forms of life and technology.

But while these hybrid forms might give pause, it is not the loss of their 'essential character' that troubles the nature–society divide. It is, instead, how they point to the work that has gone into preserving the polarities that now seem in need of negotiation. As Latour writes:

Critical explanation always began from the poles and headed toward the middle, which was first the separation point and then the conjunction point for opposing resources. ... In this way, the middle was simultaneously maintained and abolished, recognized and denied, specified and silenced. ... How? ... By conceiving every hybrid as a mixture of two pure forms (1993; quoted in Whatmore, 2002: 2).

As Sarah Whatmore (2002) notes, the challenge today is to destabilize these seemingly pure forms by de-centring what has long been sacrosanct: social agency itself. This move posits a world beyond – or perhaps before – the nature–society dualism. As Braun puts it:

It is precisely to avoid such unintentional returns to the 'human itself' that many scholars in the social

sciences and humanities – geographers included – have turned to philosophers such as Spinoza, Bergson, Deleuze, and Serres (see Whatmore, 2002). What these writers offer is an understanding of bodies, including 'human' bodies, as always already an effect of their composition in and through their relations with the world. In this sense, the human has no essence, and never did, but is rather understood as an 'in-folding' of the world, an effect of ongoing and ceaseless ontological play (Harrison, 2000). The human, then, was 'post' from the beginning (Braun, 2004: 1354).

To speak, therefore, of a post-human geography (Castree and Nash, 2004) is to deconstruct the nature–society binary. This requires us to put nature 'under erasure' (i.e., 'display', following Derrida, 1976), for nature has always been the key resource for propping up the social, and yet it is a Nature that can never be – *a priori*, primordial, beyond construction. Only through this constitutive other has 'the social' been secured. In particular, for Derrida (2003) the persistent gap between nature and society has everything to do with the nature that is animal. Braun (2004), drawing on Derrida's animal–human deconstruction in his discussion of Badmington's post-human thesis (2004), elaborates on this point:

Without this distinction, humanism has no foundation. Derrida shows this fundamental anthropology at work across the spectrum of Western philosophy – in Descartes, Freud, Heidegger, and Lacan, among others – in order to reveal not only how the space of the 'human' is differentially produced, but also how the 'properly human' comes to be defined within, and is dependent upon, this system of difference. Derrida gives us a neologism – *animot* – that brilliantly captures his point. The word phonetically singularizes the plural for animal (*animaux*) and combines it with the word for 'word' (*mots*), thereby calling attention to the habit of rolling all animal species into one, producing an undifferentiated 'other' against which the 'human' can be juxtaposed and defined. This animal-word at once founds and grounds humanism. ... Of course, Derrida goes on to explain that this 'fundamental anthropology' deconstructs itself. Humanism's founding difference – the differentiation of human from animal – is, ultimately, unstable; a supplement is always required to fix the difference ([the commonly invoked 'specifically' human skills of]

language, reason, tool-making), yet each and every supplement is inadequate to the task (Braun, 2004: 1352–3, brackets added).

Yet, in concluding, it should be emphasized that, however much one might welcome a post-human social geography, this does not mean that we can dispense with a political analysis attentive to invocations of ‘the human’ or ‘the social’ (Castree and Nash, 2006). Just as Don Mitchell (1995) warned us to be wary when the term ‘culture’ was being wielded, so too must we be suspicious of daily encounters with a nature-reinforced ‘society’ (see also Joseph, 2002, on ‘community’). Even if Margaret Thatcher did turn out to be serendipitously prescient in her claim that ‘there is no such thing as society’, this does not mean that ‘the social’ has not been nor will not remain a contested discourse, an object of politics. If anything, Thatcher herself only substantiates the point.

### **Social/economy**

Social geographies are often rooted in everyday life, focusing attention on the relationships and behaviours that elaborate the ordinary world. Not surprisingly, this point of departure rarely sits easily with the atomistic, individuated, ostensibly rational ‘economic men’ whose stylized behaviours still drive empirical economics; nor has it resonated with the ostensibly separate spheres of economy and society that are ingrained in an intellectual division of labour and materialized in the institutional arrangements of governance. But the latter is easier to live with than the former, and social geography has *de facto* tended to be about social, not economic, life. Yet the isolation of ‘the economic’ is rarely maintained in practice, and to the extent that it is, this begs the question of how economic essentials have *been made* to prevail in certain kinds of settings or encounters. So it is not surprising that a shift of scholarly interest from high theory to situated practices, spanning nearly two decades, has come to recognize two key truths. First, that there is more to economy than economics: indeed,

that ‘economics has failed by neglecting to develop a theory of real markets and their multiple modes of functioning’ (Callon, 1998). Second, and equally, that ‘the economy is ordinary; it is an integral part of everyday life. ... Not only are economies inescapably social, societies are inescapably economic’ (Lee, 2006). Together, these observations encapsulate a sea-change in the study of both economy and society, recognizing that the projects are linked and their scope interdisciplinary. Critically for this handbook, it is now clear that progress in accounting for economies and economics can no longer be dominated by economists; it is a challenge for us all.

Nevertheless, it is surprising how long it has taken a range of disciplines (other than economics) fully to embrace the challenge of understanding what economies consist of and how ‘the economy’ works. It is, for example, striking how few references to economic geography appear in the *Journal of Social and Cultural Geography* – a publication whose mission since the turn of the millennium has been ‘to report on the role of space, place and culture in relation to social issues, cultural politics, aspects of daily life, cultural commodities, consumption, identity and community, and historical legacies’. Economy is, to be sure, an aspect of daily life and an element of consumption studies, but that is at best implicit in the mix of papers published in this journal. A similar picture emerges from the limited reference made to social geography in the *Journal of Economic Geography*, a publication established in 2001 as an attempt to ‘redefine and reinvigorate the intersection between economics and geography’. Notably there is no statement about connecting economic geography with the rest of the discipline, and although some contributors clearly are engaged in this task, the majority of works testify to a still-entrenched division of roles between economic geography on the one hand and social and cultural geographies on the other.

Arguably, a more obvious place to look for rapprochement across this specific subdisciplinary divide is *Tijdschrift voor Economische*

*en Sociale Geografie*. Dating from 1967, this is the one English language journal in geography to contain the words 'economic' and 'social' in its title. Its mission statement however makes more of the connection between Anglo-American and Continental human geographies than of integrating social and economic affairs: searches on key words bring up very little overlap in this latter respect. On the other hand, perhaps signalling changes that are already in train, the online journal *Social Geography* (first published in 2005) includes amongst its 'topical fields' the words 'labour', 'production' and 'consumption'. In fact, the very first article in the series is effectively an assessment of social geography's take on economy (Van Wezemael, 2005).

