Book Reviews

Peter O. Muller, Book Review Editor

Encyclopedia of Human Geography. Barney Warf, ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006. xxiii and 616 pp. $155.00 cloth (ISBN 0-7619-8858-0).

Companion Encyclopedia of Geography: From Local to Global. Ian Douglas, Richard Huggett, and Chris Perkins, eds. London: Routledge, second revised edition. xxxvii and 1,022 pp., index (two volumes). $395.00 cloth (ISBN 978-0-43169-9, set).

Reviewed by Ron Johnston, School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol, Bristol, U.K.

Dictionaries, encyclopedias, handbooks, companions, and other compilations have become increasingly popular with geography publishers in recent years, and clearly indicate viable markets for such reference books. The differences among the four types are not always clear. Dictionaries and encyclopedias are often similar, with alphabetical lists of entries, although the former are likely to contain more short entries or definitions than the latter. Companions and handbooks both tend to be collections of substantial essays providing overviews of a field or subfield. All four types of references share common problems of compilation, not the least getting a substantial number of authors to meet deadlines to ensure the publication’s timeliness, and then keeping the material up-to-date through regular revisions, crucial in a rapidly changing discipline. Furthermore, the breadth of the current discipline—or half-discipline if physical and human geography are to be separated—is such that a very large volume is likely to be necessary, with implications for saleability. The two collections reviewed here both go in the category of encyclopedia, although one covers human geography only and the other seeks to cover the entire discipline and straddle the typological boundaries by presenting itself as a companion encyclopedia. The Encyclopedia of Human Geography conforms precisely to the preceding description: It is a large-format, 600+ page volume containing 319 entries; these vary in length, but none is particularly long and there are no very short pieces typical of dictionaries. What should such a volume contain? The minimum, it seems, would include essays on the discipline and its constituent subdisciplines; major concepts, practices, and methods; particular terms that are widely used; and (perhaps) outlines of the major contributors to the discipline’s practices and progress (either individuals or schools).

On the first of these, the book is fairly comprehensive with twenty-one entries on adjectival geographies and a further thirty-three on either geography of x or x and geography. There are, however, no entries for agricultural geography (mentioned only briefly in the entry for rural geography; however, there are entries for agriculture: industrialized, agriculture: preindustrial, and agrofood system), geography of development (although we have development theory), military geography, or industrial geography. More intriguingly, there is nothing on physical geography to indicate that the disciplines’ two halves coexist and interact in many institutions—or on geography as a whole, a major lacuna.

Human geography does not get a separate entry either, so the only overview is the editor’s relatively brief introduction, which unfortunately starts with the assertion that “Human geography over the past decade has undergone a conceptual and methodological renaissance that has transformed it into the most dynamic and innovative of the social sciences” (p. xxv)—a very difficult claim to sustain beyond the rhetorical flourish. It includes a definition of human geography—“the study of how societies construct places, how humans use the surface of the earth, how social phenomena are distributed spatially, and how we bring space into consciousness”—that is rather restricted (only “social phenomena!”) and seemingly ignores how place-making and the use of the earth’s surface (and subsurface, and atmosphere) are radically changing the environment (a major undefined concept!).

Most of the entries on adjectival and adverbial geographies provide reasonable capsule overviews, but there is a tendency toward parochialism in some. In the entry on history of geography, for example, discussion of the post-nineteenth-century period covers only U.S. geography, and the entry on geography education

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is exclusively U.S.-focused (there is no entry on the geography of education). Some other entries are similarly myopic—that on electoral geography, for example, plus its companion on redistricting and the essay on zoning. As another example, why is there an entry on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and no other, let alone no comparable government departments elsewhere? Some geographical bias is inevitable: The book is published in the United States and clearly aimed at a North American audience, with twenty-three of its fifty-seven contributors based there. Even so, readers should be provided with a broader perspective, even if the non-Anglophone world is to be largely ignored (and this should be explicitly noted). There are some rather glaring absences when it comes to major concepts—both environment and landscape, for example (on which see Setten 2006, forthcoming). Whereas the entry on epistemology is clear and accessible, that on ontology is not, nor is the entry on uncertainty (nothing on risk) because it appears that both it and that for ontology have been written with reference only to their usage within GIScience; even then, I found the descriptions difficult to follow. If definitions of communism and socialism are necessary, why not capitalism, too—and slavery (there is one on geoslavery, but that is about "a radically new form of human bondage characterized by location control via electronic tracking devices" [p. 186], what, it seems, some call neogeography; see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neogeography). If cartel is worthy of mention, so too is the much more spatially relevant concept of monopoly.

Finally, what of those who have contributed to the discipline’s intellectual development? On this, there is an almost complete blank. The only school of geographers explicitly identified is the Berkeley school: Has their impact been that much greater (if at all) than that of the 1950s Seattle school? For urban geography, we get the Chicago school of sociologists, but only their spatial models, and nothing on the much-vaunted recent Los Angeles school. No individual geographer gets a separate entry.

It is always easy to criticize such a book for things omitted, both absolutely and relative to some of those included, with implications regarding their importance to the discipline. Thus if the gravity model and Tobler’s first law remain worthy of inclusion, so surely do central place theory and the modifiable areal unit problem. (For the latter, the index does direct readers to the entry on tessellation, but it gets a very brief mention.) Nor is there anything on point pattern analysis, let alone Openshaw’s major contributions of the Geographical Analysis Machine and Geographical Explanation Machine. Although most of the entries are clear and accessible, some are less so. Perhaps the most glaring example is the editor’s entry on neighborhood, which wrongly presents Louis Wirth’s classic (1938) paper on urbanism as presenting a view of neighborhoods being structured along three dimensions; this gets hardly a mention in his paper, and the key source here is Shevky and Bell (1955). Elsewhere, the editor refers to a book published in 2003 that still remains to be published at the time of writing this.

