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Panel discussion of Henry Yeung's *Theory and Explanation in Geography*

Henry Wai-chung YEUNG[1], Paloma PUENTE LOZANO[2], József BENEDEK[3,4], Andreea ŢOIU[3] and Ferenc GYURIS[5]

Abstract

This paper focuses on Henry Yeung's recently published book with Wiley, *Theory and Explanation in Geography*, discussing it through the lens of an international group of scholars and from various perspectives. On the one hand, the current study aligns with the volume's main message to create and apply mid-range explanatory theories in geography more intensively, rather than relying too heavily on theories imported from other disciplines, such as philosophy, which often overlook different geographical contexts and provide inadequate causal explanations. We also advocate for the conscious promotion of the internationalisation and decolonisation of geography through such theories. On the other hand, the paper examines the challenges and ambiguities of how geographers can become more self-reflective and philosophically educated to develop better theories, as well as how the history and philosophy of geography, as a subfield of the discipline, can contribute to this goal. This study also scrutinises the relationship between proximity, scale, and causality, discusses the book's major takeaways through a Central and Eastern European lens, and, even more broadly, analyses the structural shifts the volume and its referencing patterns indicate in the international practice of doing geographical research during the last half a century. By doing so, the article summarises the conclusions of a panel discussion held in November 2024 at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, the only book launch event of *Theory and Explanation in Geography* to have occurred so far in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: causality, Central and Eastern Europe, decolonisation, explanation, geographies of science, History and Philosophy of Geography, theory

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On theory and theorising – in geography and by geographers

by Henry Wai-chung Yeung

In this paper, first of all, I will say something about theory: what is theory? Second, I will discuss what to theorise, if you have an interest in theory. Three key considerations are developed in the book as a way of thinking about why and how theory matters. In the third part, I will elaborate on how to theorise, if you really want to theorise about whatever you're studying, and finally, why bother even with theory.

[1] Department of Geography and Resource Management, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. 2nd Floor, Wong Foo Yuan Building, Hong Kong, China. E-mail: henryyeung@cuhk.edu.hk

[2] Department of Humanities: History, Geography, Art, Carlos III University of Madrid. Calle Madrid, 128, 28903 Getafe, Spain. E-mail: ppuente@hum.uc3m.es

[3] Faculty of Geography, Babeş-Bolyai University. 5–7 Clinicilor Street, 400006 Cluj-Napoca, Romania. E-mails: jozsef.benedek@ubbcluj.ro; andreea.toiu@ubbcluj.ro

[4] Budapest Metropolitan University. Nagy Lajos király útja 1–9. 1148 Budapest, Hungary.

[5] Department of Social and Economic Geography, Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, Faculty of Science, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University. Pázmány Péter sétány 1/C, 1117 Budapest, Hungary. E-mail: ferenc.gyuris@ttk.elte.hu

The main argument of the book is that theory is something abstract. Theory cannot itself be, if you like, the empirical mess that we are studying. For instance, we are studying a bottle of water. That's not a theory, right? Theory is an abstraction of an actually existing reality. Theory cannot be just about words. Theory cannot be just a mathematical formula. Because these are representations of something, that something has to have existed. To me, I don't think there can be a theory of the future because your theory of the future is as good as mine. However, it should be something that we want to talk about that has already happened or is currently happening. So that's what theory is about: an abstraction.

Second, there are many kinds of theory. In the book, I've outlined those kinds of theories I mentioned earlier. Some theories are interpretive – they are only interpretation of certain empirical happenings. Certain theories are meant to be narratives, meaning thick descriptions of empirical events as they are happening. Some theories are predictive in nature – when this happens, that will happen. Some theories are explanatory – all these things happen because of this and that.

Theories come in many different kinds, which is normal. In this book, I wanted to make the case that, in my own reading of at least contemporary writing in the English literature, in geography, we have too few theories which are explanatory in nature.

In other words, we are very good at developing so-called abstract ideas about geographical reality, geographical happenings, and geographical phenomena. But we are not very good at explaining those geographical happenings – that's my own reading and view. If that's the case, then perhaps we also need to consider theories which are explanatory, not just descriptive, not just normative.

In Tariq Jazeel's (2019) book *Postcolonialism* – he is a University College London (UCL) Professor of Geography – he makes the case that even if you do postcolonial thinking, when you are deconstructing colonial discourses, you can still find ways in which those discourses contain some kind of what he calls "representational mechanics". There are ways of representing others, and, in so doing, shaping and creating the reality that we think we are representing. In that sense, even discourses can be explanatory. It's possible.

In the book, I'm really trying to advocate for theories which are not universal, not grand theories, but theories that are non-deterministic. Grand theories tend to be deterministic, meaning the world is like this. So, we are talking about theories that are aimed towards specific social-spatial phenomena, but not necessarily across the entire world. For one, you'll find out why, and in that sense, these are theories which are mid-range – not too grand, not too small, so to speak – but based on relational thinking in human geography and a particular kind of philosophical approach known as critical realism. In its more recent format, this is speculative realism, speculative in the sense that it offers a philosophical understanding of reality based on newer thinking.

So that is what theory is about. The question, then, is: when we theorise, what should we take note of? There are three key considerations.

First, I'm afraid to report that theories cannot be objective, particularly in the social sciences, because we are studying a social reality that is continuously changing and open-ended. The world we live in is not waiting for us to study it; as we speak, the world is changing, and we are part of that world. So, when we theorise about our own world, it is not possible to say that what we theorise today will necessarily be the same tomorrow.

If you think of the tree outside, even the tree grows. A rock, I suppose, remains the same today and tomorrow – depending on the geologic timescale you're considering. The moral of the story is that in the social or human side of geography, it is almost impossible to have what is called an objective theory.

To me, theories are also about why we theorise. We theorise in a way that aims to change the world. This is why we do critical geography: we want to change the world for the better. So the question is: when you theorise, you have to think about where the phenomenon

you are studying comes from. In other words, you must consider the geographical specificity of the theory. For what? What kind of theory? For what kind of social science or geography? On whose behalf are you theorising?

You theorise about something – some phenomena – which might be the result of other actors. In this sense, we are studying subject formation. So, theorising is political; it is not neutral, and it is not objective. Here, I draw on the famous feminist scholar Judith Butler (2015) and her book, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*. In a particular passage I reference, she makes the case that if you want to theorise in an ethical way – meaning you hold a certain normative position and care about what is right – you must think not just of the happenings here or in this room, but also of the happenings elsewhere. When you are theorising the present, the "here", you need to connect it to the happenings "elsewhere" that enable the event you are looking at "here" to happen. In the quotation I give you, the central idea is that only if you are able to understand that the "here" is already shaped by the "elsewhere" do you stand a chance of grasping the difficult and shifting global connections. These connections reveal the transport and constraint of what we might call ethics.

In other words, ethical theories require us to think not just of the "here", but also of the "elsewhere", drawing connections to understand the world in her particular way. However, this does not mean that if theories are normative, all theories are the same because they are subjective and not objective.

