

Book reviews

Life and Times of Cultural Studies: The Politics and Transformation of the Structures of Knowledge

Richard E. Lee, Duke University Press and Hong Kong University Press, 2003, \$22.95, 278pp.

In their endorsements of this book, Immanuel Wallerstein and Ien Ang draw attention to the ways in which it weaves an account of the origins and development of cultural studies into a broader and longer account of the distinctive dynamics of the relations between western forms of culture and knowledge from the early modern period to the present. For Wallerstein, it represents the 'conjuncture of cultural studies and world systems analysis' while, for Ang, its appeal is the ambition of the grand narrative it offers in stitching the story of cultural studies into 'the vast world-historical context of crisis and transformation of the intellectual structures through which we know and live the world today.'

Both are right to highlight these aspects of Lee's account of cultural studies as, in his assessment, a major success in terms of the challenges it has so far made to prevailing forms of cultural hegemony and disciplinary specialisation. His purpose, moreover, is to strengthen a sense of the value of cultural studies by placing its accomplishments in a longer perspective so that it can, in a context where traditional divisions of intellectual work have been called into question, contribute to 'creating a more substantively rational world by imagining a future with *values*, the rallying cry of cultural studies, reunited with *knowledge*, the watchword of science' (p. 214).

The book is, accordingly, organised in terms of a division between three kinds of chapters. There are those, first, in which he tells the story of cultural studies from its roots in the New Left and its first institutional incarnation at Birmingham through to its subsequent spread to, and engagement with related traditions of work within, the USA, Australia and Canada to spawn a range of nationally distinctive inflections of a shared cultural studies lexicon. Then, second, there are chapters connecting these developments to, first, the

development of a dominant model of instrumental and technocratic forms of scientific rationalism in the context of post-1945 US industrial, political and military hegemony – and then, after 1968, the range of challenges to this from postmodernist, feminist and postcolonial perspectives. And, third, there is a key connecting chapter relating these two sets of more immediate histories to an account of the longer histories of the relations between scientific and cultural forms of knowledge, and their complexly contradictory claims to intellectual authority, from 1790 to 1968.

The account of cultural studies that emerges from the first type of chapter is well-organised, perceptive and well informed. It is, at the same time, an account with few surprises – an addition to the genre in which, like any other discipline, this ‘anti-disciplinary discipline’ has constituted itself through a now more-or-less routinised narrative telling the story of its origins and subsequent development, recounting the vicissitudes it has encountered along the way. The same goes for the second type of chapter; again, these are well done, but show little inclination to move outside or to question the now largely canonical forms in which cultural studies has storied itself.

While, in both these regards, the book is valuable in providing an up-to-date, well-sourced, thorough and intelligent account of what is now largely familiar ground, its claim to distinctiveness depends mainly on the way it organises the relations between these more recent histories and the tensions and torsions characterising the relations between scientific rationalism, culture and aesthetics from the late eighteenth century onward. As the Deputy Director at the Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Historical Systems and Civilisations at Binghamton University, it is not difficult to see why Lee is tempted to engage with *la longue durée* in this way. Yet, to foreground this lineage, as Lee does, invites unfavourable comparisons. For, when Braudel dealt with *la longue durée*, he tended to do so in the form of the long book, not a short chapter, and, more importantly, to do so in a way which located changing intellectual structures in densely detailed accounts of material practices. Lee’s account of the longer temporalities in which the relations between modern forms of culture and knowledge have been shaped and reshaped is, by contrast, one which proceeds largely in terms of generalised relations between intellectual practices and key political events or large-scale social and political processes.

This might not matter so much were it not for the fact that the ground Lee covers here has been addressed in other recent engagements with the longer intellectual lineages of cultural studies far more probingly and, to my mind, with a sharper eye to ways in which the political project of cultural studies has been limited by its continuing subscription to the ‘deep structure’ of key aspects of that lineage. This is true, for example, of Francis Mulhern’s *Culture/Metaculture* (Routledge, 2000) and William Ray’s *The Logic of Culture* (Blackwell, 2001) both of which show how it is precisely in its commitment to overcoming dualities – such as that between knowledge and values which furnishes Lee with his rallying cry – that cultural studies is best

understood as still part of the machinery of identity formation that the post-Enlightenment discourse of culture has bequeathed to us.