The Companion Encyclopedia of Geography is not really an expanded second edition of a book that first appeared in 1996 but rather a new book; apart from two of the three editors, only two authors (Brian Robinson and Ian Simmons) appear in both editions. In part this reflects a laudable desire to shift generations and deploy people working at the current “cutting edges” to cover contemporary disciplinary themes, but even more so it is because the second edition has an (apparently) very different theme from the first. The latter (Douglas, Huggett, and Robinson 1996) was subtitled The Environment and Mankind, based on the view that geography is, and at root always has been (despite excursions into spatial science and other exotic themas), about the interdependence of people and their environment, and about the evolving intercourse between humans and their earthly, and to a lesser extent celestial, habitat. (p. ix)

The book’s six sections exemplified that argument, dealing with a differentiated world (and its evolution), a world transformed by a global economy, scale and habitat modification, a world of questions, “changing worlds, changing geographies,” and geographical futures.

This second edition has a new subtitle—From Local to Global—and takes what is called a fresh, forward-looking but equally fundamental and unifying focus—the concept of place and the tensions of writing about local responses to different scales of change. It explores the nature of places, documents and exemplifies forces and actors producing different kinds and rates of change, and considers the role of the geographical imagination and responses to the challenge of the future. (p. xxxiii)

It is further presented as an “integrated view of modern geography, drawing together many contemporary human and physical strands of the subject around the theme of place and change.” The book’s sixty-two authors—drawn from ten countries, although the
United Kingdom provided the majority (forty-one)—contributed sixty-four separate chapters arranged into six sections: “The Nature of Place” (five chapters); “Forces for Change” (twelve chapters); “Actors in the Process” (seven chapters); “Nature, Rate and Direction of Change” (nine chapters); “The Geographical Imagination” (seven chapters); and “Responses to the Geographical Drivers of Change” (twenty-four chapters), justified by the editors “to illustrate the diversity of human response to change” (p. 641). There are short editorial introductions to each section, but they offer little more than very brief outlines of what is to follow. Nor is there any overall introduction beyond a one-page preface; any integrated view, therefore, is to be developed by the reader—just like regional geography of old, the synthetic whole has to emerge in the reader’s imagination!

The first five chapters on the nature of place provide valuable introductory essays on disparate themes: living on the earth, place as landscape, individual place, social place, and place as network. They are dissociated from the rest of the book, however; if a main focus is the concept of place then surely these should provide the matrix within which what follows is cemented. They do not, however; they are stand-alone essays—and as one progresses through the book the disappointment at the lack of any clear cohesion simply grows. In many ways, the next twelve chapters on forces for change really set the context for the remainder of the book. Again, most are excellent introductory reads, though is it just their novelty for me that led to the physical geography chapters being more interesting and intellectually exciting? There are intriguing contrasts—between the adjacent chapters on transport (Preston) and cultural change (Pawson), for example—and some essays are partial; Batty’s otherwise excellent overview of IT makes no mention of the growth of surveillance at all scales, for example, and Mannion’s on biotechnology is largely limited to agricultural applications and says nothing about the hybrid geographies that many increasingly see as characterizing human–nature interactions.

The seven chapters on “Actors in the Process” deal sequentially with “International Order” (the actors are states operating through, for example, the United Nations), “National States,” “Regional Initiatives and Responses” (which unconvincingly concentrates on devolution in the United Kingdom “as a window through which to view new regional agendas and initiatives” [p. 323]), “Urban Policy and Politics,” which focused on urban entrepreneurialism, “Firms,” “Households,” and “Individuals.” The editors seem to have taken seriously Margaret Thatcher’s dictum that “There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families” (this quote is from a 1987 interview she gave; see http://briandeer.com/social/thatcher-society.htm); nor, it seems, are there socioeconomic classes, or ethnic groups, or a range of other societal divisions—some of which might underpin nonstate actors (quangos, nongovernmental organizations), and might be involved in resistance.

The final nine chapters of the first volume address “Nature, Rate, and Direction of Change,” intriguingly introduced by a chapter on “Unchanging Places,” which makes the important point that many of our built environments, and the social patterns they contain or constrain, are relatively long-lived. It is followed by another chapter on “Preserved and Conserved Places” and one on “Stagnation” before we get to “Rapid Change,” which turns out to be an essay on the Pearl River Delta. We then get chapters on “ Manufactured Places,” “Regenerating [British] Places,” “Reconcentration” (with an intriguingly diverse set of exemplars: Rosario, Argentina; refugee camps in East Africa; and U.K. regional cities, plus Stockholm), “Counterurbanization,” and “Virtual Places”—the most fascinating of them all. Even more intriguing, however, are the absences from this section; there is nothing on rates of environmental change, for example, surely the most significant and substantial topic for geographical futures.

Most of the second volume comprises the twenty-four chapters on responses to change, but these are preceded by seven on “The Geographical Imagination,” covering words, mapping, art and geography, photography, moving images, sounds, and multimedia. The overwhelming impression is not of a geographical imagination, but rather of sources that geographers analyze and interpret: Geographers are consumers of these seven media only, it seems. There is nothing on geographers’ use of words, for example, only their interpretations of texts. Nor is there anything on how they produce maps and pictures, and yet these (increasingly the latter) are major elements in our public performances, such as lectures. (Should there also be a chapter on PowerPoint?) A major opportunity has been missed.

