

## **Introduction: Culture, Space, and Representation**

A Special Edition of the Irish Journal of Anthropology

These papers represent the proceedings of a conference held under the auspices of the Anthropological Association of Ireland at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, from the 12th to the 14th of December, 1997. While the Irish Journal of Anthropology has historically published individual contributions from AAI conferences, the editors (who also were the co-organisers of this event), felt that the quality and thematic connection of the papers at these meetings were such that a special edition of the Journal was justified. A combination of factors, however, from the academic duties of the editors to the sheer logistics of coordinating contributions from authors several thousand miles apart, delayed the publication of this work. The editors wish to thank those who made this conference a success (particularly the student members of the AAI), and to acknowledge the forbearance of the contributors to this volume in the face of seemingly interminable delays.

These papers address an issue of growing importance in Anthropology in particular and of the social sciences in general, that is, the theoretical role of space in the analysis of culture. At one level, of course, analyses of space and culture have been interconnected for a long time. Cultural constitutions of the landscape, for example, have enjoyed a long-standing, if sporadic, anthropological interest, going back to Boas' (1934) observation that place-names are social constructions par excellence. This tradition is continued at present in such work as Basso (1992, 1996). More generally, though, a theoretical analysis of space, stressing contestation, historicity, and the conditions of the possibility of certain structures, has emerged in the discipline in the last fifteen years or so as an important theoretical lens with which to examine the relationship(s) between power and culture, to rethink the simple equation of *culture = order*, and to understand the mechanics of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices (see the various contributors to Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

These trends owe much of their modern impetus to the multi-faceted work of Henri Lefebvre (1973 (trans 1991)), and his English-language interpreters, such as David Harvey (1989), and Edward Soja (1990, 1996). They also owe much to the work of Michel Foucault and the myriad studies to which his oeuvre has given rise. The papers in this volume bear the marks of these interests, but they also advance them, making important contributions to debates about space in the social sciences beyond anthropology. In the process, they highlight just how

fruitful the current overlap between the analyses of space and culture can be for a wide variety of disciplines.

Most of the papers in this collection examine various aspects of Irish culture. In many ways, they move forward a trend in ethnographic analysis of Ireland, away from an emphasis on ostensibly bounded local and traditional social structures, either suddenly adapting to (modernizing), or failing to meet the challenge of (declining), in the face of recently changing circumstances, and towards an ethnography of Irish culture that stresses history, contestation, and extra-local structures as integral parts of the analysis. Clearly, this way of thinking lacks the easy temporal watersheds of an older paradigm of culture change—the before-and-after binaries at the heart of modernization theory or those theories discontented with modernity. This more sophisticated theorizing of time, however, can easily mask the fundamentally different appreciation of space embedded in this same thinking. In all the papers analyzing Irish data in this collection, space is much more than the dead hand of the past, a container of traditional activities, structures, and sentiments, awaiting the arrival of *History* to spring the mold. Instead, space is understood by these authors as a social dynamic in its own right: changed geography and social relationships—from the urban built environment to the technical needs of capitalist distribution—rework the possibilities of Irish traditional music (Dillane); the nineteenth-century landscape is viewed in Lefebvre's terms both as a space of contestation and a contested space (Ó Cadhla); the tellurian presence of death on the Irish landscape brought about by the disaster of the Famine existing outside of History, only historically so, constitutes eldritch potencies connected to memorial spaces (McClellan), and the symbolic constitution of the space for traditional performance is the precondition of both community solidarity and inter-generational rivalry (Ó Laoire).

