

Preface to the Second Edition

We were delighted when Sage asked us to update and extend the original edition of *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*. We were gratified that the original book had found an interdisciplinary audience and that there seemed to be a demand for a second edition, confirming our belief that a biographically-orientated approach is both a valid and valuable way of considering philosophical and theoretical debates on the nature of space and place. Indeed, our original intention was not to provide a reader's guide to the 'great and the good' in the discipline of Geography (a veritable 'Who's Who') that would be of interest to practising geographers keen to see if their friends, colleagues, supervisors or lecturers had entered the 'canon'; rather, we set out to use a biographical approach to show that different ways of thinking about space and place always emerge from a complex weft of contextual relations, being entangled in the personal politics and life stories of individual scholars. As many of the entries demonstrate, key ideas often appear to take on a life of their own – becoming associated with broad 'schools', movements or paradigms – yet always remain associated with key individuals. Foregrounding the scholar is for us a valuable way to understand the social production of knowledge, in this case ways of thinking about the nature of space and place.

The invitation also aroused other emotions as well, chiefly anxiety. The process of preparing the first edition, whilst enjoyable and stimulating, was also fraught as we grappled with questions about the book's pedagogical value, its range of chapters and possible reception. In particular, we agonised long and hard about balancing the coverage of different philosophical approaches to space and place with the inclusion of certain thinkers, and with constraints of space inevitably some difficult choices had to be made as to whom to include and exclude. The publication of the first edition confirmed that others shared our concerns, and we quickly received feedback that told us that the book evoked some controversy (see review section of *Environment and Planning A* 2005; Johnston, 2006). Much of this revolved around a misunderstanding of our intentions – that we were trying to compile a guide to the most influential, cited or celebrated spatial thinkers, rather than provide a selection that highlighted the value of a biographical approach and introduced a broad range of thinking on space and place from across disciplines. Moreover, we were accused of being somewhat unreflexive in our choice of thinkers, being complicit in the privileging of a white, Anglophone and masculinist worldview and marginalising other ways of seeing and theorising the world (this despite Gill Valentine being a leading feminist scholar). Related to this was a sense that we were seeking to manage disciplinary boundaries, excluding those whose understandings of space and place were not 'geographical' enough, or developed outside the academy. At the heart of such criticisms was the concern that we had not

sufficiently addressed our own positionality, producing a volume that said more about our own prejudices and preferences than it might say about the state-of-the-art in cross-disciplinary, international efforts to theorise space and place. One memorable review even went so far as to imagine that we casually drew up the list of thinkers one night in a conference bar, accusing us of exercising a 'careless' approach to selection in which we never stopped to consider whether we had the right to make decisions about who is a 'key' thinker.

Such criticisms are, we feel, worth making, however misplaced some of them might have been (we actually spent weeks working out and debating whom to include and conducted extensive consultation with colleagues, despite how it might have appeared to critics). *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* – like the other handbooks, encyclopedias, and dictionaries that litter contemporary academia – has its partialities, blindspots and exclusions. It indeed serves to foreground particular individuals and push others to the periphery. Such is the nature of the project: no matter if we had listed those entries we might have included, or wanted to include, the fact is that this extended list would have been equally partial and selective. In a real sense then we are privileging particular people, certain ways of thinking, and highlighting certain stories. Whether or not this is an act borne of arrogance and 'careless power' is open to debate, we would suggest. Certainly, we concede that our editorship needs to be situated in the context of our own white, middle-aged worldviews; our own commitment to critical geographical research; our own limited language abilities and Anglophone-bias; our professional positioning as geographers and our emplacement within positions of authority within higher education establishments. It also needs to be understood within the constraints of the pedagogic remit that we established: i.e. that the book was written in the main for English speaking students and therefore we chose thinkers whose canon was available in English; that we wanted to include thinkers from a range of disciplines; that we wanted to cover as many philosophical approaches as possible; and we wanted to concentrate on the contemporary period of the last 50 years.

In these respects, we are guilty as charged. Our editorship resulted in a volume that did reproduce the hegemony of a particular way of thinking space and place; arguably the same malestream, disciplined and Anglophone geography that we had been exposed to, in different ways, in our own undergraduate studies. Despite the variations in the types of people profiled in the first edition, one could not escape a bias towards male thinkers, predominantly white, assumed heterosexual, and writing predominantly in English (or their works have been translated). The majority, too, trained and identified as geographers (although roughly half were from other disciplines), with a large number having been educated at a relatively small set of 'elite' institutions. In this respect, *Key Thinkers* is complicit in reflecting the dominant ways of thinking spatially in the social sciences, rather than what it might be or could have been.

As such, we approached the writing of the second edition with trepidation. We are making ourselves hostages to fortune once more by producing a volume that many might consider as a 'definitive' list of *the* key thinkers on space and place, effectively setting in stone those whose ideas are worthy of scrutiny, and those whose are not. We would certainly countenance against such a view, and would hope that those reading and teaching with this volume will do so with a critical eye. Indeed, we would argue that questions as to why certain ideas of space and place have come to be predominant

in the discipline can indeed be addressed by considering the privileges and power obtained by certain key individuals, and relating this to their life-paths is a useful way of considering the roots of exclusion within the academy. Rather than simply noting who is not included in this volume, and noting the omission of certain traditions within and beyond geography, we hope that readers will reflect critically on why such thinkers have not been included in what is, perhaps, a view 'from the centre'.

Eagle-eyed readers will note that in this edition we have not just updated existing entries, along with our introductory essay, but also added a select number of new entries. Due to space constraints we have not been able to include as many new people as we would like (just 14). In selecting these thinkers we have been guided by a number of considerations – to address issues in the disciplinary make-up and international siting/tradition of thinkers, philosophical approach, and gender. This is both a deliberate reaction to the reviews of the first edition but is also, we would argue, a reflection of the changing composition of faculty and the cross-disciplinary nature of significant work on space and place. These selections go some way towards redressing certain balances in the original selection, although we admit the collection as a whole is still guilty of certain biases for the reasons outlined above.

Despite these shortcomings, we present this second edition hoping that educators and students alike will find it a useful, accessible and timely collection that helps them think through questions about how individual life stories might inform the development of ideas about the world. Furthermore, we hope that it will continue to provoke healthy debate and critical reaction on the production of knowledge given such debate is vital if we are ever to untangle the value of key ideas from the messy situatedness of the individuals that are making them.

REFERENCES

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