This limitation is, I think, connected to a second one. For Lee is so immersed in his task of recalling cultural studies to its heroic mission that he is inattentive to those new form of cultural materialist analysis – many of them influenced by developments in science studies, anthropology, or cultural history – which have aimed to bring the threshold of cultural analysis down from that of world-historical narratives to focus on the more mundane and disaggregated practices and relations in which cultural attributes are shaped.

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The Third Way and Beyond: Criticisms, Futures, Alternatives

Sarah Hale, Will Leggett and Luke Martell (eds), Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 2004, £45.00, paper £14.99, 206pp.

This book originated in a conference held in November 2000, with about eighteen months elapsing before the papers were completed, taking us to around May 2002. It was published early in 2004, so it has been a long time in gestation and production. Much has changed since the mid-point of the first Blair Government. This is true of the emphases in domestic politics, though not perhaps of the general orientation and character of the New Labour project. But the international context in Europe and beyond has changed significantly in a range of ways. Social inclusion has become so central to the social policy agenda of the European Union that all member states must provide biennial plans for its promotion, with harmonised indicators approved for assessment of progress. Most member states now use a common currency, although Britain remains outside the Euro. On 1 May, the Union will expand its membership from 15 states to 25. Most dramatically, since 9 September 2001, or '9/11', rhetoric about globalisation and the end of history has been replaced by rhetoric about terrorism and the axis of evil. Anti-terrorism legislation at European level provides the basis for curtailing civil liberties. The second Blair Government has taken us to war in Iraq, possibly in breach of international law, certainly on manipulated intelligence reports, and in support of a United States President who came to power through a rigged election. The morning news on the day this review was written reported an alleged claim by Bin Laden of responsibility for the recent Madrid bombings, in retaliation for Spain's role in Iraq; an Italian hostage killed by his Iraqi captors; and George Bush's declaration of his support for Ariel Sharon, effectively tearing up the slim possibility of peace in Israel/Palestine.

The history of this particular volume means that none of these events is mentioned, let alone discussed. It would, perhaps, have been wiser therefore to frame the essays as a historical analysis of the Third Way, rather than as an argument for its continuing relevance, for such relevance could only be

demonstrated by engagement with contemporary politics. Indeed Will Leggett argues in the conclusion that critics of the Third Way are at fault in failing to engage with the 'social revolutions of our time', principally globalisation. Taken as a contemporary political intervention, rather than an exploration of political history, the book seems both parochial and dated. In fact, apart from the initial essay by Armando Barrientos and Martin Powell, which attempts a European mapping of the Third Way, and Stephen Driver's consideration of the relationship between US and UK welfare reform, at the level of policy and politics the book is exclusively concerned with Britain and the character of the New Labour project.

On this narrower canvas there are some excellent pieces. Eric Shaw's analysis of the PFI in the health service is both an exceptionally clear and useful demonstration of how this is presented as best value when it is not, and a cogent argument that this policy is driven by ideology and dogma, not by pragmatism or 'what works'. Paul Cammack demonstrates how, in *The Third Way*, Tony Giddens takes key terms that carry the values of social democracy and transmutes them into their neo-liberal opposites: individualism is the new solidarity, responsibility the new emancipation, risk the new security, opportunity the new redistribution, inclusion the new equality. Both these essays are highly effective, well-written and well-crafted, and in Cammack's case also funny. Shaw's argument is an important one, with continuing relevance to the substance of politics and policy, while Cammack's is a useful case study of political rhetoric and the debased role of the academic as ideologue. Peter McCullen and Colin Harris also take Giddens to task, exposing the parallels between his Third Way agenda and managerial rhetoric about empowerment and the 'ownership' of the work process. Their critique of Giddens' reliance on Maslow's theory of need is perhaps less successful, and an extension of the revealed managerialism of Giddens to the orientation of the Blair project would have created a stronger coda.