The disparate set of chapters on “Responses to the Geographical Drivers of Change,” gets a longer editorial introduction (but still predominantly a summary of what is to come rather than a justification for the contents). The first ten chapters deal explicitly with the natural environment—again with some valuable overviews, such as those on global water resources. Even so, there were major absences: carbon footprints,
offsetting, and trading, for example, and the discussion of hurricanes ends at 1995. If, as we are told, “Societies have always had to respond to climatic changes, but until now they have never had to respond to predicted change” (p. 680), why is there so little on the science of prediction (a spatial science exotica)?

The remaining chapters are hard to encapsulate because they cover such diverse topics as producing, competing for power, communicating, shopping, dwelling, and performativity, although it is very hard to establish how the last three of these can be considered responses to geographical change drivers. Some do directly address important topics that fit the nature–society interaction theme (if not that of place), such as that on protesting and empowering. (Of the main targets in the latter is neoliberalism, however, which is not addressed at all earlier in the book; indeed, changing capitalist regimes of accumulation are entirely ignored and yet they are both major drivers of contemporary change and spatially very nuanced in their application and implication.) Others are rather misleading, with catchy titles suggesting something that is not delivered; that on “Counting,” for example, has the subtitle “Finance, Debt, Banking, and the Global Casino.”

Indeed, this comment on the chapter on counting identifies a major part of geography that gets virtually no mention: quantitative work, defined as broadly as one wishes (recall the editors’ reference cited earlier to “spatial science and other exotic themas”). Much of the work on changing physical environments and the role of human use discussed in the book is based on high-quality earth systems modeling, but readers get no deep appreciation of that whatsoever, nor are they given any insights into the substantial amount of work being done in quantitative human geography, much of which is directly relevant to the book’s theme of place. Take, for example, geodemographics, which deploys statistical procedures honed by geographers to define places according to their population composition and which commercial and political operations have expanded massively for targeted marketing. Or all of the work on the spread of diseases and how that might be countered; or the segregation of groups in multiethnic cities and the conflict that this engenders (again, a major place-based issue).

In sum, whatever the merits of the individual chapters—and there are many—the book does not cohere, let alone do so around the focus of places, oddly defined at the outset by one of the editors as “segments of the landscape with a physical form, and usually signs of human uses” (p. 1). It is hard to conceive how the book will be used. Certainly at the quoted price it will not be considered necessary or background reading for undergraduate courses, although perhaps the publishers intend to split it up into a number of shorter and much cheaper paperback texts once they have reaped the profits from library sales (something open to them but not to the publishers of the Encyclopedia of Human Geography). Certainly there are essays in these two volumes that offer students valuable (although obsolescent in many cases) insights into important themes, but one has to wonder whether the authors have to some extent wasted their time producing their essays, despite their quality: Who will read them? This raises the more general question of the relevance of such books in contemporary geography, and indeed in higher education more generally. Given the great breadth of the discipline today, is it really feasible or desirable to produce a book that covers the whole of the discipline (either geography or just human geography in this case), let alone do so around some unifying theme that does not work, either in general or because some authors at least do not conform to it? An encyclopedia or dictionary might still just be feasible, but I have many doubts about companions, which the one reviewed here illustrates. Surely it is better if individual authors wrote their own books about various themes, presenting them as their take on geography, but not in so doing denying that there are other takes that are just as valuable and valid (Johnston 2006). These would be much more likely to reach widely and deeply into student and other audiences, and perhaps reinvigorate education as a means of critically evaluating arguments rather than transmitting information (from Wikipedia?!). Encyclopedias and dictionaries are probably nearing the end of their value, too, not least because if they aspire to be comprehensive—even within human geography—they have to be large and expensive, which in the end becomes self-defeating. We have a new source for such material now in the Internet. There, a dictionary can be compiled in real time. The editors do not have to wait for the last recalcitrant authors to deliver their pieces (perhaps years late) before sending the manuscript to the publishers and waiting twelve to eighteen months before the final version is on sale. Material can go online as soon as it is delivered and edited, and there is plenty of room for competitors, even those who want to challenge what is said. So the two books reviewed here might be among the last of a dying breed. Technology has changed publishing and the pace of knowledge creation and re-creation has speeded up enormously. Obsolescent, expensive collections
of entries and essays are unlikely to be either what the student of the future wants or what we will deliver to them.

Key Words: encyclopedias, geography, human geography.

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Contesting Neoliberalism: Urban Frontiers. Helga Leitner, Jamie Peck, and Eric S. Sheppard, eds. New York: Guilford, 2007. 338 pp., tables, diagrams, maps, notes, bibliography, and index. $30.00 cloth (ISBN 978-1-59385-320-4).

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Today, neoliberal governance in the United States and beyond has become a powerful and haunting presence. Controversies about it abound: As many people and places feel the crunch of its punitive regulating and emphasis on private markets, some applaud this and many others simply shudder. In this context, neoliberalism has rightfully attracted increased attention among researchers, planners, and organizers. With the struggle to understand the nuances of this governance, a new world of ambiguity has opened up about its most basic characteristics: its constitution, form, and modes of operation. What is now increasingly mythologized is the sense of a monolithic, top-down kind of governance with an easily identifiable core, periphery, path of expansion, universal set of operative strategies and tools, and a common base of project-propelling ideologies and resources.

