

A note on human geography (or 'geographical imagination):

Society is constituted by four main foundational processes: economic, political, cultural and natural/corporeal. Human geographers take a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of society, including its relation with nature. They may focus on (the geographically-specific) ways in which a) the environment sometimes can pose obstacles to the lives of human beings, and, more importantly, b) society transforms the natural environment (and affects the functioning of the human body itself). Or, they may describe and explain how economic, political and cultural processes and environmental transformation are inter-connected in particular places, and how they are different in different places and at different scales (e.g. local, national, global, etc.). Major disciplines tend to be focused on a specific foundational aspect of society (e.g. economy, political power, etc.). In contrast, the inherent nature of geographical thinking (or, geographical imagination) is such that, by mobilizing the insights of the theme-based disciplines (e.g. Economics, Sociology, etc.), it examines the spatial organization of each of these foundational aspects of society, and of the *relations* between/among these aspects *in so far as* these relations are shaped by the need to be geographically organized (e.g. need to be here but not there; need to annihilate space with time; need to confine things/processes to specific areas or scales). So, human geographers study how the four foundational processes of society and their inter-connections are shaped by the social need to transform the spatial organization of society. They bring to the fore the question of why things happen (more) here and not there (or less there). For human geographers, it is therefore important to examine the question of the spatial concentration and spatial dispersal, and attendant uneven development (and uneven and combined development) of all social processes, and the consequent peculiarities of places, regions and countries. Urbanization (and regionalization) of social processes is one of the important concerns for human geographers. So are the ways in which global processes, or a-spatial processes, combine with, and mobilize, sub-national and national-scale processes, and thus produce sub-nationally/nationally-specific outcomes. In all these ways, contrary to popular perception, geographical imagination is a very powerful approach to social analysis, as it complements other approaches such as sociological imagination. Producing powerful geographical insights presupposes the utilization of abstract theoretical insights from other disciplines: geographers can uncover how the *more* general mechanisms of, say, capitalism and imperialism actually work at a *more concrete* level.¹ In the process, human geographers can produce relatively general ideas about the concrete functioning of society. Geographical ideas

¹Other things constant, when people are separated from the means of production and subsistence, they have to surrender a part of the value they produce to capitalists over which they have therefore no control. This will be the case *everywhere*. Yet, the ratio of the amount of value they surrender to the value of the compensation they receive might be different in different places/countries in part because of the spatial differentiation in various processes that form the concrete context within which capitalist accumulation works.

explore society at multiple 'levels of generality': all forms of society; all forms of class society; capitalism as a form of class society; a specific form of capitalism (e.g. advanced capitalism), capitalism in a specific time and place, and so on. There is absolutely no aspect of the study of society, whether it is by a social scientist or a humanities scholar, that is not touched by geographical imagination. Of course, how much difference geography makes depends on what it is that we study. Geographical imagination, as a part of the totality of approaches, is important not only from the standpoint of description and explanation of society but also from the standpoint of bringing about radical changes in it.

Human geographers' main 'keywords' (conceptual building blocks) include: nature, environment, sustainability, space/spatial, scale/scalar, place, region, neighbourhood, distance, localities, geographical unevenness, uneven development, spatial division of labour, mobility/migration, immobility, border, territory, territoriality and landscape. Their other keywords—these ones represent the specific geographical forms of society—include: city, rural area (village), suburbs, global economy, national economy, ecological zones, depressed areas, opportunity zone, national parks, less developed regions/countries, more developed regions/countries, nation-state and local state.