A surprising proportion of the volume (three out of ten essays) addresses the issue of New Labour's communitarianism. The first of these pieces, by Sarah Hale, suggests that Blair does not have a political philosophy, and observes that two of his main gurus, Giddens and Amitai Etzioni, are in fact sociologists. She argues that communitarian philosophy has not, in fact, had much influence on Blair: 'maybe there is simply no room in government . . . for the precision which political philosophy demands and the abstraction by which it is attained'. This seems to be a gratuitous criticism of sociology as somehow less rigorous than political philosophy (although it is properly more holistic and less relentlessly abstract). It mis-identifies the problem, which is that the sociology proffered by Giddens in the Third Way and by Etzioni is simply bad sociology. Simon Prideaux demonstrates well the continuity between Etzioni's earlier sociology – 1950s functionalism – and his later pronouncements. A substantial section of Hale's chapter is devoted to showing that even the claimed influence of John Macmurray on Blair is doubtful, given the divergence between their views. I published a similar argument – with

some of the same quotations – about the Macmurray/Blair contrast in 1998, when claims about that connection were in the public domain. Again, these pieces work better as reflections on the history and origins of the New Labour project. As contemporary comment on the communitarian element in New Labour, the third essay by Eunice Goes is a little more satisfactory, as it addresses the variety and transformation of the idea of community within the project as a whole.

There are then some useful and some excellent essays in this volume. However, it remains problematic even as historical analysis. The deepest problem is the essentially realist approach to the Third Way, with Luke Martell talking about ‘the Third Way experiment’, and the presence of ‘Third Way governments in power’ (p. 3). Martell identifies the foils of the third way in wholly British terms as ‘old’ social democracy and the New Right, but does not interrogate their characterisation within Third Way discourse. Barrientos and Powell, taking a wider European canvas, cite Etzioni’s absurdly broad claim that all Third Ways differ both from totalitarian and libertarian approaches, thus including Swedish social democracy as a version of the Third Way. And they argue that a ‘country that “talks” a Third Way may not have Third Way policies’ (p. 21) which again treats the Third Way as an identifiable substantive position. Leggett, in the conclusion, describes those who (like Cammack) see New Labour’s Third Way as obfuscating rhetoric promoting an essentially neo-liberal agenda as ‘neo-Marxist’ (pp. 188–9). The relationship between the *discourse* of the Third Way and its role in constructing the electoral coalition that elected both Blair Governments, and the *policies* of New Labour seems to puzzle many of the authors, particularly those who want to argue for the continuing relevance of the Third Way (and hence the continuing relevance of this book). Much more recently, Stuart Hall’s ‘New Labour’s double-shuffle’ (*Soundings* 24, 2003) has provided an incisive analysis of why so many of New Labour’s supporters are indeed still puzzled by the contradictory nature of the Project, whose social democratic elements are systematically suborned to neo-liberalism. Perhaps Leggett’s neo-Marxists have it right.

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A Researcher’s Guide to the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification
David Rose and David Pevalin (eds), London: Sage, 2003, £60.00, 276pp.

Although one may not agree that sociology is all about class, it would be hard to imagine what the world of sociology would look like without one of its sharpest and most useful tools. For decades, sociologists have been debating on the nature, use and, more recently, death, of class. Indeed, the whole area of class analysis has become so technical and ‘specialized’ that only a handful of experts can talk to each other. Yet, at the same time, class divisions run deep in almost all aspects of life. Under such circumstances, the book edited

by David Rose and David Pevalin on *A Researcher's Guide to the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification* comes as a timely, authoritative and accessible gift to sociologists and other social scientists alike on the state of art in class analysis, particularly that involving the newly designed National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NSSEC). Experienced researchers in social stratification will find many fresh and stimulating ideas while newcomers to the field will find much guidance and helpful comments on most of the heatedly-debated topics in class analysis.