Of course, one might argue that a subjective theory is as good as any other. I disagree. I believe some theories are still better than others. Therefore, I am against what is called "epistemological relativism" – the idea that all theories are the same. I am firmly opposed to that view. Later on, you will see why in my third criterion.

The second criterion, which I think geographers will accept more readily than others, is that we need to theorise in ways that take into account the social-spatial context of the phenomenon we are studying. We know very well that place matters. We know very well that the same phenomenon may not occur in the same way in other parts of the world.

Hence, the context in which the phenomenon you are studying takes place is significant – both its historical and geographical context. This means we need to incorporate into our theorisation the idea that the same explanation or narrative may not be applicable elsewhere.

In that spirit, social-spatial contexts are crucial to theory construction in geography. Even if you take a causal approach to explaining geographical phenomena, it does not mean that the same explanation will apply universally or consistently across all contexts.

So, while causal, it need not be deterministic. Here, I take the position that theory is always partial. Our theories can never be complete or universally applicable. There is no way we can develop a "law of gravity" in geography that universally explains phenomena in the same way everywhere.

For example, if you jump from a tall tower overlooking this city, the law of gravity will tell us that you will die. But on the other hand, the theory we develop in human geography is unlikely to work everywhere in the same way. Even though theory is partial, it does not mean that we should stop attempting to develop generalizable ideas. It is still possible to create some generalisations, but not universally across the entire world. Therefore, theory can still explain phenomena beyond the local context.

There are colleagues who believe that because we cannot develop explanatory theories that transcend the local context, we should stick to mere description. While description is necessary in theorisation, it is not sufficient on its own to constitute theory. This is where my perspective differs from Trevor Barnes *et al.*'s (2024) critique (of my book).

The final point I wish to address, which highlights why some theories are better or more useful than others, is the criterion of practical adequacy. Our theories must be practically useful in real-world applications. This is particularly important if you are mo-

tivated by the desire to change the world – whether it be addressing climate change, poverty, inequality, or racial discrimination. If you feel a passion for these causes, that's commendable, but the critical question is: how do you enact change?

To make a difference, you first need to understand what is wrong with the world. If you aim to predict whether the same negative event will occur again, you could rely on very good Bayesian statistics, which can tell you the probability of a recurrence. However, if you want to ensure that the same bad thing does not happen again, you must be able to identify why it happened and how it happened. The "why" and "how" help you understand the causal mechanisms, allowing you to intervene effectively and prevent a repeat of the same negative event.

Thus, explanations for actual social-spatial phenomena are essential if you wish to make positive interventions in the world and improve it. In this sense, the critical realist Roy Bhaskar (2016) argues in his final book, *Enlightened Common Sense*, that there is only one world in which we live, but many varying descriptions of it. Theories and principles of critical realist philosophy should apply to everyday life. If they do not, something is seriously wrong.

This means that our theories and explanations must be tested in both everyday life and specialist research contexts. Our theories must be practical and useful in what we do in the real world. So, in that sense, this differentiates theories that are more useful for what we do every day from those that are less practical.

In Chapter 2, I then proceed by using these three criteria to examine each strand of literature: post-structuralist thinking/geographies, and some of the key theories such as actor-network theory, non-representational theory, and assemblage theory. Additionally, I explore more ideologically oriented or radical approaches, including feminist and postcolonial studies, feminist theory, and postcolonial theory. What does "theory" mean in all of these bodies of work? They are different, and it is necessary to tease them apart.

In the book, I summarise this material in my usual "Yeung-style". If you follow my writing, you know I like tables; I enjoy constructing tables to present concepts in a more concrete way. There are others who write extensively without using any visuals, but I find that approach boring. I prefer tables, and John Agnew, who was one of my book referees, agreed – they're good for teaching. In the table, I summarise the key philosophers, thinkers, and geographers, along with the key ideas, quotations, and the style of theory/theorising within each body of literature. We cover everything: postmodernism, post-structuralism, feminism, postcolonialism, as well as more recent literature from the past 20 years, including post-phenomenology and post-humanism, within the broader context of human geography, critical or otherwise.

This is the nature of the book. Empirical work is necessary; if we want to learn more, we need to do something. But we also need to have something to say about what we are studying that goes beyond surface-level description. For example, we might study why the iPhone is assembled by someone else and use this as a basis to develop a theory.

But if you want to theorise, how do you go about doing it? Are we merely writing in abstract terms? One geographer, Nigel Thrift (2021), in his more recent book *Killer Cities*, uses the term "phiction". He suggests that when your writing becomes too philosophical, it risks becoming phictional – a philosophical phiction. In my book, I used the term "philosophy envy". I think in human geography today, particularly in the English literature, there is perhaps too much grounding in philosophers' writing. I think what some geographers argue is that if our work borrowing from philosophers is that good, why are the philosophers not using our work? Which is also quite true. We use a lot of philosophers' work, but philosophers don't really care about what we write.

In this sense, I think we need to reflect a bit on theory development in geography. Is it just about embellishing with more metaphors? Embellishing more abstract concepts

and ideas that are perhaps really removed from what we study as geographers in terms of what might explain social-spatial phenomena? That's really what we do. If you ask, what does a geographer do? We study phenomena that are geographical in nature. So theory, perhaps from my point of view, can also provide some explanatory power. I mean, it would be nice to have a theory that provides some explanations.

In that sense, explanation requires certain things. If you want to explain something, you almost necessarily have to say why that something has happened. The "why" requires some kind of causal thinking, causation. Something has happened because of something. One day, you become a great physicist because of today's funny lecture here. You become a great Nobel-winning physicist because you hate geography after today. "Be cause". There is a cause that is related to this thing that you're talking about, the fact that you are a Nobel Prize physics winner.

For me, it's useful to think about the "why" issue because (cause), and then how that cause, that causal power works its way through – that's the whole question. If you like the mechanism, the causal mechanism elaborating the why and how social-spatial phenomena take place. And social-spatial phenomena, very broad, anything from gentrification, ghetto formation, poor people being removed from the city centre or the other way around, bank buildings right in the CBD being abandoned, why the Apple iPhone is made by somebody else. Explanatory theories are wanted, but we don't have that many in human geography. For some reason, we have not been very good at developing explanatory theory. That's my own argument.

Hence, in the book, I make the case that what kind of theory for what kind of human geography? Mid-range ones, I think. Because we have been very good in sort of really leveraging on what are called the grand theorists, from Karl Marx, etc. But I think in practical reality, we deal with phenomena that are not the whole world. Phenomena which may be peculiar to Cluj, or even certain parts of Cluj. So, you can actually develop theories which can be very locally and contextually specific.

In this sense, mid-range causal theories need not be only special to us but also in the physical sciences. So, in the book, I make the case that even in the natural sciences, there are people like computer scientist Judea Pearl (2009), writing about causality. Because in the natural sciences, if you know in physical geography, it's important to find out about the facts. When this happens, that happens. The question is, how do you know? This happened, the one that comes later, is the explanation of what comes before that. And for that, you need to figure out the causal mechanism.