It is in this spirit that Helga Leitner, Jamie Peck, and Eric S. Sheppard offer this book. The dual aim is to more deeply destabilize and reveal a fragile, tenuous neoliberalism, and yet to also further underscore its pervasive power and influence today. To accomplish this, Leitner, Peck, and Sheppard strategically decenter the analytical gaze from the direct operation and functioning of neoliberalism to the mediating and contesting of this formation on the ground. At the same time, they posit neoliberal content, operations, and human mediation of it as an inseparable whole. Human negotiation and resistance is placed at the heart of neoliberalism’s very constitution at all times in all places. Neoliberalism emerges as a formed and forming governance in a proactive and reactive creating: It is pieced together and defended in iterations of reflexive, malleable responses set within prevailing milieus of structural conditions, stocks of understandings, and actual and anticipated patterns of contestation.

Peck and Tickell initiate the foray by setting the stage for the empirical chapters. They sketch out the neoliberal project’s rise and expansion, which leads into Larner’s investigation of this governance’s innovativeness and flexibility in New Zealand. Larner chronicles a deft human engineering and maneuvering by this governance while contestation is constant and everywhere. Margit Mayer unpacks new kinds of contestation of social movements in the United States and Germany. Neoliberalism, in all its rhetorical dodges and creation of new normative conceptual landscapes, is documented as a moving target with immense vulnerability. William Sites highlights the ways in which different conceptions of neoliberal capitalism lead to different imaginings of the promise of urban-based opposition. Such conceptions, like guideposts, take opposition theorists to different shortcomings with different implications for strategic resistance. Sophie Oldfield and Kristian Stokke reveal the discrepancies between polemical political discourses and actual political practice, focusing on South Africa’s Western Cape’s Anti-Eviction Program.

Patrick Bond and Peter McInnes continue by revealing the destabilizing complexities and tensions that can mark protest groups with a focus on South Africa’s famous Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC).
Joel Wainright shows how the relationship between neoliberalism and urban protest is mediated by, and gets played out through, a crucial force: politicized spaces. Adrian Smith chronicles the centrality of everyday life—rhythms of practices and events—as a crucial medium for the constitution and unfolding of place-based neoliberalism in postsocialist cities. Byron Miller examines Calgary’s distinctive negotiation and response to neoliberalism’s changing modes of governance that coordinate a localized, market-based reality as everyday lifeworlds are pierced and colonized. Nik Theodore interrogates the realities of day-labor expansion in U.S. cities as neighborhood organizers, advocacy groups, and day laborers themselves struggle to improve working and living conditions. Volker Eich chronicles the problems and impediments that nonprofit organizations face as they increasingly take the lead in contesting neoliberal rules and practices in Europe and North America. Finally, Ute Lehrer and Roger Keil examine the implications of a central neoliberal mediating network, the International Network for Urban Research and Action, as it translates urban social movement demands and debates into a new scale: the transnational one.

There is much that is important in this book. The introductory and concluding chapters take the lead, staking out an innovative and bold gaze onto the neoliberalism–resistance dialectic. For me, three key insights flow through the book. First, neoliberalism is cast as fundamentally a colonizing project of the human imagination. Beneath its veneer of toughness and inevitability, this project must always negotiate the slippery turf of fluid human subjectivities and stocks of understandings. Second, neoliberalism is always a hybrid formation whose interwovenness with a welter of sociospatial undertakings both enables and obstructs the project in places. Neoliberalism thus proceeds through the likes of enacting gentrification, maintaining patterns of residential and life path segregation, and transforming waged work spaces whose prospects, possibilities, and contradictions permeate the neoliberal project. Third, neoliberal governances are poignantly spatial undertakings, concatenations of rules, policies, themes, and assertions provided with content, form, and legitimacy via spatial usage and occupation. Yet its grounding in space ultimately serves up both its strengths and failings as a kind of observable text for others to critique and respond to.

The result is to posit an important position: Neoliberal governances are formed by and reflect complex conjunctural assemblages. Dense, thickly configured formations arise out of multiple forces: local and societal structures, grounded political cultures, stocks of place-rooted understandings, the wills and actions of strategically positioned beings, and structural propelled institutions. In this way, neoliberal governance is opened up as something diverse and multifaceted—as a new common sense set in the production of new forms of market subjectivity, a form of economic and political imperialism, a new governmentality marked by a bundle of political practices, and a regime of resource allocation and benefits distribution. Neoliberalism, then, is illuminated as a richly textured social formation. Each of these facets not merely makes the others; they are inseparably embedded in the others. This, I suggest, is not mere semantics or tortuous hair splitting, but rather an important analytical framing and theorizing.

At the same time, however, key superficialities also mark this book and must be noted. Much of this stems from some crucial points of disconnect between the editors’ ambitious mapping of the neoliberal research program and the tack taken in many of the empirical chapters. Thus political-economy studies of neoliberalism have become increasingly and rightfully sensitive to cultural and representational matters (as the concluding chapter highlights), but many chapters treat this superficially. Here, key insights from the emergent cultural-economy perspective are frequently marginalized or banished to oblivion, leaving fertile spheres like the hermeneutic and interpretive, race and racialization, and gender barely scratched. Cultural-economy studies offer tremendous promise to nuance our understanding of the neoliberal-resistance relation, for example, exposing the important role that cultural performance staging plays in constituting political positions, the reality of an unshakable cultural embeddedness in economic thought and practice, and the racially inflected character of economic decisions and responses. Culture, when tackled here, often appears as a thin ancillary appendage to the working of an economic core.