The NSSEC came into being as a result of a review conducted by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for the Office of National Statistics (ONS). It replaced the widely-used and long-established Registrar General's Social Class (SC) based on Occupation and the associated Socio-Economic Groups (SEG). The SC was replaced because of its conceptual void and the SEG replaced because it is a schema that speaks theory without knowing it. In their stead, the employment relationship theory underlying the Goldthorpe class schema is adopted for the NSSEC. This book explains why. Do the NSSEC class categories really measure what they purport to do, that is, do they have the kinds and amounts of employment relations and conditions as predicted by the theory? Do they effectively demonstrate associations with outcome variables such as earnings, health and unemployment as predicted by the theory? How far does the NSSEC provide research continuity and what areas of the schema are currently under-researched or could be challenged?

The book is divided into four parts. Part 1 provides a systematic explanation of the operational and conceptual properties of the NSSEC. The two chapters are both written by the editors. Part 2 has four chapters discussing the criterion validity of the NSSEC from different perspectives. Part 3 has five chapters on the construct validity of the NSSEC, showing its associations with income, unemployment, mortality, low-weight births, health and the continuity with the old SC measure. Part 4 provides two more chapters by the editors on further reflections. On the whole, I find this one of the best written books on class. All the four chapters by the editors are especially laudable for the lucidity, the width and depth of coverage, and the insights into almost every aspect of the debate on class. The chapters on the criterion validity would perhaps interest class specialists more than general readers but the chapters on the construct validity would surely benefit all those who would wish to use the NSSEC in their own research. Furthermore, readers will no doubt draw inspirations from the book on ways of presenting complicated data graphically.

As this book is a collection of writings by a group of best-known social scientists in the country, I believe that almost all readers will have something to learn from the book, substantively and technically. In the following are some brief notes on what I believe could further strengthen the arguments of the NSSEC approach.

The foundation stone upon which the NSSEC is based is the employment relationship theory which stipulates the distinction between the service and

the labour contracts. How to measure the employment relations and conditions is crucial as it would affect the *classness* of the different categories in the NSSEC. A good approach, as also adopted by McKnight and Elias in Chapter 3, is to construct an overall measure and compare the properties of the NSSEC categories in terms of this measure controlling for likely confounding factors such as gender, age, education and marital status. McKnight and Elias did it by dichotomizing and then summing up the scores in the responses to the eight questions that stand for service versus labour contract relations such as the method of payment, whether there is a recognized career ladder in the job, the length of time required for leaving the job, etc (pp. 48–9). This method is not very effective. Some of the response categories are clearly ordinal and dichotomizing the information would lose the valuable information capable of differentiating the higher and lower grades of the service class, or the skilled versus unskilled working class. A more suitable method would be to use the item response theory model to assess and obtain the scores for the underlying structure via the gllamm (Generalized Linear Latent And Mixed Models) procedure. Although the basic contours between the summation and the gllamm approaches would be similar, it can be predicted that the latter approach would result in greater distinctions between the NSSEC categories.

Another point is related to the conceptual rigor of the NSSEC. As noted above, this schema takes the employment relationship theory as the theoretical basis. Although this theory is found superior to that implicit in the SC or the SEG schemas, there are other theories which pose a serious challenge to it. The two best known among these are the ‘assets theory’ constructed by Mike Savage and his colleagues in their 1992 book (*Property, Bureaucracy and Culture: Middle-class Formation in Contemporary Britain*, London: Routledge) and the theory of generalised social advantage /disadvantage underlying the Cambridge Scale developed by Ken Prandy and his colleagues in their numerous publications. If the book had contained one or two chapters on a direct comparison between the NSSEC and these two challengers, it would be much more comprehensive and intellectually gratifying.

On the whole, the book is a masterpiece in many aspects and would prove an invaluable asset to students and scholars in class analysis in the years to come.

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British Subjects: an Anthropology of Britain

Nigel Rapport (ed.), Berg, Oxford, 2002, £16.99, 340pp.

