
NOTES AND REVIEWS

Ecoscapes: Geographical Patternings of Relations. Edited by Gary Backhaus and John Murungi. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford: Lexington Books 2006, xxxiii+241 pages.

This book is a collection of articles that engage with the concept of the ecoscape, i.e. human activity related to space and nature. The collective of authors is interdisciplinary, including philosophers, geographers and historians. Ten articles discuss various sides of human relations with animals, plants and space in different time periods and regions.

The volume kicks off with the introduction by Gary Backhaus who conceptualises the term ecoscapes. On page xviii the definition of the ecoscape is given as “the geographicity of ecosystem”. From the introduction the reader learns that the concept of ecoscape leans rather on philosophy and less on social sciences as one might expect. The first article, by Eduardo Mendieta, is about reshaping ecology in the New World since the beginning of the European conquest. He sees this process as ecological imperialism that continues today in more sophisticated forms. Benjamin Hale follows with a discussion about genetic modification of animals. The author believes that the genetic modification of animals, especially those with human genes, poses a question of the ‘realness’ of nature and should give us material to discuss in what kind of world we want to live. The next chapter, by Azucena Cruz, discusses the issue of “ecology” or the biotechnologic production of food. Cruz looks at human demographics concerning food distribution, causing environmental changes and the privatisation of the results of scientific research. Jessica Hayes-Conroy uses the dialectical philosophies of Hegel and Marx to seek the answer to the question of why Mexican corn production fails

to feed people. The author works out the dialectic between the global and the local technologies and suggests that for successful functioning there is a need for synthesis from both. José-Héctor Abraham focuses on usage of the science of open dynamic system in solving environmental problems. He concludes that pollution is not an isolated problem but an interrelational one, i.e. market economy and spatialisation affect the ecology of the enterprise. Christine M. Petto writes an interesting article about how mapping of the state territory served the French state as a tool of the scientific bureaucratic control and was used in the state-building process. The article by Dennis E. Skocz is indirectly linked to the previous chapter. The author analyses how GIS mapping is used to reconstruct animal relations to their environment and to other animals from the point of view of the animal. In this article the concept of *Umwelt* is used as the theoretical framework. Skocz argues that the benefits of GIS technology can be gained only when we also acknowledge the limits of the same technology. The next chapter, by Alex Zukas, brings the reader to the 19th century industrial Ruhr Valley. The author shows how a capitalist economy and technological changes have influenced the nature of human settlement in the region. Similar to other contributions in this book, the dichotomy between the ‘natural world’ and human impact on the environment is also a central topic in this article. Troy R. E. Paddock discusses the role of history in understanding changes and meanings in ecoscapes. He uses different buildings as an example to show how meanings and interpretations of different time periods are incorporated into ecoscapes. John E. Jalbert, an academic and third generation woodman, delivers an article with an autobiographical touch about human footprints in the nature. He

uses American nature philosopher Thoreau and his own experience to show how the 'human footprint' is created in nature. The article is about how people make sense of nature and space through their own experience and knowledge. The article includes an interesting discussion about the meaning of harmony and human action in nature. The volume is rounded off by John Murungi's epilogue, which contextualises the notion of ecoscape in what is called "Western Tradition".

As mentioned above, the whole work leans theoretically on philosophy, especially on German philosophy. Names like Heidegger, Hegel or Uexkull are cited often. A wide range of interpretations of *Umwelt* are presented to the reader as human notions and understandings of the environment. The theoretical framework here is based on semiotic interpretation of the human-nature relationship where different ecoscape actors are discussed as agents living in a world filled with symbols and images. Characteristic to the tone of this book is Chapter 7, by Dennis E. Skocz, who focuses on the exclusion and inclusion of different symbols and signs in the environment and relates them to the discourse of power. Power plays a central role in many analyses. The construction and production of space is in all articles linked to economic, cultural and political processes where power holding or subordination to processes initiated by power holders plays the central role. In cases of conflict some authors do not hide their sympathy for the oppressed side. For example Jessica Hayes-Conroy's article about Mexican provincial agriculture reads like an anti-globalist statement.

The main question that the reader might have is how new is the content of the presented concept of the ecoscape. There is a huge amount of anthropological literature that discusses similar relationships between humans, animals, plants, space and time. Tim Ingold, author of many classic works in this field, has summarised many discus-

sions in his book *Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London, New York: Routledge 2000). Authors like Piers Vitebsky, Elisabeth Crool or David Parkin discuss in their works symbols and symbolic relationships between humans, non-humans and the environment. To the reader who is familiar with these and many other authors, the concept of ecoscape does not seem very revolutionary or innovative. The contribution of this volume is to add the philosophical dimension of ethical and value discussions to this debate, without creating an entirely new debate. Technically, the volume would have needed more careful editing. Inclusion of a project description as an article (Abraham) is disturbing. Moreover, footnotes 23–43 of Chapter 3 are missing.

However, this book opens another dimension in the debate about the human relationship with the environment. As a collection of interesting case studies and intriguing theoretical discussions this book is recommended to readers from many disciplines of social and humanitarian sciences.

Aimar Ventsel