It would be a mistake, particularly in light of recent trends, to overstate the extent of the social-economic divide in geography. There have always been individuals and institutions committed to bridge-building: that, after all, is part of the geographical imagination. And a concern with political economy (a critique of how whole economies are managed) is of course at the heart of many areas of human geography. It is, nevertheless, worth pausing to consider why, and with what consequences, the analytical line between economy and society has, so often, been so sharply drawn. More importantly, it seems timely to attend to a host of recent attempts, within and beyond geography, to recognize the economy in society and to work with the sociality of economy.

### *Economy and society*

In an engaging essay entitled 'Capturing markets from the economists', Don Slater (2002) observes that 'The division between economic and socio-cultural analysis constitutes a kind of deep structure of modern Western thought' (p. 59). This division of intellectual labour is sometimes attributed to the so-called 'Parsons' pact' – a deal that enabled the expansion of sociology, and cemented the isolationism of economics, during the early twentieth century. Commenting on this division of territory, David Stark (2000)

tells how, as Talcott Parsons put his grand design for sociology into practice, there was only one discipline he was not prepared to take on, and that was economics. Basically, says Stark, 'Parsons made a pact: in my gloss – you, economists, study value; we, sociologists, will study values. You will have claim on the economy. We will study the social relations in which economies are embedded' (p. 1).

More structural explanations for the divorce of society from economy are forwarded by Anderson (2003), who argues that the exclusion of democratic and civil society from the realm of economy is a requirement of the capitalist condition; and by S.J. Smith (2005), who recognizes the essentialization of markets to be both a condition of, and an explanation for, the weakly developed ethic of care in modern political democracies. Such authors imply that, while the separation of economy and society may have been a condition through which disciplines (and subdisciplines) developed in one way rather than another, more critically still, the split has been necessary for economics, economies and welfare states to function as they do.

Both these explanations – for a division of intellectual labour and a separation of real-world activity – help to account for the divorce of social from economic geographies; for the creation of subdisciplines whose subject matter and approaches have, until recently, been almost completely distinct. In this longstanding separation of roles, social geography tends to occupy one of four positions. All these positions are caricatures, of course; and all accommodate some quite excellent ideas and contributions. But they do add up to a tendency not just to privilege the social (a move that might be ethically appealing), but also to represent social life as if it were not an economic affair (a position that is ontologically unsustainable).

First, there are social geographies that take particular economic conditions as given: either as a benign backdrop against which social life works; or as machine that structures the social world. On the one hand this underpins

social geography's much-criticized tendency to assign too much agency to individuals, as if residential patterns, flows of migration and so on are a product only of similarity and dissimilarity in the characteristics of who people choose to live, work and socialize with. On the other hand it produces a kind of determinism in which economic processes map onto social outcomes, producing systems of stratification which are expressed as social geographies, through processes of (essentially economic) categorization which its incumbents are powerless to control.

Second, there are many rich empirical studies in social geography which attend to all kinds of social and cultural processes yet choose not to document, or comment on, their economic content. Think, for example, of a large body of work on consumption which profiles all kinds of tastes, qualities, identities and behaviours, yet scarcely mentions how much it costs to produce, buy and sell the goods concerned. Consider equally a fascinating body of work on domestic interiors that, for its many fine achievements, glosses over the financial costs of key objects and materials and pays only passing attention to how such expenditures are funded. Even work on that staple of social geography – residential segregation – has until recently had surprisingly little to say about (for example) the fundamentals of housing market dynamics (of course there are important exceptions; see, for example, the work of Steve Holloway and Elvin Wyly and the papers collected in Smith and Searle, (in press)).

Third, social geography embraces a strong welfare tradition, which – although intimately concerned with the financial edge of inequality – is generally more interested in how best to *suspend* the price mechanism (with, for example, needs-based systems of allocation) than in the finer detail of how markets, price determination, valuation, credit scoring, and so on, work. Welfare geography has, as a consequence, generally contributed (albeit in some very important ways) to a line of thinking which divides states from markets and assigns the former a role in 'mending' the latter by compensating in cash or kind for widening inequalities (see Smith and

Easterlow (2004) for an overview and critique of this position). The result is that much more is known about 'states' than about the economies they manage; more is known about social exclusion from the economy than about the entanglement of social and economic affairs that is a condition of human life. And even though the challenge of matching welfare resources to individual and collective needs, funding and delivering formal and informal care, and promoting well-being demands sensitivity to economic themes, work in this vein has rarely been central to mainstream social geographies.

Finally, social geographies – multiple though they are – have been strangely silent on themes that might reasonably be located at the heart of the enterprise. In recent years, the sociology of work, for example, has been tackled mainly (though magnificently) by a handful of (generally feminist) geographers. The economics of domestic labour – the cost and content of housework – have an even lower profile. And the consumption of financial services – mortgages, insurances, banking, personal loans and so on – is woefully under-researched for a subdiscipline concerned with the consumption (though rarely the cost) of virtually every other imaginable product or object. Again, there are exceptions: in the UK, Elaine Kempson and colleagues at Bristol University, together with Andrew Leyshon and colleagues at Nottingham University, have made important contributions in the area of personal financial services, financial capability and an understanding of 'financial ecologies'. The message nevertheless is that, as an interdisciplinary effort to unpack the sociality (the materiality, the relationality and the emotional content) of key economic ideas (markets, prices, information, calculation) gathers speed, the social geographies inherent in this cry out for greater attention.

The division of geographical labour into which social geographies have hitherto been so neatly cast may be enduring, but the indication already is that old boundaries are being transgressed, indeed erased, by a rethink of what constitutes economy, as well as by a shift

this demands in the understanding of society. Whatever it was that split social geographies apart from their inherent economies, there is an impulse now for their reconnection, and evidence that this process is seriously under way. This is the product of a concerted effort across a range of disciplines – sociology, anthropology, politics, psychology and geography – to open up the ‘black boxes’ of economy, recognizing the ontological impossibility, and epistemological undesirability, of an oddly enduring (if practically unsustainable) intellectual rift.

