Chapter 2 A Brief History of Geographic Thought

This chapter covers

2.1 Histories of geographies
2.2 Geography as (spatial) science
2.3 Developing 'human-centred' theories
2.4 Structural theories and radical responses
2.5 Conclusion: an intellectual battleground?

2.1 HISTORIES OF GEOGRAPHIES

In the first chapter, we began to explore the importance of theory in geography by demonstrating that all geographical enquiry is, to a lesser or greater extent, informed by ideas and theories about how the world works. In particular, we emphasized the fact that theory informs what geographers study and how they study it. We began to show this by looking at definitions of geography (in terms of its preoccupation with the related concepts of space, place and nature) and how they have been informed by particular packages of theoretical and conceptual thought. However, so far we have not explored how such theories have impinged on what academic geographers have actually done (i.e., how they have gone about studying and writing 'geography'). But in many ways, theory cannot exist without praxis; for Harvey (1999, p. 576) the acid test of new thinking comes with the active transformation of geographical thought into practice. It is impossible – or at least very difficult – to assess the utility of geographic theory without exploring how it has helped (or hindered) geographers in their research, discussion and debate. Consequently, we cannot hope to understand the practice of geography without understanding something of the theories that inform that practice. Equally, it is extremely difficult to understand why certain theories enjoy popularity unless we are aware of how they are sustained, reproduced and modified through practice.

The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to identify how different philosophical and theoretical impulses have served to influence the practices and procedures of academic geography (and vice versa) at different times. First and foremost, the intention is to show that human geographers have imagined and conceptualized the relationships between people and their surroundings in varying ways, developing different theories to account for the 'realities' of everyday life. As we shall see, these theories, which are informed and sustained by distinct philosophies of knowledge, are often antithetical, in the sense that some theories contradict and undermine other theories. This has led to innumerable intellectual confrontations and skirmishes as geographers seek to prove that 'their' theory is the correct one for explaining the nature of

the relationship between people and place. In turn, it will be demonstrated that different geographers have adopted very different approaches for exploring these relationships. Here, the links between high-level 'abstract' thinking and the nitty-gritty business of actually studying the world are brought into sharper focus; the history of geography tells us that what geographers have studied, and the way they have studied it, have been explicitly and implicitly informed by philosophical and theoretical concerns (Martin and James, 1993). As we stressed in Chapter 1, geographers have not been able to avoid theory any less than they have been able to avoid engaging with the messiness of the real world!

What will become evident in our brief history of geographical theory is that, at certain times, particular packages of theoretical and philosophical thought have enjoyed wide currency in the discipline, so that distinctive ways of 'doing' geography have become widespread. This has led several commentators to highlight geography's propensity to move through successive phases of intellectual and theoretical development where particular ideas about what is the 'correct' way of doing geography have become dominant (Mair, 1986; Unwin,1992; Haggett, 2001). In the work of Ron Johnston, in particular, this has led to the descriptions of different geographic *paradigms* (Johnston, 1986, 1991, 2000). This concept was introduced by Thomas Kuhn in his key work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970). In essence, paradigms refer to the idea that academic disciplines move through phases of development characterized by different assumptions about how work should proceed. By way of example, Kuhn referred to the development of chemistry from an embryonic and pre-paradigmatic endeavour (associated with random experiments in alchemy) to a scientific paradigm underpinned by atomic theory, standardized chemical classifications and experimental procedures. In turn, he stressed that each paradigm is associated with the development of particular forms of notation, jargon and language – often incomprehensible to those working outside the paradigm. In Kuhn's estimation, each paradigm becomes an accepted way of gathering and synthesizing knowledge until the weight of 'anomalies' which cannot be explained using existing theories demands the formulation of new ideas. It is at this point that an apparently superior paradigm may emerge, with existing theories and ideas rejected in favour of this new paradigm. Often, the influence of one academic or one key text has been sufficient to dramatically change the trajectory of a discipline, instigating such a paradigm shift. In chemistry, for instance, Dalton's work on atomic theory is cited as a key influence in the development of scientific chemistry, while the replacement of Newtonian physics by Einstein's theory of relativity is often cited as the quintessential paradigm shift in the history of physics.

What Kuhn's ideas suggest is that every academic discipline goes through distinct episodes where different assumptions about what exists and how to study it predominate. Moving from one paradigm to another demands a fundamental re-conceptualization of the world by academics – they need to look at the world in a new way and learn a new language for talking about it. What Kuhn thus documents is a situation where disputes over fundamentals mean

that meaningful debates between the proponents of different paradigms are impossible – they simply 'argue past each other'. As we shall see, this assertion resonates with some of the episodes in the history of geography, as many thinkers in geography have argued (at various times) that their way of looking at the world represents the most meaningful, progressive and correct way of doing geography, rejecting existing modes of exploration and explanation out of hand. Exploring this contention, Johnston identifies three separate paradigms that became dominant within academic geography in the period up to 1950. These can be summarized briefly as follows:

- *Exploration*: An arguably pre-paradigmatic phase of geography where the growth of knowledge about the globe was the principal aim. This was characterized by efforts to accumulate and map information about the world, implicating geography in the wider process whereby the colonial powers sought to expand their global reach through the accumulation of knowledge. Here, the dominant motif was one of integrating knowledge acquired on 'voyages of discovery' into coherent and logically presented taxonomies, encyclopaedias and gazetteers. This paradigm can be loosely traced from the beginnings of European maritime trade and exploration in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to the late nineteenth century. At this stage, geography was also closely associated with cartography, so that charting the 'unknown' lands and 'empty spaces' beyond the European heartland was a key objective (Harley, 1992). Gradually, however, dissatisfaction set in with this accumulation of knowledge for accumulation's sake, leading some to advocate that this knowledge ought to be used to test certain assumptions about the links between people and their surroundings.
- *Environmental determinism*: Associated with the institutionalization of geography in the nineteenth century (e.g., the formation of the Royal Geographical Society in Britain in 1830), this was a paradigm characterized by attempts to theorize the types of human activity documented in different parts of the world with reference to characteristics of the environment. Influenced by Darwinian and evolutionary thinking, this proposed that human activities were influenced by their environment. In the view of its most forthright proponents (American geographers Ellen Semple and Ellsworth Huntingdon), climate and physical conditions were bequeathed causal powers, able to determine human development, physiology and culture. In turn, this led to explanations of national development based on accounts of environmental physical characteristics. For example, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts on Australia described a dangerous and hostile environment that was consequently populated by Aboriginal races that were deemed inferior to white European races (see Ploszajska, 2000). It has been subsequently argued that this 'new geography' was therefore connected to the impulses of colonialism, albeit in the guise of 'new imperialism' (see especially Livingstone, 1992a). So, while this paradigm shift witnessed geographers beginning to engage with the ideas of inductive and logical reasoning in the development of theory (particularly in the work of

Fredrich Ratzel), cumulative evidence suggested that environmental determinism was too simplistic to explain the variations in human activity and culture, leading to spurious (and often racist) theories of environmental causation. Ultimately, and retrospectively, this led many to begin to question the usefulness of this paradigm.

- *Regionalism*: Associated primarily with the work of French geographer Vidal de la Blache at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this paradigm argued that the region should become the primary focus of geographical enquiry. This took inspiration from preceding paradigms in the sense that it involved taxonomic classification of different regions in terms of the *genres de vie* (or ways of life) that characterized them, as well as postulating a relationship between physical environment and human activity (see also Sauer, 1925). Yet, unlike determinist accounts, a premium was placed on rich descriptions of the intimate and varied relationship of culture, physical landscape and region, with the interconnection of these three resulting in the distinctive identities of (for example) specific counties, regions and nations. Hartshorne (1939) was later to codify this concern with areal differentiation in his text *The Nature of Geography*, which provided an erudite theoretical framework for regional geography based on the identification of regional differences and similarities.

In passing, we should note that Johnston's description of paradigm shifts has been widely disputed, with Mayhew (2001), for example, suggesting that it imposes too much order on the 'geography' carried out in the early modern period (i.e., pre-nineteenth century). None the less, this threefold description of geography's theoretical influences has been often repeated (e.g., Bird, 1989; Cloke *et al.*, 1991), and provides the basis of human geography's 'institutional memory' (Barnes, 2001a).

However, after 1950, Johnston (and others) have recognized a much more rapid set of paradigm shifts as geographers have become increasingly preoccupied with the purpose, direction and relevance of their discipline (and increasingly dissatisfied with the theory and practice of regional geography). Thus, writing in 1991, Johnston identified a 'quantitative revolution' leading to the establishment of a spatial science paradigm in the 1950s and 1960s, a behavioural and humanistic paradigm emerging in the 1960s and 1970s and a radical/structural paradigm becoming dominant in the 1970s and 1980s (see also Bird, 1989; Peet, 1998; Haggett, 2001). It is these apparently distinctive episodes that provide the context for contemporary geographical thinking, and, as such, they provide the focus of our chapter.

What this historiography will hopefully show is that contemporary theoretical approaches to human geography need to be understood contextually, in relation to at least three things (see Castree and Sparke, 2000):

1. The *history* of geography – how geography has actually developed in terms of what geographers have studied (and how).
2. The *sociology* of geography – how institutions, social networks, journals and

educational structures (particularly universities) have shaped the development of geography.
3. The *psychology* of geography – how individual geographers have adopted ways of thinking about and interpreting the world, whether conformist or confrontational.

Here, we must therefore balance our focus on the first of these with an understanding that geography has not developed in a vacuum, but has been developed by individuals (and individuals collaborating) within particular institutional and social structures. A key argument running through this chapter (and, by implication, the book) is that it is impossible to understand what geographers do without reference to the way that individual theories have been promoted (or quashed) by particular practitioners at particular moments in the development of a discipline which, in turn, is subject to a series of social, professional and institutional influences. In relation to the latter, we need to be mindful of the geographers' accountability to the university or college in which he or she works, the wider geographical community that he or she represents and the wider society which he or she often claims to serve. For instance, Castree and Sparke (2000) argue that in recent years geographers have been subject to a series of corporatist accounting pressures which have forced them to focus on the quantity rather than quality of their work, and that the changing nature of their work can only be understood in relation to these institutional imperatives (see also Sidaway, 1997).

