both of which have been informed by versions of post-structuralism which, even as they seek to move beyond structuralism, nonetheless typically retain that tradition's deep interest in language and discourse and its profound suspicion of humanism (see ANTI-HUMANISM).

References

Suggested reading

structuration theory

An approach to social theory developed by the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (b. 1938) that seeks to elucidate the intersections between knowledgable and capable human agents and the wider social systems and structures in which they are implicated. Giddens identified the central problem in modern social theory as a dualism between 'agency' and 'structure' that recurs across the whole field of the humanities and the social sciences (cf. Chouinard, 1997). He also proposed an explanation for the chronic failure to reconcile these two 'mysteries' (see figure 1) in the social-making/constructions of human agents who are co-constitutive of social patterns of interaction and structure, and to identify, classify and understand the roles that individuals and groups play in these processes of social change (see figure 2).

Regionalization: the continuity of social life depends both on interactions between actors who are co-constitutive of time/space and on relations that reach beyond the 'here and now' to constitute interactions with others who are absent in time and/or space. These two dimensions – time-space routinization and time-space distanciation – entail the articulation of 'presences' and 'absences' through modes of regionalization that channel social life into and out of sites/locales/domains (see figure 2; see also TIME GEOGRAPHY).

Giddens argued that these propositions made it possible to explicate the interconnection of routinized and repetitive conduct between actors or groups of actors with long-term, large-scale institutional development in a depth which was denied to both conventional social theory and HISTORICAL MATERIALISM (see Giddens, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1985). Several human geographers noted what Giddens' ideas had much to offer to studies of historical-geographical change, but most of them were much more reserved than Giddens about distanciation fromistorical materialism (Giddens, 1982; Harris, 1991; Pred, 1990; Thrift, 1983). In any event, in his later writings Giddens was markedly less interested in fleshing out his arguments about the genealogy of CLASS Societies and CAPITALISM with any empirical sophistication, than in using some of the ideas of structuration theory as he was led to call 'sensitizing devices' that enabled him to offer a generalized, highly schematic argument-sketch of the constitution of late twentieth-century 'high modernity' (see Giddens, 1990, 1991, 1994) (see also MODERNITY). Of most interest to human geography have been the Giddens' claims that, in the course of the twentieth century, and intensifying since the end of the Second World War:
project, which, so he says, elevates ambivalence into virtue. Again, this is an argument familiar to human geographers who have had to negotiate a passage between ESSENTIALISM and FOUNDATIONALISM on the one side and RELATIVISM on the other.

Thirdly, Giddens was supposed to have retained the essentialism he sought to transcend. According to Archer (1990), structuration theory oscillates between the two divergent images it besrides, between (a) the hyperactivity of agency, whose corollary is the innate volatility of society, and (b) the rigid coherence of properties associated with the essential recursiveness of social life.

In fact Giddens has consistently advocated a methodological bracketing that allows for either the analysis of strategic conduct or the analysis of institutions. Insofar as this maneuver merely transposes the dualism between 'agency' and 'structure' from a theoretical to a methodological level, it is perhaps scarcely surprising that there should have been so few empirical exemplifications of structuration theory inside or outside human geography (Gregory, 1989).

Fourthly, Giddens's conceptions of both 'agency' and 'structure' have been attacked: the former for collapsing agency into action, for tying agency too closely to everyday conduct understood as 'doing' (Dallmayr, 1982), and the latter for collapsing structure into rules and resources, thereby driving the notion of structure back into the concrete and 'depriving it of autonomous [objectivist] properties which govern conduct quite independently of the creative and constituting capacities of actors' (Layder, 1981). Certainly many human geographers have become highly sceptical of the account of human agency offered by structuration theory: its emphasis on 'rational action' leaves no conceptual space for passion and desire, considerations that have animated human geography's contemporary interests in subjective and pro cesses of subject formation; and much of this developing work has been informed by a POST-STRUCTURALISM with which Giddens has little sympathy. Indeed, Thrift (1996, pp. 54–5) argues that most of the lacunae in structuration theory can be traced back to Giddens's earlier work in post-structuralism. He suggests that this includes its anaemic version of 'structure': 'Giddens over-emphasises action as individual and never fully considers the ghost of networked others that continually informs that action' (cf. ACTOR–NETWORK THEORY).

Fifthly, and closely connected to the foregoing, Giddens is seen to have an unusually weak understanding of culture. Critics have argued that not only does this contract the generalized contours of structuration theory but it also impoverishes Giddens's understanding of modernity, 'POSTMODERNITY' and the changed politics of modernity in the 1990s and 1980s (cf. Archer, 1990, pp. 123–4; Thrift, 1996, p. 55; Mesrotvic, 1998, pp. 25, 221). And it is perhaps the absence of culture – more than anything else – that accounts for the coincidence between the eclipse of Giddens's star in human geography in the 1990s and the rise of a critical CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY to a new prominence within the discipline.

References

Suggested Reading

Subaltern Studies Originally 'Subaltern Studies' identified a radical project in contemporary Indian history. The Subaltern Studies collective had its origins in the early 1980s, and owed much to the energies and skills of Ranajit Guha. It set its face against two dominant and, so its architects convincingly claimed, imperialist interpretations of (i) a 'pristine' Indian history, in which the Indian subcontinent was ushered from 'tribalism, petty brigandage and feudalism into capitalist modernity under the benign tutelage of the Raj; and (ii) a 'nationalist' historiography, that cast a native Indian elite in the role of heroic modernization agents, not peripheral others. In the attempt to construct a subaltern, inclusive, and Indian History, the collective has produced a radical alternative to the hegemonic, Saidian narratives of colonial domination. Three subaltern histories has also encouraged similar inter-disciplinary projects on other continents (Rabasa, Sanjinés and Carr, 1994).

References

Suggested Reading