Two final caveats are in order. First, a crucial organizing point provided in the introduction is often glaringly absent in the chapters: that contestation of neoliberalism is continuous and everywhere to profoundly influence the constituting of these governances. Too often, the chapters cast protest and contestation as temporally discrete, a set of reactive and momentary social responses to sedimented and hyperaggressive neoliberalisms. Ignored is Larner’s sharp call to see neoliberalism as continuously taken on and continuously inventive, a project that relies on the likes of skewing contestatory arguments and modifying rhetorical strategies as it
confronts ebbs and flows of anger and protest. Second, a book that purports to take the urban seriously often fails to do so. Typically, the urban is served up as the stage on which human resistance entangles with neoliberalism, a place where the action happens to be taking place. In too many of the chapters, therefore, it remains unclear why the urban is important in the empirical terrains that are investigated.

This said, *Contesting Neoliberalism* is an important step forward as geographers and other social scientists struggle to understand the intricacies of a powerful yet elusive neoliberalism. The stepped-up search for points of resistance comes at a time when the United States and the world beyond struggles to blunt a political program that exacerbates growing material inequalities, increases poverty and hunger in cities and towns, and nurtures the growth of human-destabilizing labor markets. This book, exceedingly well written and relevant especially for graduate courses, advanced seminars, and research undertakings in the social sciences, provides a wealth of key pointers to deepen the inquiry into neoliberalism. I highly recommend this book, and will be returning to it again and again to strengthen my own base of understanding.

Key Words: contestation, governance, neoliberalism.

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**The Sociology of Spatial Inequality.** Linda Lobao, Gregory Hooks, and Ann Tickamyer, eds. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. 274 pp., tables, diagrams, notes. $29.95 (ISBN 978-0-7914-7108-1).

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... Sometimes I feel Like a waste of space. But I can’t just disappear. I have to be somewhere, right?

— Lyrics from a song by The Tubes

Yes, space is as basic a dimension of our daily existence and social life as there is. We live in it. We also operate on an interactional basis with other individuals and larger aggregates (e.g., institutions such as schools, the labor force, and the real estate market) through it. So how have sociologists incorporated this ontologically necessary dimension into their examination of the fundamental defining aspect of their discipline—the dynamics of socioeconomic inequality? Unfortunately, my assessment has generally been not very well. Historically, theoretical paradigms in sociology that assign space a relatively prominent role in explaining how inequality is created and perpetuated (e.g., the Chicago School of urban sociology) have had enough scorn heaped on them to relegate them to the status of being trotted out as examples of how primitive and nonsensical some of the classic origins of—in this case early American sociology—were.

Fortunately, in recent decades space as an analytical tool has made a comeback in sociology. To be sure, the development of an informed sense as to how spatialization is related to the unequal access to valued resources has proceeded at an uneven pace across the subfields of sociology. Hopefully without engaging in too much reductionism, my take is that there have been broad approaches to this issue. The first, which represents a relatively mature conceptualization, is that space is an object of interest in its own right. It is an active, defining agent in inequality, a synthesis of all factors; it defines and structures opportunities; and space itself is contested on a symbolic and material plane. Status and material outcomes are produced and reproduced because space defines the stock of stratification-relevant information you acquire, who you interact with and learn from, and the range of opportunities you are limited to. This contrasts with a second approach wherein space constitutes background noise, not necessitating that its role be meaningfully articulated so that its status is epiphenomenal and delimited by the unavoidable; that is, socially desirable resources are differentially distributed across space.

So where are sociologists headed? This edited volume by Linda Lobao, Gregory Hooks, and Ann Tickamyer helps to answer this question. A group of noted sociologists were asked to discuss the advantages to be gained from taking a spatial approach to their research. Their contributions constitute eleven chapters, which are grouped into an introduction and three thematic parts: conceptual and methodological issues, studies of spatial inequality across substantive areas, and an integrative section that discusses directions for future inquiry. The introduction discusses at length how space has fared as an analytic tool across sociology’s subfields. Its thrust is conceptual and its reach is relatively broad.
It identifies the territorial units (the global system, countries, subnational units such as communities, and cities) in which space is relevant, and documents the ways in which space has become increasingly incorporated into sociological analyses of inequality. The thesis is that spatial considerations remain largely segmented from stratification analyses across subfields, although few specifics are offered as to how this can be resolved.

Lobao and Hooks’s chapter in Part 1 focuses on subnational perspectives, arguing—based on their review different of conceptual approaches studies can take—for the importance of assessing sociology’s “middle ground,” the spatial scale between nation and city. Privileging the national and urban scales has led to a gap in our understanding of the dynamics that shape people and places. The subnational scale provides opportunities for spatializing theory and a window into some of the nation’s worst inequalities. This scale is also important for studying new forms of inequality arising from devolution and similar changes in state and society. This broad overview is followed by a critical discussion of similar issues by Kevin Leicht and Craig Jenkins. They argue for the need to explicitly integrate space into the subfields, certainly an ironic omission because political sociology assumes territorial bases for political action and institutions. Additionally, they address various forms of political action that are subnationally based, illustrated with a discussion of their own research on state-level economic development programs. The final chapter in this section, by Mike Irwin, links conceptual and methodological aspects of spatial analyses. He outlines the conceptual and empirical origins of commonly used territorial units and how they can be applied to study inequality across spatial scales. He demonstrates the impact of decisions concerning the use of different place units on data reflecting three dimensions of inequality—race, wealth, and occupational status.

Studies in Part II illustrate different treatments of place, comparative methodologies, and conceptual approaches blending the study of space with that of inequality. Tickamyer and her colleagues use a spatial lens to study welfare reform. Relying on data on selected Ohio counties, they focus on the impact of welfare reform and broader governmental devolution. They show that welfare reform has different implications for localities in Appalachia than those outside this region, and conclude that there are profound public policy implications due to the reorganization of the spatial scale of welfare. Diane McLaughlin and colleagues bring together literatures from demography and inequality to address the determinants of mortality across the United States. Specifically, they explore mechanisms that link income inequality to mortality by introducing sets of local conditions that mediate the impact of such inequality. Although previous studies rooted in ecological models demonstrate a relationship between income inequality and mortality at different levels of analysis, their research moves beyond past work to explicitly incorporate and test spatial dynamics.