To Judea Pearl and Dana Mackenzie (2018, 300), the search for mechanisms, as the quotation goes, is "critical to science as well as to everyday life, because different mechanisms call for different actions when circumstances change". We know the world will warm up by how many degrees, but if you don't figure out the causal mechanisms leading to global warming, then how you can make the right intervention to make sure that climate warming can at least be reduced or even stopped? If you don't know my driving contributes directly to global warming, then how do you stop?

However, in the social sciences, it's not so clear-cut. We cannot isolate the world like in a laboratory setting in natural sciences. We can't ask the world to stop. We can't even stop each other. So you have to study the world then, as the world is happening. Then how do you deal with that?

So when it comes to causality, understanding that the reality exists through objects in the more recent form of philosophical writing in speculative realism, for example, is about the idea of understanding the world as emergent causality. On the other hand, you can still think of how emergence has a certain causal pathway. Even Gilles Deleuze, in post-structuralist writing, used the term "line of flight" (Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 1987). There are pathways to how the world is becoming and in so doing you can theorise about that in order to provide explanation.

So, how do you build your explanation in human geography? We are quite attuned to this idea of relational thinking through Doreen Massey's (2005) *For Space*, which makes it very clear in terms of how we can think of relationality in spatial phenomena. In other words, any geographical event is not singular; it tends to be part of wider relations that are happening. But then, how do you make sure that that relationality is explanatory and has some causation?

So this is where the why and how relationality matters. In the book, I went through some detail explaining how we need to think of what's called "power". Doreen Massey (2005) calls this "power geometry" in her relational thinking. And for that, we need to figure out: it's not just about how everything is related to everything else, but it's about how does that relationality work. How does our relationality with each other work out as well?

And in sociology, there is a similar movement towards what's called "processual sociology" by Andrew Abbott (2016), who is a Chicago-based sociologist. Basically, my main idea of theorisation is that causal mechanisms are important if you set it within certain social-spatial context.

But to develop causal mechanisms as a form of theorisation, perhaps you need to trace the processes where certain causal pathways are turned into mechanisms that account for those happenings, and process tracing as a method. I'm sorry, it wasn't in the book. It was in the chapter on method, but my book is already excessively long – 140,000 words. I was given 80,000 words to write, but I ended up writing 140K, so I had to take out that chapter. That chapter has recently appeared in *Progress in Human Geography* (Yeung, H.W. 2024a). So this paper on method, in relation-explanatory geography, came out in September. You can just go and download it, in which I went into some detail about how theorisation of causal mechanisms can also be done through some kind of process tracing, which draws upon political science and sociological thinking. That's the method side. It's not in the book. So just to give you some qualification.

Finally, let me say a few words about why I am doing this thing. So those of you who read the book know that, well, he got nothing better to do after he got woken up from the afternoon nap, suddenly frustrated about the world. And it was the pandemic time, when he didn't know whether he could leave Singapore. Singapore is a city and a country. It's everything. You'll be stuck there for the rest of your life. So what might happen? So, at the end of the day, I was asking myself, but then, you know, we geographers are not very good at explaining this crazy world's happenings. Perhaps we need to think of theorisation.

In my own case, actually, the story went further than that. Far earlier, I have had a long-standing interest in theory. David Harvey (1969, 486), in the book *Explanation in Geography*, ended his book by saying, "By our theories, you shall know us". That "you" doesn't refer to geographers. "You" means the biologists, the law people, the medical guys, shall know us. In other words, we have to produce theories, not just take theories from others and apply them to our geographical analysis. So, fair enough. The question is, how have we been doing since 1969? We have some theories, but not that many. So I've thought it is important to take theory development as our goal as well. Because theory brings us together. It brings knowledge communities together.

Second, theory can also help us contribute to wider social science and other kinds of knowledge development, to explain and deal with increasingly complex world problems. I mean, the world is not getting simpler; it's getting much more complex. Today's world is far more complex than the day when Marx or Weber developed their theories in their time. The world then… at least they didn't have TikTok, no Instagram for them. So they didn't have to deal with the digital. They dealt with everything physical and material. So, we have a much more difficult world, for good or for bad, in which we live, and to do that, to theorise, we need a lot more effort across different disciplines.

Going back to yesterday's question about transdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity, we

can contribute to theory development. But as I said yesterday, I want us to lead in theory development, not towards the end. When sociologists develop the theory, we use that theory and then we say, "Yeah, geography matters". Yeah, but that's too late. They dominate at the top, and we only add a little bit to it.

So, my own experience, reflected quite a bit in Chapter 6: when I went to Manchester in October 1992 to do my PhD under Peter Dicken, I came from Hong Kong at that time, having graduated from the National University of Singapore. Hong Kong was still a British colony. So, me, as a colonial subject, going to Britain to study with the grandmaster. I asked Peter, "Why is it that we come from Asia, always have to use your theories and then apply them to Asia, and say it works or doesn't work, and then give me a PhD, thank you very much?" And he said, "Yeah, why should that be? I mean, develop your own theory. If not, I won't give you the PhD". So, here I am. That's what I do.

Peter didn't say… "I'm your colonial master, and you're only a colonial subject: of course, you listen to me; I'm the core, you are the periphery". So, in that chapter, I reflected on the idea that we, coming from the Global South, tend to be the data mine, providing the data to the theory mill in the Global North. Why should that relation be? In yesterday's question about the semi-periphery or other parts of the world – in geography, to be fair, it's not that we have not reflected on this. We have, in feminist thought and in post-colonial thought. Gillian Rose, we were just together in Oxford one month ago. Derek Gregory at UBC, Jenny Robinson at UCL, the two of them have been talking about this idea that knowledge is situated knowledge, remember, it's not universal, it's situated in geographical space, specific to the phenomenon. Here.

I give you one quotation. I will not read the whole thing from Derek Gregory's (1994) *Geographical Imagination*. And by the way, you notice all the big names in geography write books with beautiful art book covers. Except this guy. (Him, Henry Yeung.) This guy's book cover has only three symbols from *Squid Game*. And I was watching *Squid Game* (the Korean show) during the writing of his book, and hence the three symbols. You know, theory, explanation, and geography. Geography is a circle, Earth.

What Derek mentioned in his 1994 famous *Geographical Imagination* book is that European high theory – because even Western Marxism itself is geographically specific – has to be considered carefully. You want to bring Marxism into your work? Be careful. Because, according to Derek, for those theoretical ideas, they are invested with their origins, scored by their tracks... So their genealogies need to be interrogated. Their political intellectual baggage declared, and their closures prised opened. This means even Marx's theory. I think when Marx was theorising about the industrial revolution in England, he wasn't thinking of the poor women workers in southern China, was he? Well, China wasn't really industrialising at that time. He was thinking of the textile mills in Lancashire.