As the chapter unfolds, the difficulty of writing geography's histories will become apparent. In particular, any attempt to write the recent history of geographical thought in terms of distinct paradigms will be seen to be highly problematic, not to say dubious. As Johnston's (1991) own attempts to use Kuhn's paradigm concept have demonstrated, the danger of adopting the paradigm idea is that it imposes an artificial constancy on what Livingstone (1992a) memorably termed the 'situated messiness' of geographical endeavour. In particular, the idea that geography has moved through unified (and generational) paradigms glosses over the ideas and practices associated with those who did not conform to the dominant or fashionable way of doing things. The consensus among geographers at any one time that there is a best way of doing things has seldom been complete or stable, and to pretend that it has been so is to obliterate the voices of many researchers. In relation to recent histories of Anglo-American human geography, we therefore need to be mindful of the fact that it is often white, English-speaking, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied male academics who seek to define the *Zeitgeist* and identify which ideas are most useful to progress. The net result of this is that dissenting voices – and alternative traditions within geography – are often marginalised or obliterated in the pages of geographic history (Greed, 1993; Sibley, 1995). At the same time, we should be wary of an account that presents a linear, developmental account of geography as the summation of its history rather than its *histories*; the enterprise of geography takes many forms, and it is only relatively recently that geographers have began to acknowledge the existence of different knowledges

(Bell *et al.*, 1995; Driver, 1995). Mindful of this, as you read our account of the recent histories of geographic thought, you might want to reflect on the gender, age, class and *positionality* of the most forthright proponents of particular world-views (something evident in our thinker profiles). You will probably begin to discern that certain types of academics are represented as having had most influence on the discipline's trajectory, with others apparently conforming to their ideas in order to get published. In later chapters, we will perhaps see this trend is beginning to change, as geography opens up to a plurality of voices and ideas, but for now you should be wary that most histories of geography can serve to legitimate the careers of an academic elite while obliterating the views of others regarded as insignificant.

2.2 GEOGRAPHY AS (SPATIAL) SCIENCE

The relationship between human geography and science has always been complex, and although many human geographers have identified strongly with the methods and ideas of science, the relationship between them has been marked by periods of mutual distrust and antagonism (Gregory, 1994b; Massey, 1999b). In part, this is a consequence of geography's uniquely broad focus, which encompasses the exploration of both physical and human phenomena (see Chapter 1). While this twin focus lends geography much of its distinctiveness as a discipline, the net result of this is that something of a schism has emerged between those physical geographers who identify with the natural sciences and those human geographers who feel an affinity with the arts and humanities. This is mirrored in many geography departments in the United Kingdom and Ireland, where students specializing in physical geography are often awarded a Bachelor of Sciences degree and those mainly studying human geography receive a Bachelor of Arts. In this sense, it could be argued that, historically, most human geographers have felt distanced from debates concerning the philosophies and methods of science, preferring to subscribe to a version of geography which concerns itself with scholarly interpretation rather than scientific explanation. Certainly, this could be described as the dominant feeling among human geographers in the pre-war era, where an emphasis on the careful description of people and place was deemed the cornerstone of a discipline based on areal differentiation (Gregory, 1978). Yet to argue that pre-war human geography was not at all influenced by the ideas and theories of science would be quite incorrect. Regional geography was in fact implicitly rooted in long-standing ideas about the procedures and philosophies of science, particularly induction. This is a process which led geographers to make generalizations on the basis of repeated observations, so that conclusions about the nature of different spaces and places could be made on the basis of particular premises. This implied the adoption of scientific notions of causality, where certain things were deemed to be associated with other things. For instance, in many accounts, regularities in human behaviour in different regions of the world were deemed to be related to certain environmental

characteristics of that region. By extension, this led geographers to make certain universal conclusions.

However, it was in the 1950s that human geographers apparently became more concerned with adopting the principles and practices of scientific investigation (Rogers, 1996). In part, this appeared to be related to concerns that geography was unsystematic in its explorations. We can perhaps discern two underlying anxieties here: firstly, that geographers were simply accumulating facts (about regional geography, for example), without integrating them into an overarching theoretical framework, and, secondly, that they lacked the ability to distinguish between causal correlations and accidental or spurious associations. An example of the latter may be found in the environmentally determinist (and *possibilist*) accounts that suggested that a factor such as high ambient temperature, for example, caused a lack of development in a region because of its tendency to induce sloth and idleness among local residents. While such an assertion might appear correct on the basis of observation, by the standards of scientific method, such thinking represents 'bad' science as it fails to distinguish between causal and non-causal relationships. Moreover, it was apparent to some that much geographical thinking was guilty of committing what, by scientific standards, were obvious ecological fallacies – i.e., believing that the characteristics of people could be inferred from the aggregate data that described the general character of the area in which they reside. For instance, to infer that a person living in a country where average educational attainment is low will have a poor standard of education is an example of how inductive thinking can lead to overgeneralized and false conclusions. In logical terms, this represents a process whereby the truth of a universal conclusion cannot be guaranteed even if particular premises are true (Werlen, 1993).

When coupled with a general institutional desire to establish human geography on more systematic grounds, the problems of such fallacious thinking were identified as a serious hindrance to the development of the discipline by a number of practitioners (Hill, 1981). Different histories of geography have thus identified particular individuals (and publications) that encouraged geographers to establish their studies on more scientific (and apparently *firmer*) ground. Notably, these included a posthumous paper published in 1953 by Fredrich Schaefer on 'Exceptionalism in Geography'. Herein, he rejected the argument that there was anything particularly unique about geography's focus on a disparate range of natural and human phenomena, arguing that it could profitably engage with ideas from mainstream science about the possibility (and desirability) of constructing general laws through systematic study. This suggested that there could be an essential unity of method between the natural and social sciences (i.e., *naturalism*), making possible a conversation between physical and human geography. Schaefer identified the essence of synthetic, *nomothetic* science as being a process of inference and observation leading to the deduction of causal relations. More broadly, this begins to indicate the principal features of positivist science, a form of scientific thinking which can trace its roots to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, and later to the writings of Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Rejecting the imprecise and poorly specified thinking that

characterized science at the time, Comte argued that the objective collection of data was a prerequisite to the discovery of cause and effect relationships. The characteristic features of contemporary positivism may be catalogued as follows (see Johnston, 1986):

- Positivist science is based on the collection of data through observation and measurement of things that are known to exist and can be directly experienced (Comte's notion of *le réel*);
- Positivist science assumes that the development of generalizations and deduced laws can only follow on the basis of repeated observations and the testing of hypotheses about the causal relationships that exist between phenomena (Comte's notion of *la certitude*);
- Positivist science aims to combine accepted generalizations and hypotheses into theories and laws that explain how the world works (Comte's precept of *le précis*);
- Positivist science argues that these theories can never be completely validated (i.e., verified) in the sense of proved absolutely correct, but can be provisionally accepted until contrary evidence or data are collected (hence, Comte's notion of *l'utile* – knowledge as a means to an end).

In relation to the latter, it is significant that falsification has been identified as one of the important distinctions between science and non-science (Kitchin and Tate, 2000). However, it has also been argued that this is the distinction between two forms of post-Comte positivistic science, *logical positivism* and critical rationalism, the former emphasizing verification, the latter stressing the importance of falsification (Werlen, 1993). Falsification suggests that science should not seek confirmatory evidence for its theories, but should concern itself with identifying contradictory evidence that would lead to the rejection of hypotheses and ideas. In short, falsification involves checking a theory against evidence that could disprove it rather than collecting and accumulating supporting evidence for the theory. Thus, to use an often-cited example of the difference between the two approaches, the continual collection of examples of white swans as evidence for the hypothesis that 'all swans are white' would never completely verify the claim until every single swan was demonstrated to be white. Falsification, on the other hand, involves searching for evidence of black (or non-white) swans so that a failure to find them would permit the conclusion that the opposite must apply (i.e., 'all swans are white'). This theory is then upheld provisionally, unless and until evidence to the contrary is produced (for example, a black swan). In practice, rational criteria for falsification are generally established so that one anomaly or single disconfirmation would not result in the rejection of a theory, but a certain weight of evidence would (Gregory, 1978). In this light, the goal of scientific process is to strive for better theories through a progressive process of measurement, hypothesis testing and rejection of theories. Through the influential work of Popper and Lakatos, logical positivism also stressed that certain mathematical and scientific statements were axiomatic, and required no empirical validation (hence departing from Comte's

assumption that all statements were to be grounded in direct experience of the world).

Rooted in (logical) positivist philosophy, scientific method appeared to offer systematization and rigour. Within human geography, this appeared attractive to many of those geographers who regarded regional geography as banal and descriptive. Hence, Schaefer was drawn to logical positivism (via the work of Gustav Bergamann and the Vienna Circle) because he saw the regionalism pursued by Hartshorne and Sauer *et al.* as simply uncovering patterns, not producing laws. Significantly, it also seemed to offer a way for geographers to harness the potential offered by new technologies of computation and data handling, with one of the pioneers of quantification in geography, William Garrison (1956, p. 428), proclaiming the virtues of 'the universal language of mathematics'. The turn to positivist packages of thought was thus closely associated with geographers' use of quantitative methodologies. This was manifest in the adoption of statistical and computational procedures which allowed the processing of increasingly large data sets. These were accordingly analysed so that significant regularities and patterns in the data could be distinguished from insignificant (and hence spurious) regularities. Adapting the ideas of Bayesian probability, this often resulted in theories being built on the basis of reasonable probability (a variant of critical rationalism that holds to the concept of degrees of truth rather than verification or falsification of the truth). In the 1950s and 1960s this encouraged some far-reaching attempts to restyle geography as a spatial science, seeking to construct theory on the basis of statistical analysis (Robinson, 1998). This was reflected in the publication of texts presenting the principles of statistical analysis to geographers (e.g., S. Gregory, 1963), and, later, those that sketched out the principles of spatial statistics based on regression, clustering and autocorrelation (Abler *et al.*, 1971). For many, the ultimate promise of this progressive and processional process of statistical

Box 2.1 Peter Haggett (1933–)

In many accounts, Peter Haggett's paper at the Royal Geographical Society in 1963 is depicted as a pivotal moment in the rejection of an 'old style' regional geography and its replacement by a 'new', scientific geography (Robinson, 1998). This paper used statistical methods (such as probability sampling) to describe patterns of forestry in Brazil, challenging the dominant mode of interpretative description. Provoking disquiet in some quarters, this none the less paved the way for Haggett's first text, the well-received *Locational Analysis in Human Geography* (1965). Combining the 'new' geography's interest in quantification with an awareness of the potentiality of a new way of thinking about space, this volume was particularly significant in terms of its emphasis on the formal geometries of space. Characterizing geography as a search for order, this – and his later work with Richard Chorley, *Network Analysis in Geography* (1969) – offered a tool kit for scientific geography comprising (new) techniques of autocorrelation, regression and spatial analysis. More importantly, perhaps, it sought to stress the analytical breakthroughs that might be possible by considering the arrangement of space in terms of networks, movements and flows, proposing that this taxonomy could be used effectively to model and predict patterns in space. In later work, he added a

testing and theory-building was the construction of predictive models (Chorley and Haggett, 1967).