David Cotter, Joan Hermsen, and Reeve Vanneman are interested in extending the study of poverty spatially. They select metropolitan areas as sites in a multilevel research design to demonstrate how variation in economic prosperity and inequality are associated with the risk of poverty for families, with particular attention given to the mediating effects of labor supply and family structure. Worth mentioning is that their study constitutes a good example of how multilevel quantitative modeling can delineate how geographic context impinges on individual life chances. Saentz and his colleagues bridge literatures on migration and ethnic inequality, extending both topics along the way. They examine Mexican American migration away from its source area in the U.S. Southwest toward places of incipient Mexican American population growth throughout the nation. These flows are conditioned by push and pull factors operating differently across regions: Inequality and discrimination drive Mexican Americans to seek new opportunities and resources, as human capital as well as social capital, including kin and community ties, direct this flow to peripheral regions. Oakley and Logan build from the spatial inequality tradition in urban sociology to assess the allocation and pattern of community services in New York City. They begin with census tracts to empirically construct neighborhood clusters based on income, then use them to investigate patterns of unequal service delivery. Their study presents a unique analysis of inequality in urban service delivery and a model for using existing units to construct new spatial boundaries based on geographic patterns of inequality.

The final section concludes with an assessment of the spatialization project. From the lens of geography, Vincent Del Casino and John Paul Jones comment on the effort to integrate the social and the spatial. They see the studies straddling two metatheoretical camps in human geography, “socially-relevant spatial science” and “critical realism.” The spatial scientific approach is a dominant paradigm in geography, from which geographic information systems and other spatial analytical techniques have emerged. Critical realism argues for viewing social and spatial processes as intertwined,
with social relations, actors, and institutions operating in tandem; overall, outcomes of social processes are contingent on place settings. For example, microlevel processes such as industrial restructuring work out differently across space due to unique contextual attributes.

This is a valuable volume in addressing the interplay between space and socioeconomic inequality. Much of its value and weakness derive from the same source: the range of substantive areas and issues that are brought into play. I learned from each chapter but also had a growing sense that many major areas that provide examples of how spatial analyses can best inform the dynamics of socioeconomic inequality received no mention. Economic sociology, for example, was the subfield of sociology that, to my mind, brought to light the fundamental relationship between space and socioeconomic inequality through analyses of quality and quantity of social networks. In fact, now conceived more theoretically as social or cultural capital, space is the underpinning that drives this dynamic. Also, in the area of race and ethnicity, the voluminous literature on residential segregation and its impact has been critical. Finally, in line with this criticism, these omitted areas have demonstrated that space is relevant to structuring socioeconomic inequality at all analytic levels that sociologists analyze. In other words, the space–inequality nexus is such that the subnational analytic portion of the volume could have addressed many critical scales that were not recognized in this volume. Overall and most important, these objections notwithstanding, the project initiated by the editors was a success because it shed light on the how spatiality can be related to stratification and inequality, and it constitutes a further call for the analysis of spatial aspects of inequality in a dynamic fashion wherein space constitutes an object of study that is vitally and actively implicated in processes of inequality.

Key Words: inequality, place, sociology space, stratification.

Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge. Linda Nash. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. xiii and 332 pp., maps, photos, notes, and index. $24.95 paper (ISBN: 978-0-520-24887-8).

Reviewed by Julie Guthman, Department of Community Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA.

Countless books on California’s beginnings reassert the boosters’ boast: California’s environment provided an antidote to that of the fouled American East and Midwest, and the Anglo settlers found it salubrious. Not so Linda Nash’s Inescapable Ecologies, which opens with the intimation that the first colonizers and explorers were considerably worried about their health and found California’s Central Valley, especially, a place brimming with miasma, or bad air. Nash goes on to posit that even though ideas of miasma have been for the most part discredited, perhaps these people were on to something. They seemed to have recognized the inextricable, or, as the title suggests, inescapable relationship between their surroundings and their health, a position that was delegitimated with the development of germ theory and more vector-based understandings of disease. Such a forgetting also enabled later notions of the environmental causation of disease to be deemed a discovery. Nash’s normative project is to resuscitate ecological understandings of disease and health, and even to suggest that all diseases are fundamentally environmental. In so doing, she joins forces with those who have argued that humans are not only agents of environmental change, but also its objects, so that “subjects blur into objects.”

Nash’s empirical project is to recount shifting ideas of the relationship between the body and the environment, and particularly changing ideas about the body’s permeability over an approximately 150-year period in California. Her sources are the written observations, records, and public testimonies of white settlers, public health professionals, medical doctors, environmental engineers, journalists, farm laborers, and others whose experience and knowledge of the Central Valley was far less salutary than boosters would have it. Situating her study in the state’s interior was a way to tell the story against the backdrop of California’s agrarian development, and to draw out salient parallels between the modernization of public health and the modernization of the agricultural landscape. The book’s organizational framework is a rough periodization with much attention given to the gradual, overlapping, and dialogic
shifting of discourses within and between various epistemic communities.