This sort of reconceptualisation of space in Irish ethnography and related fields has been proceeding along separate paths, towards similar objectives, for some years (Whelan 1992, Slater 1993, MacCana 1988, Hannan 1988, among others). In retrospect, the surprising thing about this emphasis is that there is not more of it, and, further, that there have been few attempts to chart its development across several disciplines. It is surprising because, for a very long time in Ireland—from Elizabethan inquisitions into the legal titles of holdings through Cromwellian ravages in the countryside to post-Union mapping, schooling, and population disciplining projects, the (re)organization of space and the domination of a population was seen to be fundamentally interrelated by colonial regimes in Dublin Castle and London. Nowhere

in Ireland, however, did this sort of project encounter a cultural *tabula rasa*. Instead, vibrant local appreciations of space and time exerted a strong, sometimes determining, influence on the institutions that were given the task of colonizing and modernizing a recalcitrant periphery. Irish ethnography has only recently taken these issues as central to the analysis of Irish culture, as evident in the work of Taylor (1995) and Saris (1996), among others. In this collection, Ó Cadhla's work deserves a special mention in this regard. Adroitly using some recent thinking in postcolonial studies, he imaginatively reanalyses data from nineteenth-century Ireland, specifically the grand mapping project of the Ordnance Survey as well as knowledge about the island and its inhabitants generated by the emerging disciplines of Ethnology, Folklore and Anthropology, in delineating what might be called the architectonics of domination. Ó Cadhla's central concern in this work is not the sterile categorical question of Revisionist historians—Was Ireland a colony?—(e.g., Foster 1989, 1993). Instead, our theoretical attention is redirected towards how knowledge, power, space, and meaning combine in specific ways to make and remake a particular colonial encounter.

Alongside these papers on Ireland are similar analyses of other European data, specifically from Germany and Spain. Maddox, for example, in an interesting reading of the Expo '92 in Seville, makes the case that this exhibition with universal pretensions both structured, and became the unwilling site for, the interplay between a portmanteau of regional, national and transnational social forces. The sensibility that he sees as the guiding force behind the Expo, *cosmopolitan liberalism* which imagines itself the same everywhere, mediating in a similar enlightened fashion similar *structures of difference*, stumbles on the hurdles of regional identities, national politics, and transnational capitalism (alongside some of the resistances this formation calls into being) within this setting (see also Harvey 1996). In this fashion, Maddox's work follows a long line of looking at the created spaces of Universal Exhibitions as useful lens with which to examine social processes and cultural desires and anxieties (de Cauter 1993, Fogelson 1991, Saris in press, among others). However, he inflects his analysis of Expo '92 towards teasing out the spaces in which Spanish desires and anxieties concerning *Europeanness* had the opportunity to develop and conflict. Subsequent developments in the political-economic integration of Europe argue that the relevance of Maddox's thinking extend well beyond one region of Spain in the early 1990s.

Lastly, in an historical paper, Purdy combines different readings of space in the German participation in, and anxieties about, the development of Europe-wide fashion trends. Weaving together a traditional geographical approach to space in the sense of the development of markets and trade goods diffusion, i.e., contrasting those areas of Germany that received their cultural objects from France as against those who looked towards England, alongside the *imagined* sense of space that was the pre-condition of a pan-European modernity, Purdy charts different appreciations of fashion in a strategic and economically powerful area, containing elites who could not escape the feeling that they were less well-dressed than those inhabiting the epicentres of modern civilisation in Paris and London. In an engaging way, Purdy also delves into this specific form of modern anxiety, a result of a dilemma that one might see as singularly diagnostic of the successful conquest of the body by international capitalism. No matter how speedy the lines of communication and no matter how free the trade in goods, the anxiety that one is dressed badly, even ludicrously, diffuses faster than the means of rectifying the situation. It is at this juncture of desire and anxiety that Purdy finds both the sense of the abstract space in which fashion goods circulate as well as the sense of their fleeting temporality.

Overall, though, perhaps the best praise that one can bestow on the papers in this collection is the observation that their theoretical innovations are driven by detailed ethnographic and/or historical data. These papers answer the promise inherent in ethnography—the commitment to descriptively integrating data coming from human subjects for whom something is at stake, with a dialectical appreciation of structural forces, while articulating the lessons learned within a specific setting to broader issues in the human sciences.

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