British Subjects is full of interest, and makes particular claims for the anthropology of Britain. The book brings together a rich and varied collection of ethnographic material, with clear editorial direction and framing.

For Rapport and most of book's contributors, the anthropology of Britain is anthropology 'at home'. Superficially, this means fieldwork without visas, plane tickets and vaccinations. Significantly, it means fieldwork in a home milieu – linguistic and sociocultural; mother-tongue ethnography. Anthropology has been coming home for some time now, in a number of different ways, and the move has raised a host of usefully knotty problems (see Jackson, 1987). But in making the case for the book's distinctive contribution, as possibly a landmark volume, Rapport suggests that anthropology at home, in Britain, has too often been a second string anthropology, conducted by 'returnees' already blooded on exotica elsewhere. *British Subjects* does not follow this model, nor the implied logic – that fieldwork at home is second best. Rapport points to the fact that all the book's contributors can call Britain the first and/or primary focus of their professional anthropological study. More importantly, he makes a strong claim for considering anthropology at home as paradigmatic of the discipline's project. 'Anthropology in Britain has the potential,' Rapport contends, 'of providing some of the best that the discipline can offer because an anthropologist thoroughly at home in linguistic denotation, and familiar with behavioural form, is more able to appreciate the connotive: to pick up on the niceties of interaction and ambivalences and ambiguities of exchange, where the most intricate (and interesting) aspects of sociocultural worlds are constructed, negotiated, contested and disseminated' (page 7). Conventional methodological anxieties about the fieldworker at home struggling to 'see' the meanings and culture by which they already live are dismissed as 'precisely wrong' (page 7). Culture and its study are not the privilege of professional anthropologists but a common enterprise, something we all do, everywhere – make sense out of our experiences of the world and others. As such, Rapport argues, anthropology is characterized by a super-intuitive, not counter-intuitive, mindset; an exaggeration of commonsensical habits of sense making, enquiry and interpretation.

On this basis the book's contributors have been asked to consider instilling three tenets into their accounts: that anthropology in Britain is central to disciplinary concerns; that it might entail anything that concerns the discipline of anthropology; and that it has the potential to set standards of excellence in subtlety of analysis that others might seek to match. Not all the contributors make as much of these tenets as Rapport might have wished, not explicitly anyway, but the chapters are of a persuasively high quality and make for satisfying reading. Examples include Luhrmann's absorbing comparison of magico-religious and psychiatric experiences, and Green's careful and astute reflections on culture and networked sociality. Rapport's own substantive chapter, a literary-anthropological enterprise tracking back and forth between E.M. Forster's novel *A Room with a View* and fieldwork in the English village of Wanet, provides one version of the sort of subtleties of analysis available to the anthropologist at home.

A total of fifteen substantive chapters are thematically grouped into five separate sections, each section with its own preface by Rapport. This recur-

rent editorial presence gives the book a coherence that edited collections sometimes lack. The five sections deal with different issues and problems in British culture and anthropology: nationalist sentiment and ceremony; 'strategies of modernity' – means of recovering or maintaining tradition, identity and personhood; 'global' discourses and technologies made local; the intersection of research methods and social setting; and the nature of community. Rapport insists throughout on the importance of the particular and individual, and draws back from any claims to an encompassing anthropology of Britain; to a necessary 'whole' to which the collected case-studies might amount. In the absence of which, the reader gets the (superficial) impression of a hotchpotch, provincial place: flag-waving royalists and middle-class witches, allotment gardens and retired miners, lesbians and rural vicars. A little, local Britain. But the local is what matters for Rapport; the local is where it's at – the only place to be. And, as such, is where anthropology's more general – universal – understandings begin and end.

Anthony Cohen, a key figure in, and contributor to, the development of British anthropological ethnography (see Cohen, 1986; 1987) supplies a measured and affectionate epilogue which stops short of a full endorsement of Rapport's claim for the paradigmatic potentiality of the anthropology of Britain. For Cohen, the 'best of British' need not be, of necessity, the 'best of anthropology' too. I think most anthropologists would agree. (Declan Quigley, for one, has rejected Rapport's arguments about anthropology as absurd and narcissistic (see Quigley, 2000). Be that as it may, *British Subjects* does not have to be exemplary to succeed. I did not need to be – and wasn't – persuaded that an anthropology of Britain might be paradigmatic of the discipline's possibilities to appreciate, enjoy and learn from this book.