Retrospectively, this period is described as representing a pivotal era in the history of the discipline – geography's 'Quantitative Revolution' (Bird, 1989; Barnes, 2001a). In fact, it is apparent that many geographers were not swept up in the enthusiasms for quantification, hypothesis-testing and statistical analysis. None the less, this new 'scientific' paradigm was responsible for ushering in a new conceptualization of space which became widespread among even those geographers resistant to the notion of quantification. In effect, this was to conceive of space as a surface on which the relationships between (measurable) things were played out. Looking towards other disciplines, notably neoclassical economics and physics, this placed emphasis on the importance of three related concepts – direction, distance and connection. In short, it became axiomatic that the relationships between things on the earth's surface could be explained in terms of these key concepts, and that it was possible to discern regular patterns which could be (geometrically) mapped and modelled (Wilson, 1999). This heralded a new language of spatial physics where human activities and phenomena could be reduced to movements, networks, nodes or hierarchies played out on the earth's surface. This effectively reduced the earth's surface to an isotropic plane – a blank canvas on which human relationships were played out. This empirico-physical conception of space thus lies at the extreme of the scale we examined in Chapter 1, imagining space as presocial and absolute as opposed to social and relational (see also Soja, 1996).

The promise of spatial science was to suggest that both human and physical geographers alike could enact a rigorous exploration of spatial structure – an argument emphasized in **Peter Haggett**'s *Geography: A Modern Synthesis* (1975) (see also Box 2.1). By adapting and rewriting classical locational theory (especially the models of land use proposed by Von Thünen, Christaller, Weber

consideration of the effects of time to his analysis of spatial patterns, heightening geographers' awareness of writing on spatial diffusion being undertaken by those in other disciplines (notably, epidemiology). These ideas were combined in his book *Geography: A Modern Synthesis* (1975) – which remained the standard introductory text for human geography over the next decade. Though such ideas of locational analysis have subsequently been subject to vehement critique, Haggett's work (including studies of the diffusion of HIV) continues to follow the principles of scientific explanation upheld in his early work, though his overview of the discipline, *The Geographer's Art* (1990), suggests that he is aware of the limitations, as well as considerable merits, of a geography founded on positivist principles and practices. The reissue of his key work in 2001 as *Geography: A Global Synthesis* shows his willingness to engage with one of the key concepts in contemporary geography (i.e., globalization), but a critical reading suggests an unwillingness to engage with many others. He is currently Emeritus Professor at the University of Bristol.

Further reading: Haggett (1990, 2001)

and Lösch), Haggett and others proposed that there could be an integrative and comprehensive foundation for modelling geographical pattern and process (i.e., a belief in *naturalism* – the equivalence of the natural and social sciences). This suggested that the place of things could be mapped, explained and predicted through the identification of underlying laws – often mathematically derived – of interaction and movement, with friction of distance regarded as a key factor explaining patterns of human behaviour. For such reasons, many spatial interaction models were referred to as gravity models because of the way that they utilized Newtonian theories (of gravitational attraction) to model flows between (nodal) points. Thus, where a 'natural' science like physics tried to create general laws and rules about things like molecular structure, geography sought to create models of spatial structure which could, for example, generalize settlement patterns, urban growth or agricultural land use (e.g., Berry, 1967). The analogous use of scientific theory even led some to propose that human geography could be described as spatial physics (Hill, 1981), bequeathing it the status of a 'hard' scientific discipline rather than a 'soft' artistic pursuit. This seductive type of argument was typical of the case made for scientific human geography, with the standards of precision, rigour and accuracy evident in mainstream science proposed as the only genuinely explanatory framework available for the generation of valid and reliable knowledge (Wilson, 1972). This was also a key factor encouraging the adoption of the ideas and language (if not always the method) of science among those preoccupied with the status of the discipline and the links between physical and human geography. Additionally, for those believing that geography should be engaging with policy debates, scientific geography appeared to have considerable potential to become 'applied' geography, offering an objective and value-free perspective on the success of, for example, environmental management and planning policies (Pacione, 1999).

Within Johnston's (1991) disputed description of geography's paradigmatic progression, the move from a 'dominant' mode of regional geography was one that occurred in the late 1950s and 1960s. What is perhaps obscured here is that the positivist underpinnings of scientific method were not widely understood or discussed until somewhat later. Specifically, Harvey's *Explanation in Geography* (1969) was perhaps the first book-length treatise examining the theoretical basis of spatial science (see also Box 6.2). Essentially, summarizing developments in the discipline, this sought to review the scientific principles and methods which had been adopted by those seeking to transform geography into a fully-fledged spatial science. None the less, even Harvey was more concerned to offer a rigorous epistemological framework for future geographic research rather than explore the intricacies – and assumptions – of scientific thought (Cloke *et al.*, 1991). However, the publication of this book was to provoke widespread discussion of such issues, including much critical reflection on the philosophical basis of spatial science. Crucially, much of this was to focus on the assumed 'value-neutrality' of positivist inquiry, which was increasingly shown to be based on an idealized and unachievable notion of scientific objectivity (Barnes and Duncan, 1992; Rose, 1993).

Accordingly, by the time that the principles and methodologies of spatial science had been codified and widely disseminated, something of a backlash had developed, with critiques being articulated by a number of geographers (ironically, including Harvey) who felt that positivism offered an inadequate philosophical and political basis for the development of theory in human geography. As we shall see, these criticisms concerned both the ontological and epistemological basis of spatial science, characterizing quantification variously as arid, simplistic, irrelevant and exclusive. While many of these critiques were misplaced, and only applied to caricatured versions of logical positivism (Sheppard, 2001), their cumulative impact was to fuel the search for alternative theoretical frameworks in human geography. None the less, positivism in its various guises continues to underpin much research in human geography, particularly (but not all) research involving quantification. Similarly, the search for 'ground truth' and the principles of spatial science have continued to inform the development of Geographic Information Systems (Pickles, 1995). Hence, Barnes (2001b, p. 416) has insisted that 'the quantitative revolution was a pivotal moment for human geography, shaping it theoretically, methodologically and sociologically for years afterwards'.

2.3 DEVELOPING 'HUMAN-CENTRED' THEORIES

As described above, the proponents of spatial science argued that an understanding of spatial structures through quantitative analysis and modelling would lead to an enhanced understanding of spatial organization and human activity. Yet criticisms of this approach became increasingly widespread in the 1960s and 1970s as the assumptions of spatial science and (logical) positivism were bought into question. One of the most obvious critiques was that the isotropic and featureless landscapes assumed by spatial science simply did not exist (Cloke *et al.*, 1991). More fundamental, perhaps, was the emerging criticism that spatial science worked with a very limited view of what it is to be human. In many of the models developed by spatial scientists, people were frequently represented as vectors or movements (making up aggregated flows). Rejecting this idea, many geographers began to propose alternative models of human subjectivity in an attempt to articulate a more 'human' human geography. As Plummer (1983, pp. 77–8) explains, 'many sociologists or geographers begin with a view of the person as an active, creative world-builder, but before they have finished their theoretical endeavours, they have enchained, dehumanized, rendered passive and lost that same person' (see also Holloway and Hubbard, 2001, pp. 8–12). Two important (and related) traditions that emerged as a result of this critique were behavioural and humanistic geography.

2.3.1 The behavioural critique

Like those who attempted to restyle geography as a spatial science, behavioural geographers largely took their inspiration from the sciences, particularly

psychology. In broad terms, psychology is the 'science of the mind'. Many people's image of psychology is that of a laboratory-based discipline, of scientists in white coats monitoring the behaviour of rats in mazes; for others, it might be of the psychoanalyst asking the patients to lie back on the couch and to tell them about their childhood. Either way, it might seem a little surprising that some geographers looked to psychology to provide them with clues as to how people related to their surroundings. However, the engagement between geography and psychology remains a very important one, albeit one that has become somewhat ghettoized since its heyday in the 1970s. Attempting to identify when this interest in psychology first became apparent is by no means straightforward (Goodey and Gold, 1985), although certain figures have been cited as particularly influential in expanding the horizons of geography beyond the realms of locational analysis by exploring psychological ideas. Gilbert White, William Kirk, John Wright and David Lowenthal have all been credited with bringing such ideas into the geographical fold, although further archival analysis reveals less obvious lines of intellectual heritage from the Berkeley School (a North American group of historical-cultural geographers led by Carl Sauer and interested in the relationships between humans and environments as manifest in specific landscapes). Although many of these individuals and groups were writing in the 1940s and 1950s at a time when descriptive regional analysis was still predominant, their influence was primarily felt in the late 1960s as dissatisfaction with the mechanistic and deterministic nature of the models prominent in the discipline began to take hold (Gold, 1992).

One of the most important ideas that these geographers began to introduce to the discipline is that space is not a real (or objective) phenomenon which is experienced and understood in a similar manner by all individuals. Instead, behavioural perspectives alerted geographers to the fact that each individual potentially possesses a unique understanding of his or her surroundings, and that this understanding is shaped by mental processes of information gathering and organization (Porteous, 1977; Gold, 1980). Here, the key psychological concepts of *perception* and *cognition* became widely utilized by geographers in their anxiety to explain why human behaviour did not fit the patterns sometimes anticipated in the models of spatial science. Simply put, these concepts propose that people do not have complete or perfect understanding of their environment, but have only partial knowledge because of the way that the senses (touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing) acquire information from the surroundings (Rodaway, 1994). This perceived information is then organized through mental processes of cognition to construct selective, partial and distorted images of the world which vary from person to person. Thus an important precept underlying behavioural geography is that it is misleading to analyse human spatial behaviour in relation to the objective, 'real' environment, as people do not conceive of (and experience) space in this way. Instead, it is suggested that the focus should be on the way that people act in relation to the images of space that they construct, shifting the focus from the way people dwell in 'concrete' empirico-physical space to the geographies of the mind (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001).