Marx's theory is actually geographically specific in his time. You want to bring Marxism into your work? Sure, you can. But be careful, as Derek reminded us 30 years ago. Others, like postcolonial scholar Gayatri C. Spivak (1988), also argue that those of you from the Global South can speak back. In her very famous 1988 chapter, originally published in a collection of Marxist writings, Spivak asks the question: *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Most people read that term *subaltern* to mean the lower class in the Indian context cannot speak. However, what she meant is that the subalterns can speak.

As she owned up in her later book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Spivak, G.C. 1999), this book revisits the chapter 10 years later. She said that she was unnerved by the failure of communication. In the first version of this text, she wrote it with the accents of passionate lament – *they meant we were very passionate about it*. The subalterns cannot speak. It was an inadvisable remark. She meant the subaltern can speak. She should have been more explicit about it, but when she wrote the 1988 chapter, she never knew the chapter would become so

famous. Sometimes, you don't know. Like a songwriter – you write a song, you never know that song will become so popular.

Edward Said, another extremely well-known postcolonial scholar, also wrote about this in an afterword to his super-famous book *Orientalism*, first published in 1978. In the 1995 afterword (Said, E.W. 2003, 335), he also wrote that the subalterns can speak. As the quotation marks start here: "If you feel you have been denied the chance to speak your piece, you will try extremely hard to get that chance. For indeed, the subaltern can speak". So, whether you are from the semi-periphery or the periphery, we can build theories and theorise back to change what's called the relations of dominance.

For example, Anglo-American thought in geography, like I've been consistently arguing for theorising back for the past 25 years. I was appointed one of the co-editors of *Environment and Planning A* in 2001. I had to write an editorial and I called it "Redressing the geographical bias in social science knowledge" (Yeung, H.W. 2001). Twenty-four years ago, I said, although these two facets of inequality, the bias in social science knowledge, might perhaps have been fine during the good old days of empires and dynasties when the Foucauldian notion of power equals knowledge prevailed, I believe its perpetuation poses a serious obstacle to the development of a truly progressive social science in a post-colonial, globalising era. At the time, postcolonial geography wasn't yet that big. I have had that frustration of why it is that theories of the North will always dictate the empirical work in the Global South. So, I come from that perspective. In Chapter 6 of the book, I reflected on my own experience in the development of the so-called "global production networks theory". I went into some detail to elaborate on how that theory was developed, originally in Manchester, but more formally in Singapore. We developed a particular key concept known as *strategic coupling*. This concept came out of geography. No matter how you Google it, it's done by us. It's not something we borrowed from somebody.

That particular idea of *strategic coupling* even became the title of my 2016 book with Cornell University Press (Yeung, H.W. 2016), to change the view in particular bodies of literature, known as international political economy and development studies, which used to talk about how East Asian development was a matter of state interventions. So, going back to some of yesterday's discussion, we talked about South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and today's China, all of which were seen as matters of the state doing this, the state doing that. In my book, published by a prestigious university press, Cornell Studies in Political Economy, I made the case that that literature has its own blind spot. I used the idea of *strategic coupling* and GPN theory to theorise back to that body of work, to showcase that it's not entirely true – that domestic actors can couple with international players and bypass state interventions.

If you're interested, you can look at my recent *Asian Geographers* lecture delivered at the Hawaii AAG in March 2024, which has just come out in the journal in March 2025 and documented in greater detail my own experience in decentreing Anglo-American geography (Yeung, H.W. 2025). So, that's my experience.

Thank you all – to geographers of all shades and kinds. I want to leave you with the last line of my book on page 266. David Harvey said in his 1969 book, "by our theories, you shall know us", as a slogan he wished geographers would pin up on their study walls. Let's make it digital. Please put this on your phone screens and change your home screen to read: "By our explanatory mid-range theories, you shall know and learn from us". I want them to learn from the others.

Theory and theorising from a History and Philosophy of Geography approach

by Paloma Puente Lozano

From the particular perspective of my interest and expertise in the History and Philosophy of Geography (HPG), I take Henry's

book to be the most comprehensive and thorough examination of contemporary post-positivist Anglo-American Human Geography (HG) to the day. And, more significantly, one of the few ones having drawn specific attention to the central role that theory and theorisation have played over the last decades, across the very different trends that we encounter nowadays within critical HG.

This is an important point that Henry's book has made very clear: that theory has proved to be a core and integral element to critical geography, something that otherwise has gone overlooked so far. Put it otherwise: insights about theory in HG have tended to be prescriptive in nature, going along the lines of something like: 'We should develop a theory of this and a theory of that'. Yet the very assumption about the fundamental need of theory in Geography has gone almost unchallenged over the last decades and has not been scrutinised. That is to say that the assumption of the need for theory in HG has not become the object of proper interrogation, even though different bodies of theory have loomed large in HG in a way that their political or ontological operationalisation has turned key to the numerous turns and twists that have swept the discipline.

In that sense, Henry's book is groundbreaking because he mobilises an impressive array of resources (across analytical, conceptual, empirical and normative dimensions) to articulate the sharp and much-needed question of "what does theory fundamentally do to Geography?", and how is that we have come to believe that there is such a fundamental need for theory in an otherwise allegedly empirical discipline. To tackle this question, and to make his case for mid-range, explanatory theory-making in HG, Henry's book offers an analysis of the two major forms through which theory has been established as 'fundamental' to geographical inquiry, namely within self-proclaimed critical approaches.

On the one hand, the book shows how theorisation has been deemed fundamental on normative-ideological grounds, i.e., different bodies of theories have been claimed to have political and ideological potential that should shape and utterly mould the epistemic structure of geographical inquiry so that political change and social betterment can happen.

On the other hand, the book proves how theorisation has been established on ontological grounds, most typically by resorting to anti-fundamentalist stances as variously developed in continental philosophy, which has ultimately predisposed to what Henry calls 'open-ended' approaches to theory-making.

In both cases and yet for different reasons, critical human geography seems doomed to rather unproductive dead-ends essentially linked to the integral role that theory-making has acquired as to having fundamentally shaped HG's epistemic structures. At this point, while I fully agree with Henry's analysis, I consider that further elaboration on said epistemic issues might help to fully draw the consequences of his diagnosis about where things stand in contemporary HG and why it is worth raising the issue of theory-making. Consequently, I would go on to claim that post-positivist critical geography is trapped in a double-bind of sorts. On the one hand, the normative-ideological foundation of geographic theorising has re-built critical geography upon forms of political epistemology which, over the years, have proved to be rather reductionist, uncritical and dogmatic (Blomley, N. 2006, 2007, 2008; Korf, B. 2022).

On the other hand, ontological styles of theory-making are ultimately grounded on what I will call 'self-diminishing epistemologies' that orient geographical theorisation to speculative styles and to forms of criticism consisting of endless rounds of deconstruction. These are practices that cannot ultimately account about their own internal and external limitations without engaging in further rounds of self-deconstruction and self-undermining criticism.