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Social Capital and Poor Communities

Susan Saergert, J. Phillip Thompson and Mark R. Warren (eds), (2001), New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 333pp.

Creation and Returns of Social Capital: A New Research Program
Henk Flap and Beate Volker (eds), (2004), London: Routledge, 282pp.

Social Networks and Social Exclusion: Sociological and Policy Perspectives
Chris Phillipson, Graham Allan and David Morgan (eds), (2004) Ashgate:
Aldershot, 276pp.

There is now such a vast literature on social capital, which has been published over a relatively short period of time, that it is easy to think there are few original ways of thinking about the concept left for anyone to consider. Each of these edited books, drawing on conference proceedings, however, has something very interesting to offer.

The collection by Sargert *et al.* is produced under the auspices of the highly regarded Ford Foundation's Asset Building and Community Development Program. A first glance might lead someone to think the collection adopts a typical American problem-solving approach to the study of social capital that is not to the taste of most British social scientists. They would be wrong, however, for the editors are clear that they are not uncritical 'social capital enthusiasts'. The concept is very useful in renewing interest in how cooperation and trust in local organizations can help people combat poverty. They are upfront in saying, however, that the causes of poverty do not lie primarily within the weak social fabric of poor communities but in the wider economic, political and racial structures of American society.

Thus, social capital cannot alleviate poverty although it can have a positive, albeit modest impact, on poor people's everyday lives. The focus is on how local organizations can empower people in revitalizing their communities although issues of power and conflict in community politics are rightly acknowledged. Each of the contributors adopt this sophisticated analysis of social capital. In addressing issues around the creation and destruction of social capital, for example, Lopez and Stack address the very issue of power with reference to Black community politics in the South and how attempts at building social capital have been thwarted by institutionalized state power and politics itself shaped by the old Southern race relations problem.

A number of chapters consider social capital in different policy areas. The best contribution is by Robert J. Sampson who considers crime and public safety issues in disadvantaged neighbourhoods characterized by high level of interpersonal violence. Local initiatives can reduce the fear of crime, enhance feelings of well-being and increase local sociability. The 'promise of social capital', he argues, is that it highlights the importance of collective ways of attacking social problems. Such activities have their limitations, however, when the power of wider economic and political forces in shaping poor neighbourhoods is remembered.

The role of institutions in promoting social capital is well covered. There is a thought-provoking chapter on the role of religious institutions in poor

communities by Foley and his colleagues. The authors note that religious organizations are quite problematic re social capital because they are good at creating intense in-group solidarity: namely, bonding social capital but they are less good at facilitating bridging social capital. Foley *et al.* focus on interfaith coalitions and specialized service organizations arguing that such organizations contribute to community well-being in addressing local needs. Again, however, they cannot reverse wider trends such as capital flight out of poor areas.

Falp and Volker's edited collection is quite different in its focus. The editors work in the Netherlands and they bring together contributors from Europe with a few North American contributions too. The hypotheses of the book are clearly stated from the outset. First, those with better social capital are better able to realize their goals. Second, following on from this, people will invest in ties to the degree that they are instrumental in achieving people's goals. The second, they say, is an investment hypothesis. The language of rational choice theory with its emphasis on utilitarian individualism is obvious here. Funnily enough, some of the contributors (rightly in my view) proffer a different view of social capital, thinking of it as a metaphor for a range of social activities.

Degenne, Lebeaux and Lemel, for example, draw on the *Modes de Vie* study in France based on a survey of nearly 7,000 households looking at domestic production, to make this point. Looking at various forms of support, they found that people do not see social capital as a profit-minded investment. It is far more about a medium of sociability where exchanges are governed by the rules of 'give and take'. Support networks are very similar to pure sociability networks. The 'asset value' of support networks, they argue 'does not necessarily explain why they were constituted and their support potential may not be the main reason for keeping them up' (p. 72).