Therefore, fundamental to a behavioural perspective is the idea that people's knowledge of their surroundings is perceived through the senses and mediated by processes of the human mind. The idea that people's behaviour in the world might best be understood by focusing on their perception of the world is often claimed to have been introduced to geography by William Kirk (1963, p. 361), who sought to make a distinction between the objective (or real) and behavioural environment. In his view, while the former consisted of the physical world around us, the latter consisted of the 'psycho-physical field in which phenomenal facts are arranged into patterns or structures that acquire values in cultural contexts'. Kirk thus believed it was the behavioural, not the objective, environment that provided the basis for human behaviour and decision-making. In effect, this idea challenged the idea that human responses to environmental stimuli are based on the environment as it 'really' is, and instead proposed that these responses are based on the environment as it is perceived to be. The implication here was that human beings do not make decisions based on full, accurate and objective information about what exists in the world, but on what our senses tell us exists and what our brain is capable of dealing with. According to Kirk, our daily interactions with our surroundings could only be understood in relation to the partial, distorted and simplified understanding that we have of our surroundings (see Walmsley and Lewis, 1993).

Methodologically, behavioural geography continued within the traditions of quantitative and scientific analysis, leading some to depict it as an outgrowth, rather than a reaction to, spatial science (Harvey, 1970). Foremost in this endeavour was the utilization of questionnaires, perceptual tests and rating scales to explore the images of the environment that informed individuals' decision-making processes. This included methods designed to measure people's ability to remember, process and evaluate spatial information. Acknowledging a dichotomy between fact/value and objective/subjective space, much of this was designed to identify differences between (for example) real and perceived distance/orientation (see Walmsley and Lewis, 1993). One of the more innovative techniques adopted for these ends was the mental map technique (devised by an architect-planner, Kevin Lynch, 1960). This technique simply required that individuals completed a basic sketch map of a town or area, marking those features that were most important to them. Examining these maps became a means by which geographers could see how people mentally simplified their surroundings and how images of place varied according to a person's gender, age, class, place of residence and so on (Kitchin, 1996). In part, such knowledge allowed geographers to explain why certain individuals adopted behaviour which might, in relation to the decision-making assumptions of neoclassical theory, be described as suboptimal or satisficing. In the work of **Reg Golledge** (Box 2.2), this notion of mental mapping was extended into a wider project of understanding spatial memory, cognitive ability and way-finding. This seemingly promised a full integration of psychological theory and ideas into an understanding of spatial behaviour, and hence the development of better models of spatial decision-making.

By the 1970s, behavioural geography was increasingly being adopted by

researchers to study a number of different themes, influencing studies of migration, retailing, housing, tourism, industrial location, town planning and so on. By focusing on the complex ways that people obtain sensory information from, make sense of and remember their surroundings, behavioural geography promised the construction of more realistic and human-centred models of the world. While this led to some research collaborations between (environmental) psychologists and geographers, in the main this led to geographers adapting concepts from psychology in a fairly loose and imprecise way. For some, this meant that behavioural geography was as reductive and simplistic as the spatial science it sought to critique (Ley, 1983). Indeed, some accounts of behavioural geography describe it as proposing a stimulus-response model of behaviour, whereby people's behaviour is seen to be a response to particular environmental characteristics or stimuli (Cox, 1981). In psychology, behaviouralism was none the less conceived as a reaction against the determinism of the logically positivist behaviourist theories that dominated in that discipline. Specifically, behaviouralism recognized the capacity of humans to think creatively, in stark contrast to the rigidity of Watsonian stimulus-response models that dismissed the notion of subjectivity (Gold, 1992). In geography, the distinction between behaviouralism and logical positivism was perhaps less marked, with many behaviouralists refusing to explore those aspects of the world that could not be observed and measured (cf. Golledge, 1981, on the more general and epistemologically less constraining philosophy of positivism underpinning his version of behavioural geography). Importantly, most behavioural theories continued to explore the differences between people's understandings of the world and a 'real' world that was still regarded as knowable and mappable. Simultaneously, behavioural theories in geography were developed inductively according to scientific principles of measurement, statistical testing and generalization (Gregory, 1978). This led to criticisms from those, particularly geographers subscribing to humanistic theories, who felt that the value-free and objective principles of scientific explanation espoused by behavioural geographers were overly simplistic. In

Box 2.2 Reginald Golledge (1937–)

Many of those strongly associated with behavioural geography in its heyday have subsequently rejected its theories and practices. Reginald Golledge is a notable exception to this. Working out of the University of California, Santa Barbara, his work over three decades has sought to develop a behaviourally based understanding of human spatial behaviour and decision-making. This has involved attempts to examine individuals' way-finding abilities through psychological investigations and computational analysis of 'place utility' and spatial choice. An important idea underlying these explorations is that the complexity of the world is reduced through cognitive processes that serve to summarize spatial relations in terms of key routes between anchor points. This marks an important elaboration of Lynch's (1960) basic ideas that the world is understood in terms of nodes, landmarks, neighbourhoods, edges and paths. On the basis of this, Golledge has been able to suggest the possibility of information systems and algorithms that can approximate human decision-making and spatial way-finding abilities (Golledge, 1991). Latterly, this

short, many saw behavioural geography as an inevitable appendage of spatial science, and depicted it as offering an inadequate (and mechanistic) understanding of human behaviour (see Golledge, 1981).

2.3.2 *Humanistic thought and poetic geographies*

Like behavioural theory, humanistic theory is concerned with articulating a human-centred understanding of the relations between people and their surroundings. In contrast to behavioural geography, however, the intention was to develop models of humanity based on different philosophies of meaning such as phenomenology, existentialism and idealism. Though very different in some ways, these ideas share the assumption that the reality of the world is, in fact, a human construct. Humanistic philosophies are strongly opposed to the naturalist assumption that social phenomena could be studied in the same way as physical phenomena – by looking for general laws or rules and causal explanations. Clearly, quantitative (positivist) geography, with its laws of spatial science, could be seen as adopting this naturalist perspective. The same criticisms were also extended to behavioural geography, especially in relation to the ideas of 'rationality' underpinning decision-making and cognitive processing of environmental information. According to Kevin Cox (1981, p. 3), behaviouralism remained firmly embedded in the presuppositions of naturalistic science, guilty of separating subject and object. Humanistic thinking rejects this separation, instead questioning 'being in the world' through a consideration of human agency and people's ability to experience and create their own (subjective) worlds. From a humanistic perspective, there can be no world of 'facts' unaffected by the personal values of the investigator (Olsson, 1980): the search for scientific laws is replaced by an interpretive and reflective search for meaning.

This type of *eidetic* reflection on the relationship between the self and the space which is brought into being through consciousness drew strength from a

has involved Golledge seeking to harness the potential of behavioural theory to provide a basis for helping those with physical disability. This has led to something of a robust exchange between Golledge and those who think that such theories ignore the wider social context in which disabled people live (particularly the processes of disabilism that serve to discriminate against them). In this sense, Golledge (1993) takes a view of human bodily capabilities that is essentialist and biological when compared with more widespread ideas that emphasize the social construction of the body (see Chapter 4). None the less, Golledge remains one of the most forthright proponents of behavioural theory, and his co-authored book, *Spatial Behaviour: A Geographic Perspective* (1997), represents an impressive and voluminous overview of work carried out in the behavioural tradition.

Further reading: Golledge (1981); Golledge and Stimson (1997)

number of long-established philosophical movements. Important here were existential ideas that reality is created through the free acts of human agents. Associated with, for example, the French philosopher and novelist Jean-Paul Sartre, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (see Chapter 4) and the Danish writer Søren Kierkegaard, this was a reaction to rational thinking. In sum, it is a philosophy which focuses on the subjective meaning of existence for the individual by stressing the specificity and uniqueness of each individual's experience of the world. Peet (1998, p. 35) explains that 'existence for existentialists is characterized by concrete particularity and sheer "givenness", as compared with the abstract and universal concepts of humanity and life common to positivist thought'. Translated into geographical practice, this was read as an argument for a human-centred interpretation of the world as opposed to the abstract, 'high-level' theorization that had turned diverse landscapes into isotropic surfaces populated by decision-making machines. Instead, existentialism demands a locally specific view from 'below'; a grounded view exploring the concrete and particular perspectives of individual people in specific places. Heidegger (1927) used the German word *dasein* to emphasize that what is important to human existence is being in the world (where 'being in' is opposed to rationally reflecting upon). For existentialists, this is a key to understanding the relationship between people and the world. 'Being' is characterized by existing physically in the world – taking up physical space and existing in relation to other physical objects (including other people).

In essence, then, existential ideas propose that humans create the world through the (mental) projection of meaning onto the physical phenomena – other people, places and objects – they encounter as they move through geographical space (Mugerauer, 1994). For thinkers like Sartre, this projection of meaning onto the world was related to our sense of separation, estrangement or alienation from the world (described as an essential part of the human condition). An *existential dread* results from the feeling that we are completely different from everything else we experience, so that we attempt to make the world of objects comprehensible to ourselves by giving these objects status and meaning.

Box 2.3 Yi-Fu Tuan (1930–)

Perhaps more than any other geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan defies easy categorization. Tuan's work often transcends and ties together ideas from the seemingly unrelated scholastic worlds of philosophy, psychology, urban planning, landscape architecture and anthropology. If it is possible to identify a unifying theme in his work, it is a concern with how individuals fashion personal and cultural realities from their surroundings, and how those processes reflect collective and personal ideas of appropriate human–nature relations. In turn, this has lead Tuan to theorize place as humanized space – that is, a locality that has been transformed to place from space through human inhabitation and nurturing. In much of his work, he has been concerned with eliciting the rich and diverse meanings associated with particular places, contrasting these with the placeless qualities associated with space (particularly its modern articulations). This experiential framework gave rise to the concept of *topophilia* – a term that has

Objects, people and places thus become meaningful to us, while the systems of meaning that develop through this process become an essential part of the world we experience. The legacy of this type of thinking for human geography was a focus on the social construction of place – that is to say, an examination of the way abstract space was made into meaningful place through the thought and action of human agents. The work of both **Yi-Fu Tuan** (see Box 2.3) and Ted Relph (1976, 1987; see also Chapter 1) on the creation of place (and placelessness) can therefore be seen to be key examples of how existential philosophies inspired the development of 'new' human geographies in the 1970s. Both rejected the geometries and quantification of spatial science in favour of a more expansive and literate interpretation of the capabilities of human agency, indicating an awareness of the importance of critical reflection on questions of being in the world. In short, existentialism takes the view that each individual must provide his or her own meaning for life.