Paradoxically, what we see at play in both cases is that the more flawed (either rigid or unstable) Geography's epistemic structures become, the more theory-making grows and becomes "inflationary", taking up more and more room in geographic praxis. In other

words, there has been a certain overstretching or oversizing of theory-making, either due to the perception of the fundamental "emancipatory" potential that theory assumes under such frameworks (i.e., things need to be "theorised" otherwise because this is key to bring about material transformation); or because of the drive to incorporating more and more "newer" objects, domains or/ and dimensions of the world to geographical inquiry, whether it is the "pre-individual", "elemental", "inorganic", "unsayable", "spectral", "intangible", or "infra-sensible" (the list goes on and on when it comes to post-structuralist geographies). Again, in both cases, Geography (as a field or geographical inquiry as a distinctive 'scientific praxis') seems to fade away as its 'proper objects of study' become blurred, and Geography ultimately disappears, absorbed in and by broader projects of critical theorisation (Geography is transformed into just another form of criticism).

My claim is that this double bind is caused by the sweeping adoption of different forms (and levels) of constructivism in Geography, with almost no alternative to it (except for maybe critical realism, which is integral to Henry's project, but has not been very welcomed in HG: Cox, K.R. 2013). Why this is so, why we are stuck there and why this is central to what is going on today (the lack of explanatory potential in geography theory, amongst other things) is something that is missing in the book. As I read Henry's book, while he makes a very good diagnosis of where we stand today (as critical human geographers), he does not go far or deep enough to explore why this is so and how this is fundamentally connected to previous epistemic trajectories and patterns in HG. One very obvious and sensible reason for this is that he is mostly concerned with making the case for explanatory forms of theory and to probe how that is possible (at least for economic geography).

However, I think there is another reason why he is not taking a more fundamental philosophical approach tackling said epistemic issues head-on. I think this lack of further engagement or elaboration on core epistemic issues stems from what I take to be two important mischaracterisations in the book. So, to discuss Henry's book, I want to take issue with two ideas in the book.

1. The first one is what Henry call 'philosophy envy'. He considers that if we have come to assume that a certain understanding of theory should be integral to geographic inquiry is because of a drive to mimic what has been happening all over in the Human and Social Sciences (i.e., 'theoretical turns' all over).

My point here is that even though I cannot say that this is wrong or false entirely, I consider it inaccurate at best, and unhelpful to bring about a better and deeper understanding of the long-term epistemological patterns of and in Geography. This utter dependency on 'external sources' (Philosophy, as a case in point) is neither new nor specific to contemporary post-positivist geography (it can be traced back to the very origins of Geography and much could be said along similar lines when it comes to the fundamental parallelism between how positivist and post-positivist forms of Geography got stablished).

Therefore, what we are dealing with here is a more fundamental problem about the epistemological constitution of Geography in the long-run and its place in the broader system of science as a whole. This is something that calls for more reflection (not less) and for the need of more (not less) philosophically minded geographers that can cope with, and soundly elaborate on, such long-lasting epistemic problems. We simply cannot get away with them. They are here to remain because they are to do either with fundamental features of geographical issues/objects or with the very nature of Geography as 'science' and the very place it occupies within the broader system of sciences (and, thus, as fundamentally linked to their structural conditions and the transformations that regularly happen in such system). So, no: it is not only philosophy envy, it is something broader and deeper that we need to come to terms with. This leads me to my second point.

2. Henry's mischaracterisation of the non-existing subfield of 'theory of geography'. Certainly, Henry is right when he says that nothing comparable to what we encounter in other Social Sciences (such as "Social Theory", "Economic Theory" or "Political Theory") does exist in Geography or exist to the extent that that can be considered full-fledged and well-established institutional realm.

He claims that this is not the case (which is true: we have a couple of theory-focused important journals; working research groups on HPG, but nothing ultimately comparable to what goes on in other fields). Yet most importantly to my point, he claims that is good that we do not have such a thing as 'Theory of Geography'. However, I fundamentally disagree about what we can expect of something such as an institutionalised subfield of 'Theory of Geography', or a more prominent and active area of HPG.

I guess Henry is expecting that should this be the case, this would but bring about more (flawed) theory of the type that we already encounter all over HG. I am afraid that he is expecting so on good grounds. Nevertheless, and on the contrary, what I would expect of a more institutionalised Philosophy of Geography ("Philosophy", here of course meaning something different and broader from 'theory') is that this would help to bring more history and more philosophically sound elaboration into the reflection about Geography's fundamentals features, objects and difficulties. I do agree with Henry that theory per se (for the shake of theory, to catch up with what is going on in Critical Theory or anywhere else) is a meaningless project, and that we need to bear in mind that Geography is what we are dealing with, and that theory should be subordinated to Geography and not the other way around (which is what has happened in many quarters so far: we have put geographic objects at the service of Theory/Criticism, because it matched ongoing interest in critical theory about space after the collapse of Historicism and Philosophy of History).

However, I consider that this task of "re-centreing Geographic theory" should be understood an integral part of what is to be done in the sub-field HPG. In that sense, we need philosophy (not theory), and maybe better philosophy, provided that such philosophical elaboration on what are otherwise fundamental and structural problems of our field can bring about deep analyses on said (and other) issues. All in all, a more substantive and purposeful philosophical reflection is required – a philosophy of geography that goes beyond the programmatic and prescriptive uses of theory and the hectic styles of mutually contested camps and entrenched theoretical silos which the endless turns and twists (essentially ahistorical) in the field have brought about.

I think that bringing back explanatory styles of theory making is a good starting point and we should be grateful to Henry for having open up this door.

Changing referencing patterns and what they tell us about changing geographies

by Ferenc Gyuris

In my contribution, I will compare Henry's book with another seminal work its title consciously evokes: David Harvey's "*Explanation in Geography*" from 1969 (Harvey, D. 1969). More specifically, I decided to compare the two books by investigating the works and authors they referenced (cf. Gyuris, F. 2025). I hoped such a comparison would tell us much about the changing patterns and geographies of referencing in Geography (mainly Human Geography) between 1969 and 2023. That's because I think a highly important feature of theories in Geography or any discipline is how they shape our practice of doing geographical research to better understand and explain the world from a geographical perspective. While doing the analysis, I regarded both volumes less as the imprints of their authors' individual styles and preferences of reading, using, and referencing literature, even if such individual characteristics certainly apply and may also be the object of research in geographies of knowledge and science. Instead, I considered

the two books highly influential pieces of their own time, which represent and illustrate the structural features and general international conventions of doing geographical research either in the spatial science approach in the 1960s or the more pluralistic and open-ended realities of geography in the early 2020s. Hence, my main interest was the *structural*, not the *individual*.