### *A cultural turn*

Perhaps the most general case made in recent years for expanding the sociological significance of economics (as a practice), and of economies and their constituent elements (as socio-technical assemblages), has been dubbed ‘cultural economy’. This label is broad, but it marks the extension of an interdisciplinary ‘cultural turn’ into the area that has resisted it most: economics. Geographers have played a role here, not least by gathering key works into influential interdisciplinary those edited by DuGay and Pryke, (2002), Amin and Thrift (2004), and Pryke and DuGay (eds) (2007). These collections capture the idea ‘that something called “culture” is both somehow critical to understanding what is happening to, as well as to practically intervening in, contemporary organizational and economic life’ (DuGay and Pryke, 2002: 1). Such approaches are thus concerned with ‘the social and cultural relations that go to make up what we conventionally term the economic’ (Amin and Thrift, 2004: xviii). In a series of fine-grained empirical examples, the authors in collections like these show what is to be gained by recognizing that ‘economy’ is constituted through a myriad of social, emotional, political, material and symbolic activities and arrangements – events and relationships that are not ‘additional to’ economic affairs, but inherent within them (see Woodward and Lea, Chapter 6). This moreover has been true throughout history, even though the way

economic agents operate may itself have changed in recent years, recognizing – and exploiting – the extent to which cultural themes underpin the organization of work, the contents of products, styles of consumption and modes of circulation.

The idea of cultural economy has been an exciting one for geography. On the one hand, it has attracted the attention of a very large cultural geography constituency to the salience of the economic themes which in practice infuse every nook and cranny of life’s meanings and materials. On the other hand, it has appealed to a cross-section of economic geographers, particularly those whose work is concerned with beliefs, behaviours and outcomes, which simply defy conventional economic understanding. But it has not been an entirely comfortable ride, for at least three reasons. First, the turn to cultural economy in geography has been troubled by a charge of ‘vague theory and thin empirics’ which – to be fair – is not without foundation. But at the same time it is also a charge that overlooks the many opportunities which have been seized to bring the ‘close dialogue’ of qualitative encounter into dialogue with the stylized facts of economics (see Clark, 1998). Second, cultural economy perspectives have tended to alight most readily on the cultural content of economic entities, and on the imprint or exercise of these cultural economies on wider societies. That is, they have sometimes acquired a deterministic flavour, focusing on the way economic ambitions are culturally imposed; how products are represented; or how consumers are ‘captured’. For example, the four essays comprising a section on ‘the economy of passions’ in the *Cultural Economy* reader (Amin and Thrift, 2004) mainly tackle the way emotions can be cynically manipulated for economic gain. Finally, it is arguable that a preoccupation with the meanings, representations and discourses of economy means that the project of cultural economy has not yet gone far enough to advance understandings of the sociality or materiality of economic life. As Al James (2006, 2007) has shown in his discussions of

the methods and substance of research on cultural economy, there is considerable scope both to mend and to build the interdisciplinary bridges that cultural economy appeals to, and to develop this approach in innovative and important ways. We point equally the additional possibility that some elements of this project might fruitfully be ‘wired in’ to the more connected social geographies that inspire the form and contents of this Handbook.

### *The special case of ‘social economy’*

Curiously, the most obvious label for this new connectivity – social economy – has acquired a rather specialized, albeit entirely apt, meaning, in which the prefix ‘social’ signals a welfare role. That is, the social economy *sensu stricto* works to an unconventional bottom line – one that may not even be drawn up with reference to measures of credit or cash. Local currency systems, for example, are an element of the social economy. These include local exchange trading schemes or systems (LETS), time-dollars and other initiatives which are based on the (usually localized) informal exchange of goods and services whose values are determined in a variety of ways and exchanged using local currencies (see Lee et al., 2004). LETS, for example, create ‘alternative’ economies, usually among participants who are wholly or partly financially excluded (unemployed, retired, unable to work regular hours, and so on). They have also been shown to have a social dimension which, in some cases, exceeds their subsistence role, for example where participants accumulate credits but fail to spend them – as if this ‘capital’ were an indicator of their value to the community.

More recently, social economy has come to refer to a broader sweep of benevolent economic activities: strategies ‘that privilege meeting social (and environmental) needs before profit maximization, through the involvement of disadvantaged communities in the production or consumption of socially useful goods and services’ (Amin, 2008: 1). Diverse in form and variable in content, it is

tempting to set this social economy alongside the many varieties of capitalism that currently co-exist, and define it into social geography. Certainly this provides an appealing analytical starting point and an obvious inroad into the economy for social geographers. But the concern is that the institutions and practices of social economy may not be one of many; instead, they may be distinctive in one important way, as the socially inflected Other to a ‘real’ economy, which is the dominant economy, inherently riddled with inequality and geared only to profit.

In a helpful overview of the field, Hudson (2008) implies, that social economy is indeed Other to the mainstream in at least two ways: as a safety net, supporting those who are not adequately served by markets; and as an ‘alternative’ economic space, which may be detached from the wider economy but is perhaps preferred on ethical grounds and might be more enjoyable. Only Hudson’s third vision of social economy – as a space of transformation which could be at the leading edge of a real shift in the way economies (and economics) function – engages with a vision of social economy as a more mainstream affair. This last version, connects up with the ideas of Gibson-Graham whose website on alternative economies ([www.communityeconomies.org](http://www.communityeconomies.org)) shows how this transformative role is not a minority exercise but a part of a wider internationally based, feminist-inspired reworking of what economies are and whom they are for.

Most commentators on the social economy – whether this label is used narrowly, or more generally – are at pains to stress that society and economy are inextricably entwined: that the institutions and individuals of one are at the same time the agents of the other. But there is nevertheless a divide in the literature between approaches designed specifically to explore the institutions of social economy (which are in a sense part of the welfare state) and those that recognize that societies – even with their existing structures of inequality, changing hierarchies of need, entrenched welfare ideals and variable ethics of care – are always and inherently economic

(e.g. Boyer, 2003). By profiling social economy in this second sense, this Handbook contributes to the efforts of those who now seek to bridge a gap in the geographical literature between those distinctive sets of practices and institutions that constitute the social economy, on the one hand, and the multiple meanings and materials that constitute a passionate, if slippery, but very broadly based cultural economy, on the other. In doing so it engages mainly with the third of the social-economy projects listed above – it is about excavating the content and shaping the potential of highly diverse ‘economic societies’.

### *Economic society*

The province of ‘the economy’ has expanded in recent years as states have retreated and families have changed their form: neither informal provision nor state support now offer the first port of call for providers, or for those in need, of goods, services, resources or care. It is alongside this expansion of a particular (some might call it neo-liberal) style of economic geography that the role of economy in society and the sociality of economy come under scrutiny. The term ‘social economy’ may usefully describe either ‘alternative economies’ or state interventions to stimulate markets in underserved areas, but social geographers also need a vocabulary for their work on how ‘the economy’ is itself an intrinsically social affair. Two aspects of life in economic societies are particularly important.