Alongside existentialism, *phenomenology* was to be another key influence on humanistic geography. Phenomenology is a philosophy based on the notion that we bring our own attitudes with us wherever we perceive things. It is related to existentialism, and can be seen as a methodology (way of studying) as well as an interpretative framework (way of knowing). This is an approach that suggests that the best way to find out about human relationships with the world is to use intensive forms of description. As with existentialism, individual human experience is central to this description. Phenomenology thus rejects scientific, quantitative methods of explanation in favour of understanding or appreciation. This reiterates the existential insistence that the external world does not consist of objects that can be observed and measured objectively. Instead, it suggests that experience is itself an essential part of reality, and there is no separate 'real' world external to human experience. In saying this, the founders of phenomenological thought, such as Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), sought to overcome the often assumed dualism between mind and matter (subject and object). This dualism, firstly, separated the human consciousness from a supposed 'real' world and, secondly, implied that this 'reality' could be studied independently of

subsequently come to be widespread as a definition of the type of close relationship that exists between richly symbolic places and the humans that use and inhabit them. In *Landscapes of Fear* (1978) he explored the inverse – the *topophobia* that makes individuals avoid specific spaces. Many of his ideas about the humanistic encounter of people and place were summarized in *Space and Place* (1977), while his later writing has continued to pursue an individualistic path through issues to do with the experience of place, language and culture. His last book before retiring from the University of Wisconsin in 1998 was *Escapism*, a wide-ranging text that explores the cultural and human histories of escapism as a practice (a theme that overlaps with contemporary geographic preoccupations with transgression and resistance – see Chapter 3).

Further reading: Tuan (1974, 1998b)

human experience. Instead, phenomenology seeks to appreciate the world in terms of the phenomena that are bought into existence through human experience of them. This is associated with the human subject's *lifeworld* – a concept used to describe the totality of a person's involvement with the places and environments experienced in everyday life. This is described by Peet (1998: 39) as the 'moving historical field of lived experience', implying that our experience is constantly changing as we live and do things in the world. This incorporates an appreciation of the *intentionality* that informs the relationship between a human body and the external world (see Chapter 4); Husserl insisted that intentionality links what we think about and the manner in which we think. He says that objects can only be understood as objects that human beings are conscious of and as objects that humans *intend* to use or interact with (Rojek, 1995). This happens spontaneously all the time, as we live and exist in the world, with phenomenologists aiming to recover the moment of intentionality (and hence the moment of objectification) by stripping away the accumulated layers of conscious meaning and conceptualization that hide the truth of human encounter and being. This suggests that things are created consciously and phenomenology is concerned with revealing the 'true essence' of the objects (and places) that people imagine or perceive to exist – irrespective of whether there really is a non-mental reality.

From this perspective, humanistic geography can be described as being concerned with eliciting the *relational* encounter that brings the world into existence for each person (Prince, 1980). In contrast to the view that reality and awareness are separate, phenomenology urges us to pay closer attention to our experiences of the world and to be prepared to think about it in new and different ways. This phenomenological perspective is distinct from the *epiphenomenalism* of behaviouralism that regards mental processes as effects of physical events rather than having any causal properties. Humanistic perspectives thus see mental processes as having physical effects, bringing the world into being through consciousness. This means that our knowledge of the world can, firstly, be said to be *created* by us (rather than something we simply discover) and, secondly, come about through mental and bodily *encounters* with things (which are, for example, perceived to be in front or behind, above or below, bigger or smaller than our bodies). This latter focus on encounter was to prove influential in geographic work on movement, space and dwelling – as, for example, in the work of David Seamon (1979) on bodies in space and Anne Buttimer (1976) on the lifeworld. When coupled with widely cited and acclaimed work on social geographies of place (Tuan, 1974; Ley, 1983), this began to suggest a more human-centred foundation for studies of human geography than was offered by behavioural theories:

> The purpose of the humanistic critique was to put man [*sic*], in all his reflective capacities, back into the centre of things as both a producer and product of his social world and also to augment the human experience by a more intensive, hence self-conscious reflection upon the meaning of being human. (Ley and Samuels, 1978, p. 7)

Methodologically, however, humanistic ideas of phenomenology and existentialism did not translate easily into practice. For example, describing the true essences of the objects and places bought into existence through human creativity and imagination involves being able to 'see' (as well as smell, hear, feel and touch) from the perspective of another human being. Given the impossibility of this (we are all unique, after all), humanistic geography thus developed by adopting qualitative methodologies that relied upon the ability of people to articulate the feelings and meanings that they associated with particular places. The 'truth' of such accounts was not brought into question: rather, they were used to create a faithful representation of people's world-view and engagement with place (see Eyles and Smith, 1988).

In practice, therefore, humanistic theories fuelled a geography in which qualitative methodologies were regarded as superior in the production of meaningful knowledge. Interviews, interpretative analysis and analysis of human texts (see Chapter 5) were all seen as viable ways of teasing out the emotional, aesthetic and symbolic ties that bound people and place. More controversially, perhaps, forms of covert and overt observational work were used to construct ethnographies of the particular and peculiar ways of life played out in different settings. Taking inspiration from the Chicago School of urban sociology, this involved researchers becoming observant participants (or participant observers) in social worlds that could be very different from their own (see Jackson, 1985; Herbert, 2000). Though this was an obvious reaction to the high-level abstractions of spatial science, the claim that this enabled the researcher to empathize with others' experience of being in the world remained contested (see Chapter 3). In sum, doubts were raised that geographers could develop appropriate methodological procedures for eliciting true meanings (see Pile, 1991). One fundamental critique, which has been raised in the context of post-structural debates surrounding the autonomy of the subject, is that people cannot easily articulate what they think (or even what they do!) because language relies on social conventions and traditions. In effect, it might be suggested that it is impossible to elicit people's true (inner) feelings because this relies on them using a set of social conventions, categories and descriptions that do not enable them to express or explain their world-view (see Olsson, 1980). In short, people are often unaware of the impulses and constraints shaping their decisions and behaviour and it is up to the researcher/analysts to identify these unrecognized/invisible aspects of behaviour. More widely, this points to the obvious methodological difficulty of a theorization that, in contrast to the natural sciences, takes consciousness and being (as opposed to observable action and practice, for example) as its object of study.

2.4 STRUCTURAL THEORIES AND RADICAL RESPONSES

In a variety of ways, both humanistic and behavioural geography articulated a people-centred geography that became widespread – if not paradigmatic – in the early 1970s. Yet, despite their many commonalities (particularly their focus

on individual behaviour and agency rather than aggregate patterns and flows of human activity), their emphases on quantification and qualitative research respectively meant that co-operation between humanistic and behavioural geographers was rare (Golledge, 1981). Latterly, strong ontological connections between these apparently different geographical traditions have been identified (see Aitken, 1992), but these remained overshadowed by epistemological differences (and some vituperative confrontations) in the 1970s. The fact that the dialogue between these two 'camps' was strained is perhaps due to the fact that new developments in the discipline began to challenge the orthodoxy of any approach that held to the primacy of human agency.

One of the most fundamental criticisms of both approaches was articulated by those who claimed that a focus on the minutiae of individuals' lives fundamentally failed to take account of the material context in which human action took place. This critique was grounded in specific structural ideas about the workings of society. In general, *structuralism* is an interdisciplinary movement that holds that it is possible to understand the workings of society only with reference to the logic of the relational connections (or structures) that bind people together. Using an analogy from linguistics (see Chapter 5), it was suggested that individual acts of speaking can only be understood with reference to the rules of language, grammar and syntax. In the same way, it was proposed that understanding human behaviour required a keen theoretical sensibility whereby the rules and logic of social structures were theorized and exposed. What renders such an endeavour problematic is that the structures of society – like the rules of language – cannot be discerned by observing the things that exist in the world (or for that matter, the things that are said). Instead, structuralism proposes an approach to science that explores the relations that exist between observable things and the 'hidden' structures whose existence can only be theorized (Kitchin and Tate, 2000).

In some ways, it is helpful to think of structural theories using metaphors of depth. Structuralists generally hold that (positivist) science is good at describing and explaining surface appearances. For instance, it is apparent that the models and theories developed by spatial scientists are (within their own terms) very elegant and convincing explanations of the social, economic and political processes that result in specific patterns. Equally, both behavioural and humanistic geography allow the geographer to appreciate the human creativity and intentionality that informs these processes. Yet from a structural perspective, these theories potentially ignore (and obscure) the real processes that cause things to happen in the ways that they do. Stucturalism thus concerns itself with discovering the things that are real and important in social life by looking 'beneath' the taken-for-granted categories of things that are seen to exist in the world to explore the importance of things that are real but hidden. Within any structuralist framework, we can therefore identify three levels of existence (see Johnston, 1986):

1. The level of appearances (superstructure) – the realm of things (defined as any item whose existence can be acknowledged by a system of ontology, be it a mental construct or measurable object);

2. The level of processes (infrastructure) – the social, economic and political relationships between things that cause certain transformations and effects to become apparent in the superstructure;
3. The level of imperatives (deep structure or base) – the overarching conditions that structure and condition social relationships.

The net implication of this is that there are complex relationships (theorized differently by particular thinkers) between base, infrastructure and superstructure, and that studies grounded in the analysis of superstructure cannot adequately be used to account for its existence. Instead, structuralism argues that the key to understanding a social system is to expose the structural relationships of its parts and to explore the way these parts are related by regulative mechanisms (hence, structure is more than the sum of its parts, and cannot be reduced to those parts).

In practice, geography has taken influence from a wide variety of structural thinkers – from linguistics, politics, economics, anthropology and sociology. Foremost perhaps have been those historical materialist thinkers – Marx, Althusser, Habermas and Lefebvre (see Box 1.1) in particular – who have proposed that the reality of the world can only be understood with reference to the historically unfolding political and economic relations that structure social life. Here, Marx's idea that the world has been shaped by deep structures of capitalism has proved particularly influential on a legion of geographers, suggesting there is a complex two-way *dialectic* between people's action and structure, where people's actions reproduce unobservable but real structures, and these political-economic structures reproduce and sustain people's behaviour. Central to such interpretations have been questions of the class relations played out in capitalist society. Latterly, however, this political-economy perspective has been critiqued by those who suggest that other structures and power relations are important in contemporary society, turning attention to other social structures such as racism, ageism and sexism. Both Marxist and feminist geography can be seen as offering significant insights into the structures that reproduce inequalities in society, and it is in this sense that they are often bracketed together as critical and radical theories of the relations of society and space (see Stoddart, 1986).