If you check first how the number of referenced works and authors relate to the length of both volumes, the differences will be remarkable. If you compare David Harvey's 532-page volume with Henry's 336-page book, you will find that the average number of referenced works per page increased from 0.95 to 2.50. Likewise, the number of referenced authors increased from 0.78 to 2.02. It is tempting to argue that such a significant shift may indicate general structural changes instead of individual scholarly habits. The reasons for the shift can be manifold, however. First, do the numbers reflect *shifting concepts of validation* in international geography? So, more references are expected nowadays by the readers and the academic community to accept our statements? Or, and that is the second explanation, do the numbers show *shifting emphases while doing research?* In other words, do we devote, in relative terms, more space to literature analysis and less to our own contribution? Is that a sign of a deep structural change in academic work that we feel important to much more closely reflect upon ongoing scholarly discourses and locate our findings *relative to these discourses* than just presenting results about a topic we are personally interested in? And I think that's the point where I really must refer to Henry's comment on the *"philosophy envy"* in Geography (Yeung, H.W. 2024b) or *"phiction"* as Nigel Thrift (2021) put it. Alternatively, as a third explanation, do the numbers reflect *shifting habits of reading and using literature?* I mean, do we tend to refer to a larger number of publications but take less information from each, as an understandable strategy in our contemporary scholarly world pushing all of us towards *fast reading, fast publishing* and *fast referencing?* I think these questions will be important for future research. They could probably also add "practice" to the title of a future seminal book: "Theory, Practice and Explanation in Geography".

In the next step, we may take a closer look at the authors referenced in both books. In David Harvey's 1969 title, each referenced publication had 1.16 authors on average. In Henry's 2023 title, the same value was 1.47. That indicates an increase in the share of multi-authored publications, which is a general trend in contemporary academia. However, the numbers show that single-authored publications are still crucial in Human Geography. That is not just the proof of our discipline's peculiarity relative to many other disciplines, especially in natural sciences. It is also powerful feedback that despite the changing disciplinary expectations in global academia, writing single-authored publications, including monographs, remains a valuable activity that can shape agendas in Human Geography.

In another step, we can differentiate between authors with only one or two referenced publications on the one hand, and authors with three or more referenced publications on the other hand. Remarkably, the share of the second group increased from 8.7 percent in 1969 to 16.9 percent in 2023. The shift is even more striking if we check the share of these authors' publications among the total number of references. Then, the share will increase from an already remarkable 33.5 percent in 1969 to an incredible 66.4 percent in 2023. These numbers show that references and, probably, academic literature in Human Geography are increasingly dominated by a few highly prolific and influential scholars whom we may call "rockstar geographers". That is in line with several other studies' findings on the functioning of neoliberal academia and the uneven landscapes of academic attention. I'm talking about structural questions, not about individual preferences. We all have our contexts, geographical, institutional, financial, and we must survive. Or, at least, we want to survive. If we don't, we are not here now.

In Harvey's 1969 book, Brian Berry took the lead with 17 references, followed by Michael Dacey (15 references) and, after a remarkable gap, Richard Chorley (8 references). In Henry's book, the works of Henry himself and Jamie Peck are on top with 30, eventually 21 references, and several authors have more than 10 references, namely Andrew Sayer, David Harvey, Nigel Thrift, Ben Anderson, Peter Dicken, Doreen Massey and Bruno Latour.

Another remarkable feature of references is that the most referenced authors, with 3 or more references each, which included 37 authors in Harvey's book, included no women at all, indicating that geography in the late 1960s still was a predominantly "male business". Henry's book's according value increased from 0.0 to 24.3 percent, and 20.8 percent of all references went to publications from female authors and co-authors. That is a significant increase. Nevertheless, gender ratios still move within the range of 3 to 1 to 4 to 1, which still indicates a high degree of gender inequality in the functioning of global academia in our discipline.

What I would also like to emphasise here is that Harvey referred to quite a significant number of works from physical geographers. That's remarkable how the share of physical geographers has declined in our discourse about theory, explanation, whatever in Geography, which is increasingly becoming interpreted as Human Geography somehow, which is again of course related, in my view, to ongoing remarkable processes and dynamics in global academia.

Finally, as a geographer, I aim to analyse what we may call the "geographies of referencing", or, the geographical background of referenced authors. That is still research in progress, where I managed to investigate the institutional affiliation of all referenced authors in Henry's book by countries and, for Harvey's 1969 volume, the place of birth of authors with 3 or more references. Although comparing these numbers means comparing apples to oranges, due to which we should be very careful while interpreting the results, I think they can reveal some actual, even if rough, patterns. Central and South America, Africa, and Asia (except for Turkey) were absent in 1969, whereas they all appeared in 2023 with some countries at least. That is a significant change we must emphasise as a positive sign of the decolonising and internationalising of Geography. It should not be ignored, though, that the numbers still reflect a firm Anglo-American, especially British dominance in international Human Geography. The share of the UK is still 37.0 percent, followed by the US 23.6 percent. We can also see that the share of US works decreased much more significantly between 1969 and 2023 than the share of UK publications. However, we should remember that David Harvey, although born in Britain, already worked in the US while writing his seminal book in 1969. In contrast, Henry's academic trajectory has been much more linked to the UK and Singapore as two Commonwealth member states.

It is also remarkable that the former Eastern Bloc remains highly invisible in both books – a shortcoming we and many scholars in the post-communist region must work on, and we should carefully think about "What can we do?". I believe the analysis also emphasises the importance of thinking about the world not as a two-tier system simply made up by the Global North and the Global South, which the countries of many of us will not fit well. Instead, I support thinking about the world as a three-tier system, including the core, periphery, and the semi-periphery, which is quite an exciting category itself. Anyhow, I am here to make comments from a country from the former Eastern Bloc, and I agree with Henry's point that it *is* possible to speak. It is also possible to speak back if you want.

Proximity, scale, and causation

by Andreea Ţoiu

My research problematizes the concept of proximity, addressing it as a scalar, dynamic concept that contributes to the constitution of

spatial hierarchies and global socio-economic relations. In this regard, Chapter 4 of Henry Yeung's book has provided me with a profound understanding of relationality and the causal powers operating within what he calls *"relational geometries"*. These geometries are not simple configurations of social relations. Instead, they are dynamic processes through which power and identity become effective, influencing how knowledge and resource flows traverse space.

One of the key merits of Henry Yeung's book is his epistemological commitment to understanding geography as an explanatory, not merely descriptive, science. And it allows me to articulate how proximity functions not just as a physical attribute but as a process that compresses and expands space. Proximity, in this way, builds bridges that transform places into strategic nodes within global networks.

Yeung' s idea of framing relationality in terms of causal powers clearly and convincingly explains why and how proximity generates unequal socio-spatial outcomes. And I noticed this paradox of interconnected injustice, how unequal and unfair the geographical realities are, but still in a constant connection. As Doreen Massey (1994, 146) says that *"no matter how unique a place may be, it is a meeting point, an intersection of global flows and networks of social relations"*.

Another central aspect of Henry Yeung's work is the clear and well-argued distinction he makes between mechanisms and processes, discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 5. While many contemporary approaches tend to conflate these concepts, Yeung demonstrates that mechanisms are necessary causal relationships that generate concrete outcomes in specific contexts. This clarification is essential for me. It provides the tools I need to analyse proximity not just as a descriptive given but as a specific causal mechanism, integrated into spatial scalarity and the dynamics of global knowledge flows. Through this epistemological clarity, I now have a solid methodological foundation for explaining the hierarchies and inter-scalar processes embedded within global networks of production and innovation.