First, there is the truism that ‘the economy’ is embedded in the routine of everyday life: it is *ordinary*. This point is forcefully made by Roger Lee (2006), who examines ‘the business’ of making a living. His point is that the constitution of social life is itself an economic enterprise, just as the economy is a social affair. There is no separate sphere; living economy is about all the myriad entanglements of value, sentiment, meanings, materials, exchange and interchange that constitute the sociality of human life. To be sure, the ordinary economy is diverse, multiple and heterogeneous; but above all it is ubiquitous: ‘and, in

this light, alternative economies are a contradiction in terms’ (Lee, 2006: 422). Economics, like societies, like politics, exist everywhere and in everything.

Second, there is the question of what to do with this ubiquitous co-existence of social/economy. To an extent, ‘simply’ demonstrating it and taking it seriously is itself an exercise in critical activism. This is at the heart of the Gibson–Graham collaboration which set out to reclaim the economy from its singular, capitalist space, recovering the heterogeneity that the capitalist economy subdues or denies, and constituting through this an arena of myriad economic practices and activism: ‘a whirlwind of inventions and interventions’. Their project is not to create an ‘alternative economy’ but to show that what is generally labelled ‘the economy’ is a small part of a much more diverse, interlocking means of producing, exchanging and distributing values. It is the sectors of activity which are currently ‘submerged’ beneath the tip of the conventional economic iceberg that Gibson–Graham look to, as a route to establishing a ‘radically heterogeneous economy’ which signals a transition to post-capitalism (Gibson–Graham 1996, 2006). Smith (2005) makes a related point, arguing that even the ‘conventional’ elements of what has been constituted as a singular capitalist space are in practice far more diverse than they seem. The iceberg has no singular ‘tip’. Drawing from the work of Elizabeth Grosz, Smith’s point is that even at the zenith of a capitalist order, economic life is constituted through ‘a thousand tiny markets’ whose ethic is not given but made and whose geography might be different. From this perspective ‘the diversity of actually existing markets and the multitude of normative ideas and practices that are, or could be, built into them, is not just a new economic geography, or a social curiosity: it is a far-reaching political resource’ (Smith, 2005: 17).

By these varied routes, social geography is one of many disciplines now contributing to a paradigm shift at the interface of economy and society, emphasizing the social and power-filled character of economic mechanisms and

ideas: valorising their diversity and complexity, their sensitivity to context, their passions as well as their ‘rationality’, and their part in the social construction and performance of everyday life. There is, in short, an ordinariness and a heterogeneity in economy, whose social geographies have still to be fully excavated. Such ideas may be illustrated in studies of labour markets, financial markets, small businesses or multinational firms; however, more accessible points of departure for those engaged with themes central to social geography may be found in recent research on housing markets, consumption and everyday life. By whatever tactics and examples, this all means that the division between social and economic geography, like the division between economics and sociology, which has been one of the most enduring in modern thought, simply cannot last. Politics, if nothing else, will see to that.

### ***Social/political***

If we take social geography to be the study of social practices in space, then – as we have already seen in discussions of social/nature and social/economy – it is impossible to divorce the social from the political in any attempt to interrogate it. As Henri Lefebvre (1991) remarked, any action in space is always already politically fraught and all politics is an effort to remake space. As such, the social and the political (and the context within which they occur) constitute a nexus upon which all of human life proceeds and must, accordingly, be considered in tandem. The co-constitution of social and political geography is hardly surprising as, within the larger realm of the social sciences, formerly un-breachably disciplinary boundaries are also themselves being sundered. Within geography itself, the connections between the social and the political are becoming increasingly recognized, appreciated, theorised and investigated. What is perhaps surprising is the fact that social and political geography have actually, for a very long time

already, been relationally conceptualized and those connections have been severed and sutured many times over the course of the development of the discipline and across different national traditions. Indeed, the contemporary critical/radical origins of social geography can be traced not to the political unrest of the 1960s – where it is often located in short-sighted historiographies – but back further still to the anarchist traditions of nineteenth century geographers Pyotr Kropotkin and Élisée Reclus.

### ***Early social and political geographies***

Predictably, social geography, social science and sociology share overlaps in their development. Sociology as a disciplining frame for producing knowledge emerged in the mid-late nineteenth century, first in Europe and later in the US and the UK. Early on, sociology and the classical theorists of sociology understood the purview of their discipline as a response to modernity and modernization and the challenges of social disintegration and exploitation that accompanied them. While not always considering themselves to be sociologists, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Tonnies, Pareto and Simmel, among others, formulated classical social theories that were foundational to the development of social science and sociology. Dunbar (1977) has argued that there is ample documentary evidence to indicate that the appearance of the concept of social geography was part of a larger intellectual movement that produced both social science as a multifaceted approach to human life and sociology as a more narrow disciplinary formulation. He places the origin of this movement – one that entrained social geography in its wake – in the early 1880s with the Le Play school of French sociology. The Le Playists, students of Frédéric Le Play, were interested in the relevance of environment and industrialization to poverty and destitution. They saw these problems as tractable and rejected the readily available Marxist critique of capitalism and dialectical materialism because it was considered too abstract to actually solve them. Instead, they

championed the social survey as a way of understanding place, work and family, and thereby offering reforms to address the dislocating effects of urbanization and industrialization upon them.

Early social science's and sociology's concern for understanding the particularities of place helped to produce conceptual frames such as Frédéric Ratzel's 'anthropogeography' and Paul Vidal de la Blache's 'human geography', along with the Le Playists' 'social geography'. Yet, while Reclus was also employing the term social geography around this time, his application of it questioned these prevailing framings that tended to be descriptions or catalogues of the people and places threatened by the gathering forces of modernization and instead employed the concept to reflect upon a more relevant and politicized social geography that was attentive to 'class struggle, the search for equilibrium, and the sovereign decision of the individual' (Dunbar, 1977: 17). It was thus with Reclus that the circulating approaches to people and places were deferred from objectivity's conventional standards of the time, and toward social geographic study as a deeply political act.