2.4.1 Marxist geographies

Though **Karl Marx**'s (Box 2.4) writings comprise a series of often dense and incomplete works on the history of political economy, written in the mid-nineteenth century, it is impossible to overestimate his influence on both academic and popular thought. In short, his materialist theories on the formation of society in distinct historical epochs (i.e., slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism and communism) provided a rich description of the inequalities and injustices that are associated with different modes of production. For example, in contrast to accounts which suggested that people and ideas shaped history (such as those associated with Max Weber or Emile Durkheim), Marx argued

that material economic circumstances and their associated social (class) relations are the driving force of history. According to Marx, people's beliefs, along with other aspects of their behaviour, are determined by the prevailing economic and social arrangements. Philosophy, religion and popular ideas reflect the power structure of a society while simultaneously compelling people to fit in with that structure. His materialist conception of history asserts, therefore, that the political economy of a society shapes its superstructure. Thus, for Marx the prevailing mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, cultural, political and other processes of life. Marx's view that it is not people's consciousness that determines their being but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness, places him in direct opposition to the phenomenological approach outlined above. For Marx, there is no such thing as an individual human nature – the kind of person one is and the kind of things one does are determined by the kind of society in which one lives. This theory is inherently *teleological*, in the sense that it sees events as stages in the movement towards a preordained (and socially just) future, and *functional* in the sense that it subsumes the individual to the logic of the capitalist system.

Marx argued that this totality of social relations could be best explicated by reference to the competing social classes which are themselves defined in terms of their standing relative to the mode of production or wealth creation. Marx's focus on the workings of capitalism, the latest and most 'efficient' mode of production, offered a damning description of the way that it exploits class divisions forged through 'blood and fire'. His articulation of the capitalist labour process as being based on unequal relations between the bourgeois owners of the means of production and an exploited proletariat (the class of labourers)

Box 2.4 Karl Marx (1818–83)

Karl Marx remains one of the most widely discussed and written about figures in academia over the one hundred and fifty years since his major works – the unfinished volumes of *Das Kapital*, *The Communist Manifesto* and *Grundrisse* ('Outline of a Critique of Political Economy') – were published. For some, his ideas remain inspirational, offering both an accurate description of the processes that drive capitalist economies and a set of prescriptions for the injustices and inequalities associated with that system. For others, he serves as a 'straw man' whose thinking on political change failed to predict the injustices that could be served in the name of socialist progress and class revolution (as witnessed, for example, in Stalinist Russia) and whose major legacy is to have perpetuated a dogmatic and inflexible way of thinking about the social world. It is difficult to reject either set of arguments; Marx's ideas were a product of their times and his focus on class relations was an obvious response to the changes occurring in industrialized capitalist societies (particularly Britain) in the nineteenth century. These were to inspire his ostensible transition from an idealist perspective on social life (based on belief in the powers of people to overcome the alienation that they felt) to his materialist interpretations which focused on the social and economic conditions which shaped human consciousness. In his estimation, capitalist society had developed to a stage where people could overcome alienation by seizing the social form of their

therefore placed labour power at the centre of the capitalist mode of production, suggesting that the proletariat was responsible for creating the added wealth, or surplus value, that drove processes of capital accumulation. This identified the proletariat (working classes) as exploited but also stressed that they had the potential to organize collectively to bring down the capitalist system (Marx, 1977). Writing with his colleague, Friedrich Engels, Marx thus identified capitalism as an inherently unstable system that was threatened with being overthrown at any time by working-class revolt. Additionally, he identified the instability introduced to the capitalist system by market forces that thrived on the invention of new products, competitive innovation and (concurrently) the identification of particular technologies and products as obsolete.

Though Marx's ideas became widely cited and influential among political thinkers around the world – in part, inspiring the working-class revolt in Russia – their influence on geography was to prove negligible until the 1970s. This is perhaps surprising given that Marx (and many in the 'classical' Marxist tradition such as Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin) began to write of capitalism in geographical terms. In particular, their writing stressed that capital accumulation – the process by which capital was deployed to create new (and surplus) capital – was an inherently spatialized process, relying on the annihilation of political boundaries. This was to conceive of capitalism as an imperial enterprise involving the spreading of capitalist infrastructure across the earth's surface, bequeathing an uneven geography of industrial districts, rural backwaters and urbanized centres segregated between the elite and the proletariat. While this offered a good description of the unfolding geographies associated with the parallel process of modernization and urbanization, in the English-speaking geographical community these ideas seemed to make little headway. In other

own production (i.e., redefining themselves and their subjectivity). The fact that they did not do so, he argued, was a result of capitalist class relations which frustrated this collective self-determination. In this way, his materialist interpretation of society, based on a structural theorization, was to prompt his work as a social agitator and revolutionary figure. Marx's ideas thus became a source of inspiration for those arguing for class revolt, with the subsequent failure of the communist states serving to discredit his ideas in the eyes of many (see Callinicos, 1991). Ironically, it is the failure of this classless 'self-determined' society to have materialized that actually inspires many geographers to continue to explore his ideas; to paraphrase Lefebvre (1991), we do not know why capitalism continues to survive, but we know how: by occupying space and producing place. Marx's legacy for geographers is his insistence on a structural reading of society and his careful articulation of the capitalist process; even in the present, when the reductionism of his ideas is derided by many, questions of class remain prominent in radical and critical geographical writing (albeit often considered alongside age, gender, sex and race relations – see Chapter 3).

Further reading: Harvey (1982); Castree (1999); Blunt and Wills (2000)

fields, however, Marxist ideas were to prompt the formation of new labour organizations, trade unions, and protest groups, united in a process of class struggle. In this struggle, they were joined by a range of Western thinkers who sought to update and adapt Marxist theory to develop critical theories of society that were as much about changing society as explaining it. The Frankfurt Institute of Social Research (founded in 1923) became particularly associated with this project, its director Max Horkheimer arguing that only a radical change in theory could cure the ills of society.

Geographers' turn to Marxist theory was then, in comparison to its uptake in other disciplines, strangely belated. In part, this can be explained with reference to geography's development in the twentieth century, particularly its preoccupation with regional geography and, later, spatial science. Both of these were viewed as inherently dispassionate and objective exercises in the construction of knowledge (see Stoddart, 1986). Within this framework, Marx's politicized ideas appeared to have little relevance. This was a view that was not really to be challenged until the early 1970s, prompted by changes outside the discipline as much as by changes within. Here, it is important to acknowledge the political and social changes that were occurring at this time – 1968 had witnessed student riots in Paris; there was a growing awareness of environmental problems; famine was rife in the Third World; war raged in Vietnam, and incidences of racial intimidation and violence were widespread. Against this backdrop, a number of geographers began to question the relevance of geography (particularly in its spatial science guise) to social problems (e.g., Harvey, 1973; Smith, 1977; Stoddart, 1986). For these writers, geography at the time appeared to be populated by practitioners who were constructing models and theories in splendid ignorance of the problems of those living in the world beyond the 'ivory towers' of academia. This critique was also extended to behavioural and humanistic geography, which was accused by some of the new breed of 'radical' geographers of pursuing a pointless trajectory that said nothing of the real processes causing inequality in society. Ironically, it was one of the most forthright proponents of quantitative geography – David Harvey (Box 6.2) – who now sought to propose a radical Marxist geography. In his oft-cited words:

> There is a clear disparity between the sophisticated theoretical and methodological frameworks which we have developed and our ability to say anything really meaningful about events as they unfold around us . . . There is an ecological problem, an urban problem, a debt problem, yet we seem incapable of saying anything in-depth or profound about any of them. (Harvey, 1973, p. 129)

It is perhaps wrong to suggest that all those who argued for geography's increased involvement in solving problems were convinced of the need for a Marxist geography. Indeed, some felt that spatial science and its positivist assumptions continued to provide a firm foundation for the production of useful and relevant knowledge. Against this, and informed by the ideas of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, others argued that positivist science simply

reinforced the status quo, producing knowledge that could be used as an instrument of oppression (an idea we explore in more depth in Chapter 4 when we describe Foucault's ideas of how the state *disciplines* through knowledge). This implied that positivism simply described things as they appeared, rather than identifying real sources of power (Peet, 1998).

Geography's engagement with Marxism was thus the outcome of a variety of factors. In turn, this inspired a number of innovative and radical attempts to re-theorize space in terms quite different from those used by positivists. A key feature here was the idea that space was not a neutral given, but was *socially* produced (i.e., could only be understood in relation to material events and structures). This also represented a radical departure from humanistic ideas which gave primacy to human consciousness; materialism holds to the primacy of matter. In Marxist thinking, consciousness can only be understood in relation to what exists; it is the material world translated into forms of thought. At the same time, this epistemological argument – that matter has primacy over consciousness – stresses that there is a determinant relationship between matter and thought that can never be understood through positivist science (which simply endorses scientific method). This complex philosophical assertion implies that it is impossible to create laws about the working of society and space through positivist or humanistic procedures. Laws can only be established through a method of *dialectics* where space is treated as a something which is given shape through material processes, flows and relationships (see Soja, 1985). Dialectical thought has a long history in Western philosophy reaching back to the work of Aristotle and Plato, with Marx's own adoption of dialectical materialism inspired by Hegel (Jones, 1999). Unlike principles of deductive and inductive thinking, dialectics does not aim to test theory, but to work with it, adapting it and transforming it appropriately. For example, theories about the social-spatial dialectic (i.e., the relationships between society and space) seek to use data about what exists in the superstructure to identify underlying economic and political processes. This 'data' may entail observations, figures, thoughts and words about 'things' that exist; discerning opposition among these things (e.g., wealth and poverty) allows internal contradictions in the processes and systems to become apparent. Analytically, the identification of such contradictions and oppositions allows the identification of the processes by which such contradictions are resolved (but see Lefebvre, 1991, on spatial trialectics and the way organic and spontaneous bodily spaces can transcend the dialectic of spatial practice and representations of space).