The book also emphasises the importance of explanatory theory as an alternative to descriptive accounts and predictive models. Through his GPN 2.0 (Global Production Network) theory, Yeung demonstrates how the mechanisms of organisational networks can explain unequal socio-spatial outcomes across various regions of the world. This theory provides a valuable analytical framework for understanding how knowledge and resource flows shape socio-economic spaces in diverse yet interconnected ways.

In my research, this approach helps me explore how proximity is shaped by the interaction between global and local actors, integrating heterogeneous power relations and contextual mechanisms into the analysis of geographical scalarity.

For me, *"Theory and Explanation in Geography"* is more than just a theoretical work. It is, in fact, an essential guide for building research that truly matters. By clarifying the relationships between proximity, scalarity, and causal mechanisms, this book helps me articulate and explain the complex processes I investigate.

Henry Yeung succeeds in offering a vision of geography that not only describes reality but also explains and transforms it. This is the inspiration that drives me forward in my academic journey, motivating me to contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of global socio-spatial dynamics. Thank you!

Takeaways from a Central and Eastern European perspective

by József Benedek

This book presentation and conversation can be considered a historical moment at least for two reasons: (i) the Faculty of Geography (Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania), celebrates this year 30 years of existence since the Geography Department has separated from the Biology-Geography-Geology Faculty in 1994, creating the most

comprehensive Romanian higher education institution in the field of Geography; and (ii) the Faculty of Geography in Cluj through its Research Centre for Sustainable Development organises for the first time to my knowledge a book presentation for an internationally top ranked geographer as it is Professor Henry Yeung. It speaks not again of our institution's internationalisation level, which is fair enough, but rather of the lower sensitivity and reception, until this very moment, for this special type of professional debate represented by book presentations.

The importance of this moment is even more enhanced by the fact that *Theory and Explanation in Geography* is the only recently authored academic book on theory and method in geography. This kind of Theoretical Geography was also my favourite in 1989 when I started to study geography, and although I passed the first-year exam on Theoretical Geography with the best mark, I fully understood the content only four years later, at the end of my study time. And somehow, after many decades, I came back again to this discipline for seven years in the position to teach Theoretical Geography, or "General Geography", as it is called officially for undergraduate students, a discipline not among the student's favourite ones. I mention all these details only with regard to the audience of this book presentation and to underline the difficulties of generating a coherent discourse on this topic with clear and understandable arguments for all levels of the geographical community.

However, reading this excellent and ground-breaking research monograph implies solid foundations in social theory and epistemology as well. So I am very thankful to have this opportunity to lecture carefully on the book and, in doing so, to re-read parts of some older texts, from which my favourites are Derek Gregory's *Geographical Imaginations* (1994), and Benno Werlen's *Gesellschaft, Handlung und Raum* (1987), less known for the English-speaking world although translated later into English (*Society, Action and Space*, Werlen, B. 1993).

In my view, the reading of this opus magnum authored by Henry Yeung offers the readers the following crucial takeaways:

1. A rigorous and critical interrogation of key theories and perspectives of critical human geography like actor-network theory, postcolonial theory, non-representational theory and so on, pointing at their limits in theory and practice. It is not an easy reading, but well documented, offering an excellent overview of the fragmented and complex critical human geography literature. This overview is especially welcome for the readers of Human Geography in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), where historical materialism was largely discredited by the experiences during the communist regimes before 1989, depriving the geographical community of one of the major sources of theory-building in the afterward of the regime changes following the collapse of communism in 1989.

2. Solid arguments for explanatory mid-range theory in geography. This argumentation comes timely, as Geography established itself as a theory-importing science, ending or finishing grand theories developed in economics, sociology or natural sciences with their socio-spatial contextualisation (institutional theory, evolutionary theory). I can still remember important texts calling to generate theories or even laws in geography, like the first law of geography by Waldo Tobler, postulating that near things are more related (Tobler, W.R. 1970) having resonated strongly in geography (Miller, H.J. 2004). However, as a discipline, we failed to generate a second or third law. Or was it the failure of Waldo Tobler?

I should point here also on the reverse side of theorising in geography. It is the case of developing theories with no empirical validation. I remember my times as PhD student at the Institute of Regional Geography in Leipzig in 1996 when I assisted at a presentation of Benno Werlen, arguing for a new theory on geographical space and regions, who failed later to produce solid empirical foundations for his magnificent and captivating three-volume work *Social Geography of Everyday Regionalisations* (Werlen, B. 1995, 1997, 2007).

When I was a sociology student, I sympathised a lot with Robert K. Merton's more limited mid-range or middle-range theories (Merton, R.K. 1968). At that time, I thought and still think they were very geographical in some sense. These middle-range theories are much closer than grand theories to the observed behaviour in a particular socio-spatial setting, so they are more appropriate to explain geographical processes.

3. Advocacy for a theory that should be explanatory and for geographical explanation that should be grounded in theory. The ultimate goal of the author is *"to stimulate more and better theorising and explanatory work in our discipline and for the wider social sciences"* (p. 3), since *"Theory is what defines an academic discipline"* (p. 2). It is a call that comes timely to our socio-spatial context in CEE, where strong voluntary empiricism and technological overenthusiasm generated by the general advancement in spatial technologies like GIS or remote sensing have caused a neglect of theories, a division by theory and method. It is the grand merit of Henry Yeung's book to bring back at the core of geographical thought the topic of how to build theories, recalling and echoing also on the – at that time positivist – David Harvey's grand statement from 1969 that *"By our theories you shall know us"* (Ch.1, p.1). And indeed, paradoxically, Harvey was right: we are known as weak theory developers and good theory-importers and theory-adopters and integrators, or even more as solid interpreters of geographical phenomena or vocal deconstructors of all sorts of representations.

4. Arguing for a mechanism-based thinking informed by critical realist and relational thought, enabling Geography an explanatory mission, not no neglect taking into account the new forms of geopolitical, public health, disruptive technologies driven risks, the new geopolitically driven economic policies, the environmental and sustainability issues, the 'double exposure' (complex connections and interactions between global climate change and globalisation of economic activities) emerged during and following the Covid-19 pandemics. This is an argument for a new theory and explanation to better account for some major transformative changes (cf. Benedek, J. and Ţoiu, A. 2025). I would I would label and rephrase this idea of Henry as a kind of engagement for a new mission-oriented Geography.

Beyond these important contributions, I also have my doubts and questions related to some core concepts like the mechanism-based explanation, which considers the socio-spatial context for theory building. I think a more dense explanation of concepts that are at the core of the Geography like "socio-spatial context", "space", "place", "region" or "mechanism" would be beneficial for us all. Against this background, a significant takeaway is to always keep in mind some the following questions: (i) How can we define the *"socio-spatial context"*? (ii) Does the socio-spatial context include the economic context as well? (iii) If yes, can we reformulate it as a socio-economic and spatial context? (iv) What is our understanding of the spatial context? (v) What exactly is our understanding of the relation between socio-spatial context and mechanism?