Interestingly, while a different area of geography – political geography – was at the time focused on geopolitics and empire, social geography, in contrast, emerged with a focus on much more localized political questions that revolved around environments – broadly understood – and the people, plants, animals and landscapes that constituted them. As such, the internationally focused 'geopolitics' of Friedrich Ratzel (and later Halford Mackinder) was rejected by Reclus and Kropotkin, who very deliberately aligned themselves with a socialist/anarchist commitment to political change that focused on people in places and not on the more abstract concepts of territories, populations, frontiers and states. French geographer Yves Lacoste argues that the emergence of social geography as a concept – as an organic, rooted political orientation – was an 'epistemological turning point' in the history of the discipline. Before its appearance, geography had been a foundational component of

the state apparatus: a tool of colonialism and imperialism with maps as its most powerful object (see Clark and Martin, 2004: 61). But with the anarchist geographers' more political and situated formulation of social geography, the discipline and its practitioners became a force that could be turned against the state and capital. Disappointingly, the influence of anarchist and socialist thought on social geography in particular and the discipline more widely did not persist with any vigour into the early twentieth century. While the renowned activist town planner Patrick Geddes promoted some of Reclus's and Kropotkin's ideas about social geography in the UK, and though some British geographers subscribed to them for a while (Meller, 1993), by the 1920s the lure of natural-science approaches to geographic questions had begun to be felt. There and elsewhere the sharp political orientation of social geography became blunted in favour of a more 'objective' social geography (Livingstone, 1992).

The exclusion of radical thinkers from the academy produced a similar trajectory in the post-World War I social science community in the US. In a fascinating assessment of the period, David Sibley (1995) shows how the political orientation of social geography and sociology was crowded out by the scientific orientation of sociology, which, when understood as a science, was distinctly different from social service or social work. He compares the writings and practices of the Chicago School of Sociology, especially founder Robert Park (1864–1944) and Ernest Burgess (1886–1966), to those of the early twentieth century African-American urban theorist and activist W.E.B. Dubois (1868–1963) and Jane Addams (1860–1935), a Chicago social theorist, organizer and founder of the Settlement Movement and co-founder of Hull House. Through a close reading of a wide set of texts, Sibley shows how Park and Burgess largely ignored the engaged, socially relevant work of Dubois and Addams. While the latter two produced some of the most detailed and perceptive ethnographic and social survey studies on the emerging capitalist city in the

US – particularly with respect to the impacts of exclusion, exploitation and deprivation around race, income, gender and ethnicity – their work was devalued by the intellectually ascendant Chicago School practitioners because it was regarded as descriptive (not analytically consistent with natural science models) and politically motivated, and therefore scientifically suspect. Addams was explicitly radical in her politics and used the research she and her colleagues conducted through Hull House and the Chicago School of Social Service Administration to challenge the state and capital with respect to issues of immigration, women's rights, child labour, war and housing. Dubois's social surveys unambiguously identified racism as the force behind housing deprivation and economic disparity. Moreover, both Dubois and Addams recognized the inextricability of theory and practice, whereas Park was adamant that theory should remain aloof from political practice. Sibley argues that because the Chicago School of Sociology was able to maintain control over the urban canon for five decades, the work of neither of these more politically motivated researchers was able to challenge its intellectual hegemony in an increasingly conservative and nationalist period. In the absence of a foothold for either critical sociology or the socio-political geography of Reclus, it wasn't until the late 1960s and early 1970s that the work of the anarchist geographers was rediscovered and yoked to a newly radical social geography; Addams and Dubois had to wait a few more decades for their work to attract similar attention among social geographers.

### *The 1960s and the return to the political*

There is no way to overstate the significance of the political events of 1968 on the discipline of geography generally and social geography in particular. That year was the peak of an international protest movement that stretched across the 1960s through to the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Student protests in Europe, the UK, the US; the popular support for Che Guevara in Latin America; Fidel

Castro's newly socialist Cuba; international circulation of Mao Zedong's *The Little Red Book*; and scores of anti-colonial independence struggles across the globe – most prominently the one led by Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam – were all components of new political engagements that sparked a renewal in social geography. This period produced a re-radicalization of the subfield that was felt across a range of national fronts. Within human geography, liberal responses to state power, inequality and racism eventually came to be superseded, initially by a rediscovery of the anarchist roots of social geography, and then by a growing adherence to Marxism as the intellectual and political touchstone. David Harvey's *Social Justice and the City* (1973) exquisitely exemplifies this transformation and stands as the most significant marker of the revolution that occurred in social geography, as the discipline became thoroughly politicized following an extensive commitment to scientific objectivity that had characterized most research during the previous two decades.

The history of this complex period in human geography has yet to be satisfactorily written. It is important, nonetheless, to provide some sense of the key influences on the progressive political identity which came to characterize social geography during this period and which continues to greatly influence it today. The 1968 revolutionary events were very much founded on complex theorizations of the relationship between state, society and space, and social geography participated in a similar re-visioning. Reflecting on the student strikes in Paris in 1968, philosophers and social theorists such as Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas attempted to make sense of those events by developing theories of the state that could account for its complex structure and function, as well as its relationship to capitalist domination. Althusser (1971), through careful and extensive reading of Marx's works, moved beyond the classical accounts of the violence of the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and its manifestation in the police, the military, the courts, the prisons, the government, etc., to more subtle aspects of

state power that operate ideologically to deploy and reproduce the ‘rules of the established order’. Building on Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony, Althusser theorized that the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) operates and is institutionalized in the more private sphere of social life: the school, the family, the arts, television, radio, etc. His structuralism quite clearly delineates the role of the state in shaping state subjects through the spatial contexts of both (public) repressive forces and (private) ideological ones. Poulantzas’s contribution to state theory during this period was to argue against the instrumentalist interpretation – that the state was an ‘instrument of the bourgeoisie’ – by insisting that although the state is relatively autonomous from the capitalist class, it functions to ensure the smooth operation of capitalist society and therefore benefits the capitalist class. Following in this tradition, later state theorists such as Bob Jessop (1990) explored the porous border between the state and capital, posing the former as an ensemble of social relations that is dialectically related to the latter. His state–society theory proved attractive to many political geographers, but it was the more poststructuralist, subject-oriented theory of power put forth by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) that gained wider purchase among social and cultural geographers, some of whom used the theory to explore the spatial dimensions of subject formation (e.g., Natter and Jones, 1997).

### *Contemporary inter-connections*

The contemporary landscape of social and political geography continues to make central the nexus of people, power and place. It also offers opportunities for change. The transformations that have occurred in political geographers’ embrace of the social in the last several years, particularly the focus on the materiality of state practice (Kuus, 2007a, b; Koefoed and Simonsen, 2007; Marston, 2004; Mountz, 2004), have been enabled by explicit attention to the production of political subjects through a social process that is always spatial.