During California’s Gold Rush, whites had their doubts about the salubriousness of the interior Valley as many people fell ill from cholera, smallpox, malaria, and various fevers, dysentery, and agues. For them, health was not obtained by closing oneself off from the outside, but by properly managing one’s surroundings and body. Yet the prevalence of many diseases worsened as Anglos began to transform the Valley into an agricultural landscape. Malaria was endemic owing to the crudely formed irrigation ditches and other standing water, and typhoid was three times more prevalent in the interior than on the coast. Although the advent of germ theory shifted concern toward singular etiological agents, the unevenness of disease prevalence still pointed to the qualities of place as agents of disease and made settlers uneasy. The eventual hegemony of bacteriology and laboratory techniques, though, brought almost exclusive focus to specific etiological agents and thereby paved the way for extermination projects and the erosion of ecological thinking. Environmental engineers and public health reformers alike saw amelioration in sanitation and uniformity, such that modernizing space was central to both professions. As the early successes of DDT encouraged the eradication of anything remotely pesky, however, sanitation and chemical pest control applications unleashed a new set of illnesses in a classic boomerang effect. Nash wraps up the empirical portion of the book with stories of farm workers falling ill to acute parathion poisoning in addition to less etiologically clear chronic diseases, as evidenced in the proliferation of cancer clusters in the southern part of the Valley. Like others, she attributes these new environmental illnesses to the utter failure of the existing regulatory apparatus to check them, in part because of the inadequacy of concepts such as maximum contaminant levels and in part because of the racialized status of farm workers.

Written by a historian, the book is deeply geographical, raising issues of space, place, scale, and mobility in a contribution that creatively mixes environmental history and the political ecology of disease. One of Nash’s finer points is the radical contingency of environmental disease causation. A farm worker’s pesticide-induced illness does indeed reflect which way the wind blows, in addition to cumulative and interactive effects of different exposures; the state of her or his immune system and the life history that has contributed to that; the characteristics of the fruit she or he is picking; the clothes she or he is wearing; the protection she or he is given; the technology of pesticide application; the heat, humidity, and surrounding foliage; and her or his very bodily functions in relation to her or his work in regard to breathing, perspiring, and touching. In these ways pesticide exposure is a profoundly localized event, even though the determining factors are often extrascalar.

Nash’s more direct nod to scale is provided in an intriguing comparison of laboratory and epidemiological methods in locating the cause of environmental disease. Laboratory methods offer more proof in their ability to pinpoint an etiological agent, yet the focus on the organism represents the problem of disease at too fine a scale. By contrast, epidemiology can allow for multicausal factors, yet in tracking patterns over a large population, the scale of analysis is too coarse. Neither method can capture lived experience or the contingencies of place. At the same time, she notes that migrating bodies and migrating chemicals test control of space and therefore confound the ability to investigate at the scale of the local, one of the problems with proving the existence of cancer clusters.

“Race” also plays a crucial role in her story. As Nash says, settlers’ ideas of health were utterly wrapped up in racial obsessions. For example, they saw diseased Indians as proof of European superiority. Nash, however, does more than recount earlier ways that the colonial enterprise discursively intertwined race and disease, as others have done. Her critique of contemporary epidemiology is equally compelling. Specifically, in controlling for race as a risk factor, epidemiological methods did an enormous disservice to understanding cancer clusters in the southern Central Valley. Specifically, a series of studies commissioned by various health departments found that Mexican migrants as a group were more prone to cancer than white residents. Not only did this controlling variable deny statistical significance to place as an independent variable, but Mexicans were effectively naturalized to be “at risk.” Their risk profile was attributed at different times to genetic predisposition, lack of education, or even cultural values, but never considered as a result of life histories. Race, she notes, is a crude approximation for genetic and lifestyle factors, but race is also already entangled in access to medical care, long-term and cumulative exposures, and presence in certain environments. How, Nash asks, does one statistically control for race, as these histories have helped produce race as a meaningful epidemiological category to begin with? Historicizing race and health in the way Nash does is a move that many critical epidemiologists and environmental health advocates could learn from.
For those interested in the body in relation to space, the book is about the porosity of the body and pathways into it. Although geographers have tended to theorize the body in the place and space tradition rather than the human–environmental, this book is a strong reminder of our intimate connections with our immediate environments, through such everyday acts as inhaling, ingesting, absorbing, being bitten, or being cut. By the same token, the book’s greatest strengths are its greatest weaknesses, albeit minor ones. First, it strikes me that the overall point is overdrawn. Can we really talk about malaria and organophosphate-induced cancer in the same breath? Although we can surely see that the modern project to sanitize and eradicate vector-borne diseases has brought a new set of diseases, to make these parallel cases belies key distinctions between categories of disease and, actually, muddies the conceptual ground of what constitutes environmental causation. This leads to the second point. By employing “environment” in relation to “the body,” Nash is not all that careful with delineating first and second natures, or human-created environmental causes and natural ones. Despite long-standing debates about the production of nature, human-produced carcinogenic chemicals arguably have a different ontological status than wind. Third, she tends to leave much of the political economy of agrarian development to the reader’s imagination or prior knowledge. Although we should honor editorial choices in the interest of brevity, in this case the absence of questions regarding economic development veers her toward an ideational argument: that the problem fundamentally rests with a modern conception of the body as impermeable.

Nevertheless, in most respects this book is stunning. The breadth and depth of Nash’s sources are remarkable in and of themselves, and I was very impressed with her ability to integrate archival data and social-theoretical work in a seamless way. Although the book does not focus too much on specific pathways to disease, it comes close to something we might call a political ecology of the body—a text that takes seriously the inextricable relationship between changing representations and materialities of landscape and those of the body.

Key Words: California, disease ecology, environmental health, environmental history.

**Energy and American Society: Thirteen Myths.** Benjamin K. Sovacool and Marilyn A. Brown, eds. New York: Springer-Verlag, 2007. 371 pp. $79.97 cloth (ISBN: 9781402055638).