Discussion and conclusions by Henry Wai-chung Yeung

To Paloma Puente Lozano

Paloma mentioned two major issues in my observations: the concept of philosophy envy or the idea that we have gone too philosophical. Her argument is that perhaps we need to reflect more on theory, and, as a result, we may need more philosophical reflection rather than less.

When I make the case for philosophy envy, the way I frame it is not to suggest that we should refrain from engaging in philosophical reflections. Even in my own writing and critique, I draw extensively on different kinds of philosophy, as well as the philosophy of social science and science, in order to develop our understanding of what theory means and what concepts mean. I used the term

"philosophy envy" to remind us that, for example, relying on continental philosophers' work does not necessarily replace the task of conducting actual geographical analysis. This is ultimately what we should focus on. Philosophers cannot perform geographical analysis for us, just as we cannot perform their philosophical work for them.

In the book, I argue explicitly that philosophers clarify certain misconceptions about the world, which is ontology, while we deal with the actual realities they philosophise about. In this sense, I think there is a division of labour. We should remain a kind of empirically grounded social science, or engage with physical geography or natural sciences. On the other hand, I will not shy away from engaging with philosophers. However, we must keep in mind that this engagement alone does not grant us the ability to overcome our own limitations. That would be my first response.

Second, and this is an interesting point. I mentioned that in Human Geography or Geography, we do not really have a field called geographical theory. We do not have journals titled *Geographical Theory.* In Political Science, there is *Political Theory.* In Economics, there are *Economic Theory* and *Journal of Economic Theory,* two top journals in that field. In Sociology, there are journals with similar titles, such as *Sociological Theory.* However, in Geography, we do not have a journal called *Geographical Theory.* It simply does not exist.

I also mentioned in the book that this is actually a good thing because I cannot imagine what we would call "theory heads", people who only do theory. Very few such individuals exist in our field, and I do not encourage us to pursue that direction. Although, in other disciplines, there are people who focus exclusively on theory. That would be my understanding and preference. However, I think Paloma's point is that we do need to think about the theory of Geography. In other words, I somewhat support your view that we must still engage with those who develop theory within Geography. However, I do not believe we need an entire field dedicated to it.

I think you are probably arguing from the perspective of the philosophy and development of geographical thinking and thought. From that point of view, I agree that we must continuously reflect on our theoretical practices in Geography. However, I believe we share some common ground in that we should not have individuals who only do theory for theory's sake.

That is essentially my position. I think there is more agreement between us on the second point and, perhaps, even on the first.

To Ferenc Gyuris

My reflection on Ferenc's four key observations is as follows. First, at the time when Harvey wrote his book, the difference between the two books is obvious. Harvey's book was written to champion, essentially, a positivist vision for Human Geography. Of course, in the context of the quantitative revolution in Geography, his main adversary at the time was descriptive regional geography. This was the era of Richard Hartshorne and *The Nature of Geography (Hartshorne, R. 1939).* There's also the British response to that issue. Harvey had a singular vision, and much of his book is focused on different techniques and approaches to conducting positivist explanatory analysis.

My book, however, is different in the sense that I examine the epistemological faults in our community. Additionally, there are far more practicing geographers today than there were in the 1960s. By definition, Harvey had fewer people to cite, even if he wanted to, whereas I have far more sources available.

Second, I have no idea about the sociological aspects surrounding the production of Harvey's book. It is possible that, in his time, books did not require reviewers. Who knows? Back then, you might just get a book contract, write, and publish. In my case, I have to consider my reviewers carefully. As someone who is, in many ways, an outsider – an "essential outsider" to British

Geography – this adds complexity. Although I was trained in Britain, I have spent three decades of my career outside the UK. So, I am an outsider with some connections, and I must keep in mind the people I write about and refer to in my work.

This, fundamentally, explains the vast differences in citation patterns. I was very mindful of issues related to gender, ethnicity, and geographical representation. It is true that there were very few references to authors based in Central and Eastern Europe. I cannot be certain about the backgrounds of some authors in the English-speaking world who might be from Central or Eastern Europe, but I did not explicitly think about that aspect. This might account for the observed differences.

In terms of authorship and the concept of "rock star" authors, my list of the most cited key authors appears to be quite balanced between Harvey's time and my own. Regarding citations to myself, most appear in Chapter 6, which is focused on theoretical reflections about GPN Theory. If you remove Chapter 6, I would probably have only one or two self-citations. Jamie Peck has more citations, but then you have the other major figures. For Harvey, Physical Geography was central because he was trying to bring Human Geography closer to Physical Geography. In my case, it's the opposite.

One of the referees suggested calling the book *Theory and Explanation in Human Geography*. However, I avoided emphasising the term "human" because I wanted the book to remain relevant even for GIS and Physical Geographers who adopt a critical view of explanatory approaches, including those within Physical Geography. That would be my response to your comments.

To Andreea Ţoiu

I believe that, in terms of Innovation Studies, it is really useful to recognise that innovation, by definition, cannot be achieved by a singular individual, firm, or entity.

Drawing on the point that some of the relational thinking in the book may help you further develop your work and contribute to Innovation Studies, I think that is a great outcome to anticipate. I didn't really have Economic Geography spill-over in mind when I wrote those parts, as the book was not specifically written for Economic Geography. However, I am glad that you have taken a very insightful Economic Geography perspective on the book.

To József Benedek

József's two questions essentially revolve around the difference between context and mechanism and, secondly, what this says about Geography as a so-called spatial science.

First, when we say "context matters", does that imply Geography doesn't matter? The idea that Geography matters is not a blind statement. For example, Doreen Massey had an edited book titled *Geography Matters!* (Massey, D. and Allen, J. 1984). However, when we tell other social scientists or anyone outside our field that Geography matters, it is not enough. It is important to go beyond the phrase "Geography matters" and explain how it works.

To me, Geography matters because place and space do more than provide context – they can actively alter economic, political, and sociological processes. Economists study economic processes, political scientists study political processes, and sociologists study sociological processes. However, when these processes pass through space and locate themselves in specific places, their characteristics and causal powers can change. This is where the argument that "Geography Matters" shapes the abstract, generic processual thinking of the broader social sciences.

For example, consider the metaphor of wind blowing through mountain ranges, such as those in Transylvania. The same wind behaves differently as it passes through the mountains – its characteristics change. While this is a physical metaphor, and we are discussing social processes, the principle is analogous. Similarly, sociological pro-

cesses passing through space and different locations can undergo changes. This is my conception of how Geography matters.

So, where does context fit in? Context could refer to the specific location where a sociological or political process changes. In that place and in that way, things are different. Historical context, on the other hand, refers to a particular time frame. The same process may manifest differently depending on the combination of various factors present at that specific time, which we might call conjunctural.

This brings me to the distinction between social-spatial context and causal mechanisms. Causal mechanisms involve elaborating on why and how things happen, often without considering space. However, space is more than just a context – it can also be causal. This distinction requires more detailed elaboration to convince you fully of the difference between context and mechanism.

Secondly, geographical space is not just context – it can also be causal. However, this is not always the case. That would be my response.

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