For example, Joe Painter’s concept of ‘prosaic states’ (2006) contends that everyday life is ‘permeated with stateness’ such that the only way we can understand or approach the state is through the effects that it has on social practice. Painter maintains that the state – a political concept *par excellence* – can be approached only through the influence it exerts on our daily lives: eating, sleeping, shopping, working, dying, marrying, having sex, and the list goes on. Moreover, the impact of the state, when understood in these terms, is seen to be geographically explicit; that is, it varies from one space to another and from place to place so that its reach is uneven and irregular. Another example is Anna Secor’s work on biopolitics in Turkey (2006, 2007), in which she exposes the state as a social relation that unfolds in myriad ways. She looks in particular at how subjectivity is founded in state sovereignty – showing how the ‘idea of the state’ circulates in the daily lives of Turkish citizens, disrupting any fixed boundary between state and society and pointing, instead, to ‘the everyday state’. Though fragmented and multiple, the state coheres in everyday life through ‘the resonance (between sites, agents, rationalities, and techniques) that is discursively produced through the circulation and arrest of people, documents, information, money, and influence’ (2007: 49).

Secor and Painter’s work, as well as that of a growing number of other political-cum-social geographers, underscores the impossibility of understanding the state without taking ‘the social’ into account. If we wish to understand the workings of nationalism, for instance, we must approach it through the social practices that constitute it; if we wish to understand geopolitics, we must recognize that it is embodied in mundane as well as contentious social relationships. As Sara Smith argues, the tense geopolitical standoff between India and Pakistan is manifested in intimate bodily practices about marriage and procreation among and between different ethnic groups in India (2009).

While the deliberate juxtaposing of political and social geographic framings is intellectually

interesting, these innovative approaches do much more than stimulate new ways of seeing connections. Particularly in the more activist-oriented work of geographers and others, they enable us to imagine and enact alternative ways of challenging power, domination and exploitation by revealing that the state is not something ‘out there’, institutionally inaccessible, but is rather an ‘effect’ (Mitchell, 1999) that is materially negotiable and resistible precisely through its inherence in daily practices. Notably, it is in recent discussions of the value of community as a response to state power that a return to the work of the early anarchist geographers, particularly Kropotkin, can be traced (Day, 2005). Organized around the logic of affinity, drawn in part from Kropotkin’s concept of mutual aid, the possibility of rejecting hegemonic state relations is facilitated by organizing alternative social spaces that reject racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, ageist, able-ist, capitalist and other forms of exclusionary politics and embrace instead spaces of becoming where forms of association exist that are neither dependent on capital nor authoritarian. It means, in short, rejecting the state as the starting point of radical social change and turning instead to non-revolutionary *and* non-reformist forms of social organization that are non-hierarchical, non-universalizing and non-coercive, and are based on shared ethico-political commitments to progressive practices. Richard Day calls these alternatives ‘affinity-based practices’. Undertaken by those ‘who are striving to recover, establish or enhance their ability to determine the conditions of their own existence, while allowing and encouraging others to do the same’ (2005: 13), they are effecting an explicitly social as opposed to merely political revolution, in the tradition of Kropotkin and Reclus as well as other early anarchists such as William Godwin and Gustav Landauer.

### ***Social/cultural***

The intersection of social with cultural geography is perhaps the most well worn connection

of all those contained in the handbook. As a result, while the three intersections we have discussed so far seem fresh and lively, profiling the relationships between social and cultural geography might feel a little jaded. Furthermore, while social/cultural may be the most obvious zone of integration to look to – though it is in fact no more ‘natural’ than any of the other connections – the nexus of social and cultural geography has provoked heated debate, especially in Anglo-American geography where it has formed a catalyst for the discipline’s recurring self-analysis. In continental Europe, by contrast, there are places where the social and cultural never parted ways, remaining indistinguishable parts of the same endeavour (see Simonsen, 2007, on Denmark; Paasi, 2007, on Finland) and jurisdictions where they form oppositional poles (see Chivallon, 2007, on France).

This is not the place to review the many histories of social and cultural geography – their discontinuities and entanglements – which now pepper the literature. What is of interest here is that these histories have become ‘stylized’ in ways which might constructively be challenged. This stylization generally talks, first, of a time when the two approaches were separated and unevenly examined (with the social dominating the cultural), then of a period in which they came briefly together, before, finally, a period in which roles were reversed, so that the cultural now dominates the social. There is also a geographical account in which social geography’s European roots were spliced onto quantitative US social science to form a style of ‘spatial sociology’ that was set apart from North American cultural geography, rooted as it was in the material landscapes of American anthropology. Meanwhile, UK social geography was transformed by the humanistic traditions of British anthropology and British cultural studies, whose vocabulary rarely included the word ‘social’ but whose engagement with shared meanings and powerful representations opened a whole new world for social geographers to explore.

However the story is told, the result is a certain disgruntlement: worries that social geography has lost its identity; concerns that cultural geography has no real commitment to recognizing or challenging inequality and injustice (see Gregson, 1995); calls for rapprochement around renewed sensitivity to materialism in cultural studies and social research (Jackson, 2000a); and so on. The fact of this handbook suggests that predictions of social geography's dissolution are premature (see also Pain, 2003); but our larger point is that there have always been multiple and overlapping accounts of the 'social' and the 'cultural' in geography, and it is among these folds that the most productive ideas emerge.

*The social and cultural – a re-assembly?*

Despite speculation and counter-claims, notwithstanding disciplinary tensions, and acknowledging their uneven profiles, the fact is that in geography (and more generally) the social and cultural have always been intrinsically linked. Rather than telling this story 'in the round' – a tale that can be recovered relatively easily from a burgeoning literature – we have opted to conclude this overview of social geography's connectivity by illustrating the intimate entanglement of social and cultural affairs through an example from just one area of research, the social geographies of fear. This is just one of many possible narratives, and it sketches rather than details the contours of research. Fear is an apt example, however, not just because it is an emotive topic which is perhaps impossible to pin down, but also because it is at once individual and collective, discursive and experiential, material and imaginary, embodied and emplaced; the 'feared' and the 'fearful' have complex and overlapping subject positions and spatial lives (Day, 1999). That fear is open to vastly different definitions, interpretations, ontological and epistemological positions has, indeed, made for a rich vein of research on its spatialities.