Similarly, Riedl and Van Winden consider whether social capital is a by-product of social interaction. They are especially interested in the role of information in social capital and conducted experiments with people playing 'public good' and 'dictator' games to disentangle deliberate from unconscious investment. They found it important to distinguish between short-term social capital and long-term social capital. Investment occurs early in relationships even when the long-term basis of cooperation is uncertain. Investment comes late in relationships when it is known that help might be needed in the future but it is quite low compared to the former.

Investment in social relationships for social capital, therefore, is quite a complicated matter and not as simple as economic investments! Other contributors to the book consider some different points. There are two very interesting chapters on gendered social capital in Canada by Erikson and one on gender and network chains in China by Lin. I have been surprised that social capital has not been considered in relation to women in the workplace before since so much has been written about old boys networks as forms of gender exclusion. These chapters may well set the ball rolling in terms of

how women are often in networks of other women and their chains of contact to those in power (usually men) are longer and require investment to keep them up.

Finally, there is a very interesting chapter from Dijkstra and her colleagues on social capital and education in the Netherlands. Drawing on Coleman's ideas, they consider social capital as a form of social closure looking at how 'functional communities' around high schools promote students scholastic achievements. They conclude that social networks have a limited effect on educational success relative to other factors such as gender, school track and good teacher-student relationships although it might be better at explaining school dropout and grade repetition. They speculate whether social capital as a form of social closure needs to consider the cultural aspects of social networks in terms of motivation, discipline and interventions aimed at making an effort at school.

Falp and Volker's collection offers some considerable food for thought overall. The interest in social closure is not unlike the focus on social networks (as opposed to social capital) and social exclusion of the edited book by Phillipson, Allan and Morgan. The collection originates from an ESRC-funded seminar series with a specific focus on conceptual and public policy issues. Again, there are some fine contributions and interesting points made. Crow hammers home the point that people do not need to live in the same locality to have meaningful social relationships or, conversely, living in the same locality does not necessarily generate meaningful social relationships.

Indeed, thinking about issues of geographical mobility and immobility and the effects of space and place on social networks reoccur in a number of the contributions. Phillipson considers how friends, rather than adult children who might have moved away, are an important source of social support to people in later life. The study of social networks highlights the diverse nature of social support over and above family. At the other end of the spectrum, the importance of local friendships is very strong for children but even here things are changing as children of divorced parents sometimes find themselves with two homes, two communities and two networks. Pahl and Spencer and also Dale consider how the geographically mobile draw on networks for friends far and wide.

Pahl and Spencer correctly conclude that it is possible to explore people's micro-social worlds without making gloomy predictions about the loss of community. Networks are often robust and genuinely intrinsically strong in themselves rather than as a resource for the self-centred individual. Turning to the more policy oriented chapters, Perry 6 offers an interesting discussion of how government affects social networks and if they do so unavoidably, can public policy deliberately influence social networks in a positive way? He notes that government interventions have not been effective and, indeed, have often been counter-productive in creating other solidarities in response to intervention.

In one of the best chapters, Taylor considers community issues and social networks. She notes how community groups are expected to take on various responsibilities. Inevitably, they attract scrutiny, especially if public money is involved, and regulation. They are forced to become more formal organizations and often, as a result, lose the trust of initial members and activists. Policy makers need to find ways of creating an environment in which community networks can flourish and provide foundation for formal engagement without becoming formalized themselves. Nash confirms this point when she argues that government needs to find way of facilitating social networks rather than managing them. Policies targeting at groups should avoid harming the very social networks from which they formed.

The three edited collections are an extremely valuable read. They reminded me that edited collections of this kind, arising out of conference proceedings, can be of very high quality. Each shows why social capital has proved such a popular theoretical concept and how it will to be useful across a range of substantive empirical areas for a while yet.

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