



BOOK REVIEWS

Media, culture and the environment By A. Anderson. London, UCL Press. 1997. x + 236 pp. £12.95 paper. ISBN 1 85728 384 8.

The cultural turn in geographical study has seen the contested terrain of environmental issues come to occupy a prominent place in both teaching and research. Geographers will, therefore, welcome this new text. At the same time, students of cultural and media studies will find Anderson's approach novel and engaging. The main purpose of the book is to provide an analysis of how news production processes contribute to both the transformation of environmental meanings and the setting of political agendas. The book places the media industry centre stage but, by situating the rise of postwar environmentalism and its associated media coverage on a broad social canvas, Anderson's analysis is more comprehensive than that which a conventional media studies approach might provide. For example, themes such as modernity, globalization, identity and risk inform her analysis. As a result, her original contribution lies in her analysis of how social change and shifting values impinge on new production processes. The lens of contemporary environmental issues such as climate change, pollution, nuclear power and species loss provides the focus for an intricate and often personal account.

Chapter 1 introduces the contested discursive terrain of the environment and the concept of claims-making, with Chapter 2 moving on to a discussion about the social organization of the newsroom. Here questions about the role of objectivity, balance, impartiality and their relationship with news values are systematically addressed. Having provided an introduction to the media, with Chapter 3 Anderson takes a wider perspective and examines alternative explanations for the postwar rise of environmentalism. This analysis is helpful because it draws on the burgeoning literature concerned with social movements. Chapters 4 and 5 are pivotal for Anderson's approach because they extend and develop her social and political analysis. Chapter 4 focuses on how journalists and broadcasters decide which environmental stories are newsworthy and, together with Chapter 5, demonstrates how social constructions of environmental risk come to frame both news sources and media reports. Audiences and their engagement with media stories are examined in Chapter 6. The final chapter restates the role of culture and the mass media in the transformation of contemporary social problems.

The broad social and cultural analysis developed by the book challenges a number of common assumptions. For example, it is often assumed that whilst governments and official sources have relatively easy access to the media, other organizations, such as environmental groups, do not. In practice, Anderson shows that all organizations, both government and non-governmental, have their own sourcing strategies designed to secure media coverage. Not only have environmental organizations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth become highly professional in the way they provide the media with stories, but the media have become extremely adept at utilizing these stories to advance their own political agendas too. The detailed study of the North Sea seals campaign conducted through the *Daily Mail* provides ample justification for this interpretation. Of equal interest are the insights Anderson's realist perspective brings to her analysis of the rise of environmentalism and its relationship with the media. Many readers will recognize the conscious manipulation of cultural symbols in media stories about environmental issues. Anderson's historical perspective on the rise of postwar environmentalism suggests, however, that deliberate manipulation of symbols is neither a new phenomenon nor one confined to environmental coverage. Tapping into cultural symbols helps to advance environmental claims, but because these claims have to compete with social, economic and political claims that also use symbolic values, gaining access to media coverage is not just about the manipulation of cultural symbols. Likewise, her analysis challenges the interpretation of the environmental movement as a social movement capable of forging a global unity because it is based on the recognition and promotion of shared values. Taken together, these separate strands of analysis show that neither the environmental movement nor the media industry is the monolithic structure other interpretations might suggest.

This is a thought-provoking introductory analysis to environmentalism and its relationship with the media. Some readers will find the condensed analysis of the rise of environmentalism a poor substitute for more extended studies, and others who seek a detailed and insightful analysis of how audiences come to make sense of environmental stories will be disappointed. In many respects this latter deficiency merely reflects the paucity of audience studies, especially those which provide socially and culturally informed analyses. I suspect too that a closer textual analysis of environmental stories would have helped students with little 'feel for language' to gain a sense of precisely how language is used to gain purchase on public opinion. These are small criticisms of what is otherwise an extremely accessible and well argued analysis. I strongly recommend it.

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Continuity and change in rural Russia: A geographical perspective By G. Ioffe and T. Nefedova. Boulder: Westview Press. 1997. 315 pp. £44.50 cloth. ISBN 0 8133 8992 5.

This is an original, lively and enlightening book that will be of interest to scholars of the 'transition economies' and to geographers of rural society and agriculture in general. Using the results of their own fieldwork, the authors discuss