The earliest work on fear among geographers is best encapsulated in David Ley's (1974) exploration of ethnic segregation in 'the black inner city'. This was embraced as

a work of urban social geography, but was very different to those on offer at the time, tackling issues of uncertainty, violence and fear among residents through ethnography. Ley adopted some conventional spatial mapping approaches, but he also dealt with representations of the neighbourhood, foreshadowing one of cultural geography's staple concerns. Indeed, the book's pluralistic but predominantly humanistic approach to the social world, along with its underlying concern to document the inequalities and injustices its subjects faced, nicely positions it between 'social' and 'cultural' geographies (in refreshing contrast to the positivist spatial studies of both segregation and crime that predominated at the time). It might in fact be seen as the epitome of social-cultural geography, illustrating the indivisibility of these human conditions.

Yi Fu Tuan's (1979) work on landscapes of fear was more centrally concerned with understanding the experience of emotion itself, and has always been regarded as a work of cultural geography. Tuan chronicled the nature of human fear and its placement in landscapes, including the immaterial and intangible; he explored fear of ethereal as well as more concrete threats, and drew attention to what would now be labelled discourses of fear, charting their origins and effects. Tuan was less concerned with fear as a societal issue and has been criticized for failing to identify that Western populations have in fact little materially to fear in comparison with those in poorer parts of the world (Sonnenfeld, 1981). Yet there are key ways in which this was also a work of social geography, with its emphasis on shared meanings and the sociality of fear.

Pain (1997), Smith (1986) and Valentine (1989, 1992), in their work on the racialization and gendering of fear, spoke powerfully to a growing sociological interest in the emotional structuring of inequality, noting the impact this has on the material conditions of everyday life for women and people of colour. These approaches sit quite centrally in the sphere of social geographies. But in comparison to the

work on these themes employing spatial science/GIS in the 1980s and 1990s, these were much more qualitative cultural takes, focusing on discourses, images and ideas about fear as well as first-hand experiences of violence. And while some spatial science is rightly criticized for turning subjective experiences into objectified patterns, others have found ways to use technologies such as geovisualization productively to augment intensive research into highly personal issues of emotion (see Kwan, 2008, on Muslim women's fears in the US). The social in social/cultural is again contextual and relational: the one constituting the other.

There are many other examples of the interleaving, and relationality, of ideas about the social and the cultural, the meanings and the materials of fear. Equally there is a literature invoking these ideas in reaction to simplistic or essentialized accounts of what fears are and how they are produced. Scholars of planning and architecture such as Oscar Newman (1972) and Alice Coleman (1985), for example, promoted the idea (especially popular with policy makers) that built environments directly affect crime and fear, and that they can therefore be remedied by changing those environments, making them more protective. In response to ideas like this, Gilling (1997: 186) showed how such interventions simply reinforced 'mutual suspicion and a profoundly anti-communitarian fortress mentality', while others – for example, Koskela (1997) – drew attention to the enabling possibilities of behavioural and emotional qualities like boldness, and still others concentrate on the emancipatory potential of hope (Wright, 2008). Once again, then, it is the intersectionality of the social and cultural rather than their separate effects that is most apparent.

This continues to be so in more recent times as fear, and studies of it, have experienced a renaissance in light of the war on terror and other pressing geopolitical issues (Gregory and Pred, 2007; Pain and Smith, 2008). In this new literature, the resurrection of a masculinist geopolitics setting the 'West'

once again opposite 'the rest' is countered by a new generation of place-based researchers (see also Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2003; Pain, 2009), as well as by a return to classic oppositions to the growing militarization of public space, such as that elegantly revealed in Davis's (1992) social history of segregation, fear and the distribution of wealth and power in Los Angeles.

So, while it is tempting to see an explosion of interest in emotional geographies (see, for example, Anderson and Smith, 2001; Davidson et al., 2005) as the new domain of cultural rather than social geography, this is really just one element of a wider engagement with hope, fear, anxiety and contentment that has permeated the co-development of social and cultural research over at least four decades. There is no linear history of social 'versus' cultural geography, or of one perspective extinguishing the other. Without denying tensions which are worth exploring, the bigger picture is that these approaches are each part of a kaleidoscope of understanding of social and cultural emotional geographies. Social-cultural geographies are together part of the wider project of excavating the materials and meanings of life. Rather than debating where the cultural ends and the social begins, time may be better spent pondering other schisms: for example, around our purposes and involvement in knowledge production; and our engagements in ethics, politics, relevance and epistemology.

## PROJECTIONS

Having entered a space where relationships with, and even among, things may be as interesting as relationships among people, no one has a monopoly on defining or engaging with the complexity of the social world. Likewise, in a setting where the workings of 'economy' are no longer taken for granted, where 'markets' are as much about subjective encounters as financial affairs, social geography is forced to recognize that

what was once of marginal interest – supply, demand, cost and value, for example – now occupies a central place. And at a time when researchers engaged with policy are no longer thought to be sullyng their hands by reproducing power structures that are unchanging and unchallengeable, nothing short of a paradigm shift of relevance is in train. The *Handbook of Social Geographies* is designed to reflect all this: to reconsider and redirect the cutting edge of a long-established, frequently revised and currently revived subfield; to engage with the way a map of established territory has burst into new ‘lines of flight’.

So what, to this end, does the Handbook contain? As noted earlier, it does not contain a little of everything; it is not a dictionary, an encyclopaedia, a systematic text or an exhaustive review. It is a selective excursion into the depths and across the breadth of a changeable, vibrant field of study. Consistent with an emphasis on connections rather than legacies, on trajectories rather than origins, we have invited contributions which show how different debates – whose influence may have waxed and waned in the past – are moving on. Neither we, the editors, nor the authors have tried to be definitive. Rather the collection is eclectic and exploratory, tracking the past to an extent, but with a preference for debating what the subject, and the world it is getting to know, might become. To that end, the volume is organized around five thematic hubs that are anchored in social geography; these are inspired by, but not neatly contained in, the subdisciplinary connectivities outlined above. Each section has its own editor, and each has its own editorial overview, providing a summary of, and commentary on, the individual chapters. Broadly, however, the shape of the social geographies that follow looks something like this.

The first section is concerned with a long-standing core interest among social geographers with questions of *difference and diversity*. This builds upon enduring ideas about the structuring of social relations. It examines the ruptures and rifts, continuities and connections around race, gender, age,

health and disability, bodies and affectual relations; and it uses the postsocial ‘turn’ to reconsider the way some key geographies of inequality are made and sustained.

This section examines the social relations of difference, a keystone of social geography. The opening chapters consider the role of geography in placing and reproducing ‘traditional’ social divisions around race/gender/age/disability/nation. All of these markers make some reference to the ‘naturalness’ of difference – often under the banner of ‘diversity’ – and contrast those appeals to the claims of social constructivism, anti-essentialism, and geographies of relation. The injustices these essentialized axes produce help explain why, during the late twentieth century, social geography was part of a critical, and remarkably successful, attempt to undermine appeals to nature in accounts of social difference. Authors of these early chapters explore what is at stake theoretically and politically now that these appeals to essential differences are no longer possible.