Reviewed by Martin J. Pasqualetti, School of Geographical Sciences, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ.

If any topic is mired in myths, it is energy. It is not an insignificant problem. Such myths often drive public opinion and government policy. Sometimes, accepting them without challenge, we travel down wrong—or even dangerous—paths. At other times we become twisted in such a knot of pro and con arguments that we do not know which path to take or, worse, we waste time and money in endless debate while conditions worsen.

In my energy courses, I propose myths, including the following, to stimulate discussion: Technology will solve problems of energy shortage, solar power is too expensive, and nuclear power will save us from global warming. Benjamin K. Sovacool and Marilyn A. Brown, using a similar pedagogic device, have developed a list of thirteen of their own myths that they have identified during their active and prolific careers in the arena of energy policy. Substantial contributors to the energy literature in their own right, they have enlisted some of the most experienced specialists to help them expose the myths they have identified. The careful and wise selection of these experts is the principal contributing factor that makes this collection of essays so valuable. Rarely is so much expertise brought together between the covers of such a concise book.

Of these experts, Amory Lovins is the best known, and he focuses on the topic that has done the most to make him famous, energy efficiency. He told me twenty-five years ago that he thought the country’s energy problems were conceptually solved, that it was really just a matter of implementation. As then, he remains an apostle of energy efficiency, and even after twenty-five years of personal effort—including great progress and hordes of converts to his view—efficiency still holds additional promise as an energy resource, a substitute for the technical legerdemain of physics, chemistry, and engineering that mystifies the laity. The myth Lovins wishes to
dispel is that efficiency has run its course. It has not, due to the huge amount of waste that we have been locking into our lifestyles for most of a century.

To his delight, Lovins is no longer alone in advocating more attention to the demand side of energy. In a companion chapter, Edward Vine and his coauthors at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory do their best to dispel the myth that energy efficiency measures are unreliable, unpredictable, and unenforceable. With Lovins whetting our appetite, Vine provides the nitty-gritty detail so necessary at the level of state regulatory bodies, the small but powerful agencies that actually promulgate necessary changes in energy policy.

Like Brown, Thomas Wilbanks is a geographer who focuses on energy in society. In his case, Wilbanks often concentrates on developing countries. The myth he addresses is that developing countries are not doing their part in responding to concerns about climate change. As he states it, this is “not entirely, or even largely, true.” In many ways, the opposite resonates, as in Brazil, which is deriving a substantial portion of its energy from renewable sources, or India, which is replacing petroleum-based vehicles with those that operate on alternative fuels. Although the aggregate response of such countries is still small, some are actually doing “even more than their part,” and they are likely to increase their effort when the developed countries set a more ambitious goal for themselves.

Addressing two fundamental myths, Marilyn Brown looks at the energy crisis as “hype” and Rosalyn Mckeeown examines the public’s presumed informed understanding of energy. On these myths rest many decisions—ranging from household expenditures to national priorities. Why worry about energy futures if such worry is ill-founded? Why educate the public if all of us already know how to save energy, how to find new energy, and how to manipulate technology to fix whatever problems may arise? Brown and Mckeeown expose the danger of this type of thinking, particularly how it helps provide “cover” for private citizens and legislators who would rather not have to take necessary actions on behalf of energy security and environmental integrity.

One of the most prevalent myths—actually a group of myths—rests on the premise that technology is the answer. Whether it is the allocation of research funds at the national level or the planned construction of refueling stations along California highways, hydrogen has captured the imagination of the country. It has such sweeping promise as a pollution-free fuel for our cars that embracing its potential tends to solve many problems at once. It could be both an endless fuel and pollution-free. Joseph Romm explodes the myth of the technological fix by taking a more realistic view of hydrogen, one that places it at a level substantially beneath that of a panacea.

My own energy research has over the past thirty years repeatedly questioned heavy reliance on technological innovation to solve the problems of energy demand and its environmental impact. I was, for this reason, especially drawn to Sovacool and Richard Hirsh’s essay on what they call Myth Six: The barriers to innovative energy solutions are primarily technical. Like them, I do not believe it. Rather, such barriers are more associated with policy changes, public education, and regulatory adjustments affecting how we measure economic cost.

Climate change has been a focal point of much of the discussion about energy in recent years, especially as it relates to the benefits of emission-free nuclear power, limitless solar energy, or quick and low-cost energy efficiency. Everyone is trying to couch his or her position between care and concern for the planet and how much we can—or have to—pay to keep the impacts of our lifestyles from spiraling out of control. At issue—especially in the United States—is whether the control of greenhouse gas emissions can be accomplished without destroying the economy. Eileen Claussen and Janet Peace insightfully examine this question in Energy Myth Twelve.

The remaining discussion is equally important and compelling, including the importance of price signals, the continued need for economic and environmental improvements, and the significant contribution that is possible from renewable energy. The regret I have, given such worthy and stimulating discussion, rests on the likely readership these essays will enjoy. My wish is that this fine book would be more available to and more appealing to a wider audience. Its messages are too important to remain only in school libraries and academic bookshelves.

Were a second edition a consideration, I would like to see this book spiced up with some attractive diagrams and photos, and in general made more attractive for a broader audience. Drop the parenthetical citations and rework the text into a more accessible style. As it is, it will probably have a fairly limited distribution, which is unfortunate. The material on the Thirteen Myths deserves—even begs for—a wide audience, an audience that is out there, interested, motivated, and—armed with the information in this book—capable of driving change. The hope for such change was presumably the initial catalyst that created this book in the first place.

Key Words: energy, energy future, energy myths, policy.