In classic Marxist endeavour, dialectical thinking was used to identify the forms of contradiction and tension in capitalist societies that needed to be resolved by transformations and adjustments to the mode of production. For instance, coming to recognize the fact that exploitation of labour power by the capitalist classes threatened to instigate class revolt, Marx wrote of the perpetual modernization and agitation employed by the bourgeoisie to ensure that the relations of production were maintained. In capitalist societies where 'all that is solid melts into air . . . ', Marx thus argued that new forms of social relation were being constantly brought into being, reproducing capitalism (see also

Berman, 1982). In the writing of those geographers and urban theorists who first engaged with Marxist theory – David Harvey, Richard Peet, Doreen Massey and Manuel Castells – this type of reasoning was transformed into explications of the role of space in this process of legitimation and crisis avoidance. Simply put, geographers emphasized the importance of capitalism's spatial fix – the way that spatial differentiation and de-differentiation were implicated in capitalist relations. In Harvey's (1982) account, the contradictions of capitalism were thus scrutinized to come to an understanding of urbanization processes. Herein, the division of urban space into upper-class and working-class residential areas was seen as a key means by which working-class agitation could be suppressed, at the same time serving to create an urban landscape characterized by high and low land values. In Harvey's numerous works on the urbanization of capital, this form of uneven development was theorized as a crucial means by which capitalism could create for itself new opportunities for capitalist accumulation. In effect, by placing the poorer classes (particularly surplus labour) in marginal urban spaces with inadequate social infrastructure, capitalism denied an adequate quality of life to these people, excluded them from participation in political life and thus prevented them usurping the bourgeoisie. At the same time, the association of these areas with this 'underclass' drove down land prices, meaning that subsequent development could realize the difference between actual ground rent and the potential rent offered by that site (the so-called 'rent gap' – Smith, 1996). Such theories thus explained phenomena of 'blockbusting' and gentrification by developers as part of the process by which capital sought the most profitable locations for its realization (see Section 3.2).

Coupled with Castells's (1977; see Box 8.4) theories of the role of collective consumption in capitalist society (the importance of state support for the capitalist system through the provision of non-commercial public services such as schools, hospitals, community centres and so on), Harvey's writing on capitalism provided a remarkable structural interpretation of urban process theorized around the idea of circuits of capital. This emphasis on the way that capital was perpetually transformed into different forms (money, labour, commodities) so as to maintain capital accumulation was to provide an important framework for geographical enquiry. As such, numerous geographers began to explore the way that the organization of space helped to maintain and enhance these circuits. Such explorations operated at different spatial scales, from critical analysis of the interdependencies of core and periphery played out at an international (e.g., Slater, 1977; Corbridge, 1986) and national level (e.g., Massey and Allen, 1984) to the processes of gentrification and working-class displacement evident in both urban and rural locales (e.g., Smith, 1984). The common thread in these explorations, however, was a concern with unevenness, whereby capitalism seeks creatively to destroy specific spatial arrangements at one point in time in order to create new, more profitable arrangements at the next. Conceived of in this way, capitalist structures can be seen to be supported and maintained by the arrangement of things in space to create a profit surface characterized by peaks and troughs of high and low value. Capitalism tends to bring about the development of those spaces which are most profitable, and the

underdevelopment of those that are least profitable (Smith, 1996). In some geographical accounts, this has been linked to processes of governance via an exploration of the way that politicians and policy intervene in the 'free' market, whether through 'entrepreneurial' regeneration and welfare policies in the urban West or aid programmes in the Third World (see Chapters 7 and 8). In relation to the latter, geographers working in the Marxist tradition have developed a radical critique of development, exposing aid and 'structural adjustment programmes' as neo-liberal strategies of Westernization implicated in the making of unequal and exploitative geopolitical orders (Crush, 1995; Slater, 1999).

The continuing range and vitality of political-economy approaches in geography thus put Neil Smith's (1996) wry observation that 'Marxism is dead' in context. Certainly, some have questioned the primacy of class as an analytical category, suggesting this has led Marxism into a theoretical cul-de-sac (see Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). For others, the decline of the Communist bloc signifies the inherent weaknesses of Marx's teleological thinking (Smart, 1996). Yet for Merrifield (2000a, p. 139), Marxism 'can still provide zest for life, can still be a veritable adventure of the mind and body, can still define the breadth and depth of the radical battlefield, dialectically highlighting the inner connections and contradictions between the economy and politics, between thought and action.' For him, the key to the continuing relevance of Marxism is the way that it turns these contradictions to its own advantage, using dialectical thinking to criticize and transform rapidly changing social structures from the level of the city street upwards. Merrifield thus cites the work of Lefebvre and Marxist urbanists as engaging flexibly with the concrete realities of space while being open to the abstract processes which, as Marx (1977, pp. 77–8) suggested, are often 'imperceptible to the senses'. This 'street Marxism' thus offers a revised take on Marxism, a neo-Marxism which is open to the changing rules of the capitalist game (an argument we return to in Chapter 3).

What is obvious here is that, while both the methods and subject matter of Marxist geography are diverse and eclectic, the presiding spirit is that of a radical endeavour determined to identify (and *change*) the processes, flows and relations that structure the lives of individuals. In contrast to humanism (or behaviouralism), structuralism rejects the autonomy of human agents (with Marx famously claiming that people make history, but not under conditions of their own choosing). Viewed from a humanistic perspective, this type of account appears highly deterministic, with people's endless capacity for creativity obfuscated by a perspective that sees humans as 'called upon' to fulfil structural (and functional) imperatives (Guelke, 1974). Against this, Marxists have tended to argue that notions of free will are similarly misguided, and that it is necessary to locate sequences of human action within wider contexts of social reproduction and transformation. To do otherwise, they argue, is to disengage from the real, structural processes that shape the world (see Gregory, 1978). This ongoing debate about structure and agency mirrors a more widespread debate in the social sciences about the merits of particular forms of explanation, where proponents of structural philosophies (both Marxist and neo-Marxist political

economy) have clashed with those subscribing to idealist, phenomenological and, latterly, psychoanalytical accounts of the ongoing construction of the self (Pile, 1993).

Attempts to reconcile the structure/agency dichotomy (regarded as futile by some) have thus been widespread in the social sciences. Some of these (e.g., symbolic interactionism, social representation theory) have made little impression on geography, though the sociologist Anthony Giddens has proposed a theory of *structuration* that has been widely cited (see Cloke *et al.*, 1991; Giddens, 1991). This contends that there is a need to elucidate the relations between individual actions and social structures in a much more flexible and iterative way than articulated by proponents of Marxism, arguing for a duality of structure and agency where structure does not 'exist' beneath the superstructure but is created by and implicated in each and every human action. This framework was influential for several economic geographers in the 1980s (particularly those working in the localities tradition – see Cooke, 1989), as was *realism*. This is an approach to science that uses abstraction to identify specific causal powers of specific structures under specific causal conditions. Realists argue – *contra* humanists – that there is a world of material things and events which can be observed and measured. But for realists, the world is also made up of intangible mechanisms and structures, and it is these that are seen as allowing certain things to happen in particular circumstances (Bhaskar, 1978; Sayer, 2001). A key assumption in realism is that there are certain structures – such as capitalist labour processes – that have the necessary power to cause something to happen, but do not do so everywhere and anywhere. Outcomes depend upon contingent factors – such as the presence of particular welfare systems or the existence of certain planning policies at a local level. Realist research is concerned with teasing out the real chain of causality that makes events and things occur in particular circumstances. According to Sayer (1992), this involves a threefold research enterprise:

- *abstract research* – developing a theory of how structures and mechanisms might result in events – this is about identifying and naming the structural conditions that enable something to happen, the mechanisms that actually cause it to happen.
- *intensive research* – examining concrete or specific instances to see if the theory holds.
- *extensive research* – examining whether this explanation holds in different cases, to isolate causal processes.

The difference between this and the traditional science approach is that it recognizes there can be no general law, just specific explanations which are contingent on the existence of certain circumstances; what we can at least do is identify the processes that cause something to occur within a certain set of circumstances. For many, including Marxist geographers, this sort of approach appeared to offer a rigorous method for elucidating the dialectic between society and space (A. Pratt, 1995). For others, however, realism merely reinstated the

scientific conceit of positivism (though with less methodological specificity), and geographers' enthusiasm for it (and, indeed, structural theories) appeared to wane in the 1990s in the face of 'post-structural' critiques that problematized the relationship between 'knowing' subjects and invisible social logics. It is these post-structural ideas, and the movement 'beyond' structuralism, that we shall explore in more detail in our next chapter.

2.4.2 Feminist geographies

If Marxist geography proposed a geography where class relations were seen as fundamental in understanding the dialectic of society and space, feminist geography can be characterized by its emphasis on the structures that reproduce gender inequality. Crucial here is the notion of patriarchy, a system whereby women are assumed to be generally subordinate to men and become subject to the control of men. According to Walby (1990), patriarchy is a system constituted by six interrelated but distinct structures in which men dominate women. The six 'spheres' she identifies are as follows:

1. *Waged work*: where women's average hourly pay tends to be two-thirds of that of men and where women are segregated into specific tasks and occupations.
2. *Household reproduction*: where women are charged with responsibility for domestic tasks, cleaning and childcare, even in situations where both they and their partner work on a full-time basis.
3. *State politics*: where women's participation in politics is discouraged by masculinist practices and institutions that devalue the opinions and rights of women.
4. *Fear of crime*: where women are constantly fearful of male violence, particularly rape and violent attacks perpetrated by strangers (which conversely encourages them to seek the protection of men).
5. *Culture and leisure*: where women's sports and leisure pursuits are marginalised and devalued by the media and politicians, who devote more airtime, expenditure and facilities towards 'proper' male pursuits such as football and baseball (simultaneously denigrating women's participation in these same sports).
6. *Sexuality*: where women's bodies are commodified (i.e. turned into something that can be bought and sold) through processes of representation that depict women as sex objects whose natural role is to be subordinate to sexually aggressive males.

In sum, it can be seen that patriarchy represents an ingrained system of assumptions, practices and mechanisms that collectively serve to subjugate women and make them susceptible to male social control. In accordance with structural ideas, this does not imply that all men are sexist, or that all women are subordinate to men, but that, generally, we are all caught up in structures that perpetuate gender inequality. This also stresses that feminist geography is not simply a geography of women, rather a geography that seeks to explore the way

space is implicated in the perpetuation of unequal gender relations (Monk and Hanson, 1982). Latterly, this has meant that geographers have devoted considerable energy to examining the place of men in the world, both within and without the academy (e.g., Sparke, 1996).