The section’s chapters also explore the turn to other ‘post-social’ axes of difference that have recently unsettled old ideas about categories and identities. They therefore consider newer divides – around genetic geographies, non-human animals, technologies and pre-conscious affectivities – that not only question the theoretical demarcation of ‘the social’ from its Others, but also point to the role of such an analytic in reproducing inequalities formed through the traditional axes of gender, race, etc. In marking these new directions, these chapters clarify the encounter between social constructionism and new materialisms in shaping the social geography of social inequality. They tell the story of how social geography has responded to calls to embrace ‘nature’, to recognize the salience of the object world, and to take the post-human realm seriously.

The second section of the Handbook is about the inseparability of *economy and society*, and about the contribution of social geography – alongside other areas of social research – to the development of concepts

and ideas that have previously been the domain of economy and economists. As we have already seen, the division between social and economic geography, like the division between economics and sociology, is one of the most enduring in modern thought. No social commentator denies that there is a material, and therefore economic, edge to the inequalities that divide the world, but the economic mechanisms which underpin these – money, markets, prices, costs, calculation – have too often been taken for granted rather than subjected to debate. Confronting this challenge, the essays in this section draw attention to the sociality, subjectivity, emotional qualities and placement of money, markets, price and value, recognizing the importance of examples drawn from home, work and services, from production, consumption and exchange. These authors recognize that because ‘the economy’ now dominates so many areas of life – attending to needs as well as wants, delivering basics as well as distributing surplus – much more work is required to excavate its social and cultural content and to draw out its political relevance. This task could be addressed through discussions about labour markets, financial markets, small businesses or multinational firms; however, the section also works with ideas that are traditionally more central to social geography, such as consumption and everyday life.

Section three hinges around *geographies of wellbeing*. The aim here is to draw together, and find links between, the many aspects of material and emotional wellbeing and distress, which are documented in the literature. This section builds from a foundation of work on the spaces of fear, anxiety and disease towards newer concerns with geographies of health, resilience and contentment. Perhaps the two key dimensions of wellbeing hinge around safekeeping and health. Each is impaired by the patterning of risks and vulnerabilities, and these in turn underpin geographies of emotional and material harm. On the other hand, safety and positive health, or wellbeing, are both promoted by key sets of (material and psycho-social) resources,

which not only work directly to keep people well and safe but also build up resilience to harmful circumstances and events. This section considers both sides of the coin. It documents geographies of risk, fear and victimization, as well as geographies of personal and community safety. It is concerned with the patterning of health inequalities and with geographies of disability, but it also taps into the emotional, and affective, geographies of resilience, contentment and hope as it considers the impact of inequalities in wealth and power on material and psycho-social wellbeing.

The fourth section focuses on *geographies of social justice*. The question of who gets what, where and why has, for years, formed a core concern for social geography. The neo-liberal environment, however, encasing both global and local concerns over the last 25 years, has set the competitive individualism of markets against a co-operative or relational ethics of care, such that the latter has been confined to the voluntarism of families or the residual sphere of social policy. Social geography, nevertheless, has always held onto the argument that things could and should be different, and this concern with the possibilities and practicalities of normative theory is what connects the ideas in this section.

Where a subdiscipline is so engaged with inequality as something which is made rather than pre-given, we might expect a concern with how things should and could be different. This section is about the idea and practice of a more inclusive, just, ethical, caring society; and about the role which social geographers could have in forging it. Concern with social justice in geography intersects with various other disciplines but most especially with moral and political philosophy. Since David Harvey’s pathbreaking 1973 book, *Social Justice and the City*, geographers have attempted to grapple with the spatial implications of moral and political questions and especially with how value is determined and the just distribution of value in society. But such a construction, based as it is upon distributive questions, fails to appreciate that

social injustice is the result of differential access to power and resources and not merely about the distributional outcomes of valuation. For instance, access to justice and the rights that inhere within the social and political category of citizenship are more complicated than the distribution of access to citizenship itself.

This fourth section traverses the history and contemporary terrain of social justice in geography, recognizing the many different ways in which the term has been problematized. We address the ideal of morality and ethics with respect to justice as well as the tension that exists between liberal notions of social justice and feminist reconceptualization of it around an 'ethic of care'. We also address the intersections of social justice and environmental justice and more recent attempts to develop a meta-ethics of justice for the discipline. Finally, we explore various justice- and rights- based struggles for both the capacity to become and act and to have equal access to the political, social and cultural resources that constitute worlds.

Reflecting this interest in practice and practical engagement, the handbook ends with a fifth section containing a set of commentaries on methods and ethics: on what is implied in *doing social geography*. This is not a systematic overview of the 'how to' of research: there are plenty of volumes now devoted to methodology. It is rather about the entanglement of research with practicalities, moralities and politics. It is about the possibilities for, and limits to, activism. Doing social geography has always been about practice and practical engagement – it is one area of geography where the 'doing' has always been bound into the 'knowing'. It is, indeed, social geographers who have begun to respond to calls for more grounded research and theory across the discipline, and who have tied the achievements of a sometimes too detached 'cultural turn' into pressing concerns about welfare and inequality. This makes social geography well placed to address key questions, which are currently resurfacing across social science, about the relevance of academic research and

its relationship with policy and other forms of intervention.

This section covers different ways of engaging with the world outside social geography. It encourages readers to link practical research strategies with wider theories of research and its political, ethical and institutional contexts. The contributors offer personal accounts which reflect how they have negotiated these issues in their own research practice. The editorial commentary draws these themes together and provides some thought-provoking observations on the conduct of social geographical research in the twenty-first century.

## THE SHAPE OF SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY

To restate: it is obvious, even in a volume of this scale and size, that we cannot hope to present a comprehensive picture of a subject as longstanding or as wide ranging as social geography. Nor can we claim to have done justice to the many vibrant social geographies that are currently in play. We are conscious of some glaring gaps, just as we are inspired by so much of what has been written. What we have tried to convey above all in this collection is a sense of the energy, diversity, relevance and curiosity that drives the work of social geographers today. The essays contain a flavour of what matters, a glimpse of where the cutting edge lies, a brush with the most dangerous territory, and a signal of what is still to come. This is not a geography of everything for anyone; but hopefully it contains something of value for geographers generally, for social scientists in the wider community, and for social geographers in particular.

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