The relationship between feminist and Marxist perspectives has subsequently provoked much debate (Rojek, 1995). In the eyes of some, patriarchy needs to be theorized as part and parcel of a capitalist system that thrives on inequality; in such interpretations, sexism and patriarchy are seen as crucial systems that ensure the reproduction of the household, a social unit that is central to the capitalist labour process (see Watson, 1986). In other interpretations, patriarchy and capitalism are seen as dual systems; writers have pointed to the fact that forms of gender inequality existed in pre-capitalist societies too (Foord and Gregson, 1986). Irrespective of this, feminist writing in geography – particularly as it became established in the discipline in the 1970s – was fiercely critical of gender inequality, serving to ally feminist geographers with the wider feminist movement that was campaigning for women's rights and gender equality. At this time, work by Doreen Massey (Box 1.2), Jackie Tivers, Linda McDowell (Box 6.4), Sophie Bowlby and other founders of the **Women and Geography Study Group** (Box 2.5) began to highlight the forms of gender inequality played out in the spaces of the home and the city, placing particular emphasis on the role that women's segregation (and virtual imprisonment in the suburban home) played in constraining their employment and leisure opportunities (see also MacKenzie, 1989; Pratt, 1992). At this time, the focus was squarely on the experiences and geographies of women rather than exploring the relations between men and women manifest in different spaces. In part, this focus was deemed necessary by feminist geographers in the light of the innate masculinism of the discipline. Not only were most academic geographers male, they argued, but they conceived of space in male terms, marginalizing the

Box 2.5 Women and Geography Study Group

Though there have been allied groups in other countries, the Women and Geography Study Group of the Institute of British Geographers has been a key influence on the trajectory of feminist theory in geography since its formation in 1980. The group's aims since that time have been to encourage geographic study of the implications of gender differentiation as well as to promote research and teaching from a feminist standpoint. This intention was mapped out through the publication of the well-received undergraduate text *Geography and Gender* (1984), which indicated the potential of feminist theory at a time when such ideas were still largely unexplored in the discipline. Highlighting the distinctive contribution that geographers could make to the study of gender issues, it was this book that did much to consolidate feminist geography as a key component of many degree courses. This text was written through collaboration between a group of authors, emphasizing the possibilities of a feminist praxis that was supportive and collective rather than individual and competitive. Importantly, royalties from this book, as well as the follow-up *Feminist Geographies: Explorations in Diversity and Difference* (1997), were donated to the group, providing support for a vigorous programme of conference sessions, symposia and study weekends. Both books offered state-of-the-art

experiences and opinions of women in the process. In this sense, feminist geography was conceived as a reaction to the models of 'man' that dominated in positivist, behavioural and humanistic geography, and an attempt to address key silences in the discipline (Jones *et al.*, 1997).

Here we should note that feminism in geography was never a monolithic undertaking, and drew upon different strands of feminism with different priorities concerning the emancipation of women. 'First-wave' French feminism, for example, was always a key influence, closely associated with the work of Simone de Beauvoir (who employed existentialism to demonstrate the ways in which women through history have been defined by patriarchal society as inferior to men). De Beauvoir also used literary analysis to explore why and how women have accepted their socially constructed second-class position against their best interests. Similarly, Hélène Cixous, a member of the 'second wave' of French feminism, sought to work past the limitations placed on women's writing by challenging male ideals of 'reason' via a playful and thought-provoking writing style. Presaging post-structural ideas (see Chapter 3), she argues that the way something is said can be as revealing as what is being said, and that feminists need to think and write in different ways to men. This approach, known as *écriture feminine*, proposed that women should use their creativity and turn the tables on men by either rejecting traditional male approaches to writing or using them in new ways (Cixous, 1981). In many ways, this poetic celebration of the feminine and the maternal jarred with the type of socialist feminism more widespread in the United Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s. This underlines the fact that feminism does not imply a unified political stance, let alone a unified field of theory.

But even if feminism (and hence feminist geography) has always been multifaceted, important generalizations can be made about the links between feminist theory and practice. Mainstream geography has invariably been depicted

summaries of the scope and range of feminist geography, highlighting the particular way feminists work with notions of difference, methodology and representation (Jones *et al.*, 1997). Reading the books together, however, it is possible to discern crucial changes in approaches to feminist geography, with the initial commitment to improving women's position in the labour market tempered by the awareness that gender identities are simultaneously shaped by nationalism, imperialism, heterosexism, racism, ageism, disabilism and so on. Also evident is an increasing concern with contesting and appropriating masculinist ways of 'doing' geography to disrupt established hierarchies of quantitative/qualitative technique and hard/soft data (something emphasized in the diverse range of contributions to the journal *Gender, Place and Culture*, founded in 1994). Though the membership of the WGSG has changed considerably since its formation, with increasing numbers of men now working with feminist and queer theory (see Chapter 4), its agenda continues to be dominated by discussion of gender inequalities both within and outside the academy.

Further reading: WGSG (1984, 1997); Laurie *et al.* (1999); McDowell (1999)

by feminist geographers as 'malestream', utilizing methods and techniques that produce knowledge deemed real and important only from a male perspective. For example, Rose (1993) felt that the preoccupation of spatial science with abstract geometries was a reflection of a rational male urge to impose order on a natural world conceived of as feminine. Rejecting such reductive gender-biased impulses, feminist epistemology – in geography and elsewhere – has been primarily associated with 'softer' methods of enquiry (open-ended interviews, ethnography and storytelling in particular). By adopting such techniques, the intention was to elucidate and articulate the multiple perspectives of women while avoiding the use of methods that might potentially inflict harm on research respondents (Dyck, 1997). The principle that research should be with women, rather than on them, was (and remains) a key precept in feminist methodology:

> Feminist research is about the development and construction of knowledge founded upon the relationship between women's everyday experience, academic knowledge, political power and social action. This methodological approach facilitates the central involvement of the women, who are active participants in the social construction of knowledge, empowerment and social change. (O'Neill, 1996, p. 131)

As a theoretical framework, feminism is therefore grounded in an ontology and epistemology dedicated to producing knowledge that promotes social change (Blunt and Wills, 2000). This identified feminist geographers as *dissident* geographers, dissatisfied with the role that the discipline was playing in addressing women's issues and determined to develop new frameworks of theory and practice.

In the 1980s, feminist geography became a much more broad undertaking, and, as a theoretical framework, feminism has been employed by both female and male geographers to explore issues across the discipline (including physical geography). The fact that feminist theories about identity and difference became much more widely discussed in the social sciences in the 1980s and 1990s meant that those working in the feminist tradition were able to strike up a dialogue with those in other disciplines who were exploring the construction of gender difference. One important influence here was the work of those social theorists who proposed that the categories of men and women, far from being fixed through human biology, are social constructions (see Bondi, 1992; Greed, 1993). In effect, this conceptualization of gender and sex prompted geographers to explore how the category of women was mapped out of, and onto, specific spaces, so that (for example) the association of women with home served to perpetuate ideas that women are 'naturally' responsible for child-rearing and domestic reproduction (McDowell, 1983). In the 1990s, the influence of post-structural ideas (see Chapter 3) was to transform feminist theory yet again, so that the unified categories of 'women' and 'men' were subject to critical fragmentation. This type of deconstruction suggested that the notion of patriarchy was perhaps too simplistic to conceive of gender relations in all their variety,

suggesting instead that performances of *masculinity* and *femininity* vary across space in complex ways (Longhurst, 2000a). In this sense, gender inequality is theorized as being produced through multiple axes of difference, with dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity varying according to age, class, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality (Laurie *et al.*, 1999). This concern for identity and difference mirrors some of the wider theoretical impulses that have driven human geography in recent years (see Chapter 3), meaning that feminist theory remains widely discussed and debated by those who do not necessarily hold to the central precepts of feminist thinking.

Feminist geography is now a broad framework, having extended its corpus from its preoccupation with women's geographies to a more wide-ranging consideration of the relations of gender, place and culture (Women and Geography Study Group, 1997). At the same time, its methods have become more diverse, with quantitative and archival analysis now complementing the qualitative techniques that have been the mainstay of much feminist enquiry. As such, feminist theory (like Marxist, positivist, humanistic or behavioural geography) is perhaps best described as offering a variety of theories, concepts and methods that have been utilized in different ways in particular research contexts. Certainly, the range of topics covered in *A Feminist Glossary of Human Geography* (1999) edited by Linda McDowell and Joanne Sharp shows that feminist theories of patriarchy and gender inequality have come to be very significant in many areas of the discipline.

2.5 CONCLUSION: AN INTELLECTUAL BATTLEGROUND?

As this chapter has unfolded, we have sought to describe some of the different theoretical impulses that have shaped the theory and practice of geography in the post-war era. In some ways, it is tempting to describe this as a period where different intellectual traditions and ideas have 'battled' for paradigmatic dominance, each imagining concepts of space, place and nature very differently. Certainly the way this history is narrated in some texts relies on a military language to describe a struggle between different groups; followers of different camps wage war on one another, advocates of particular approaches seeing their arguments shot down in flames, philosophies revealed as fatally flawed and so on. But, following Doel (1999), we should perhaps be suspicious of this narration. Far from being 'dead' or killed off, the theory and practice of spatial science, Marxism, humanism, feminism and behaviouralism are all alive and well. Of course, it is possible to argue that certain of these are less widely discussed or written of than they used to be, but to suggest that geography is a discipline where one way of thinking or one way of doing has become dominant at any one time is problematic. Instead, we perhaps need to think about the geographical tradition as being characterized by a singular diversity. Herein, different theories and ideas coexist, intermingling and cross-fertilizing to produce new offspring. Geography, then, is always evolving (though not necessarily improving), with attempts to assert order on it (by labelling specific ideas,

geographies and writers as 'Marxist' or 'humanist', etc.) serving to reduce its difference to sameness.

Following Johnston's (2000) claim that there is no one geography, no predominant statement of where it has come from, what it knows and how it produces knowledge, we might then view this chapter not so much as the story of theoretical battles fought as geography edges nearer to a truly authoritative account of how the world works, but as an attempt to map out some of the different theoretical strands that contribute to the continual dynamic complexity of geographical thinking. The way some of these strands have been woven together, braided and unravelled in more recent times is the subject of our next chapter.