



HAL
open science

**Book review: By northern lights: on the making of
geography in Sweden. By Anne Buttimer and Tom
Mels. Basingstoke: Ashgate. 2006. 214pp. £xx cloth.
ISBN: 0 7546 4814 1 cloth**

Avril Maddrell

► **To cite this version:**

Avril Maddrell. Book review: By northern lights: on the making of geography in Sweden. By Anne Buttimer and Tom Mels. Basingstoke: Ashgate. 2006. 214pp. £xx cloth. ISBN: 0 7546 4814 1 cloth. cultural geographies, 2008, 15 (2), pp.283-284. 10.1177/14744740080150020804 . hal-00572026

HAL Id: hal-00572026

<https://hal.science/hal-00572026>

Submitted on 1 Mar 2011

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Fatherland representation shifted over the 19th century, with the image of the *tsar-batiashka* or tsar-father becoming less important while the image of the sturdy and diligent peasant remained ever stable. The discussion of how *lubok* illustrations survived the revolution of 1917 to prosper as an effective means of political propaganda and popular mobilization in the USSR is particularly fascinating. As part of this, we gain a glimpse into the little-known aspects of the *oeuvre* of cultural giants such as Vladimir Mayakovsky and Kazimir Malevich, namely their careers as humble *lubok* illustrators. Overall, the book provides fascinating insight into how national identity was represented and perceived on the lowest levels of society, among a population that was for the most part illiterate. At the same time, however, the imagery it discusses is striking for the absence of a concern with landscape as a defining parameter for national identification. As Chris Ely's recent *This meager nature* demonstrates, landscape was a vital element in the elaboration of Russianness for the 'high' culture of Russian art and poetry. Perhaps a follow-up study, examining *lubki* pictures that are not related to war themes, would reveal a similar engagement with the geography of nationhood.

University of Birmingham

MARK BASSIN

By northern lights: on the making of geography in Sweden. By Anne Buttimer and Tom Mels. Basingstoke: Ashgate. 2006. 214pp. £xx cloth. ISBN: 0-7546-4814-1 cloth.

This book follows on conceptually and in subject matter from Buttimer's *Geography and the human spirit* (1993) and *Geographers of Norden* (1988) co-edited with Torsten Hagerstrand. The volume explores the making of Swedish geography, emphasizing geography as socially constructed knowledges. Although principally an analysis of the historical development of Geography in Sweden, *By northern Lights* draws on the interviews of the International Dialogue Project 1978–88, notably in the interview with Hagerstrand constituting Chapter Six. This interview, in the spirit of the Dialogue Project brings the (albeit still mediated) personal–professional voice of the geographer rather than their authorial or pedagogic voice to the history of geography. Buttimer brought oral history to the history of geography, long before it was fashionable, and this tradition is continued here. Many will find insight to Hagerstrand's work through this interview and it provides a useful resource in teaching the development of geographical thought – as does the whole book. The exploration of personal life-careers through biography (such as those of Edgar Kant, W. William-Olsson and Gerd Enquist) is a rich vein running throughout the text, linked in turn to wider intellectual, social and political milieu within and beyond geography.

Conceptually, changes in the history of Swedish geography are explained using Buttimer's threefold conceptual frameworks of meaning, metaphor and milieu and phoenix, faust and narcissus. Although explained here, a reader unfamiliar with these ideas may find it helpful to read Buttimer's earlier work first. However, once grasped, these analytical frameworks are applied to effect in this volume in the nuanced exploration of institutional and individual accounts of geography (although the poor text quality on some of the tables mapping these different elements is unfortunate). Buttimer and Mels provide the historian of geographical ideas and practices with a rich source of contextual studies at an institutional and national

level, all of which combines to shed light on particular matrices of influence that produced a specifically Swedish expression of geography and Empire, home and regional studies, geography and social concern, applied geography and the separation of physical and human geography. This then provides the international reader with an opportunity to place famous Swedish developments such as the quantitative group at Lund within the broader context of Swedish geography, as well as an opportunity to learn about other geographical events and trends less well known to the Anglo-American reader at least. One novel and fascinating element is the inclusion of all Swedish doctoral dissertations 1884–2000 in Appendix A, providing an accessible data set that can be analysed in many ways, not least in showing the trends in themes and methodologies in Swedish geography as well as the strong applied route for geographical knowledge. Overall, *By northern Lights* provides a detailed account of the history of Swedish geography, which has been long-overdue and should long stand as a reference not only on geography in Sweden but the practice of the historiography of geography.

Oxford Brookes University

AVRIL MADDRELL

Ham radio's technical culture. By K. Haring. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 2007. xvii + 220 pp. £18.95. cloth. ISBN: 0262083558.

'G4PDH, G4PDH, this is 2M1QQQ calling you. How do you copy?' Music to the amateur radio enthusiast's ears. Radio hams are the subject of Kristen Haring's enjoyable and important book, which traces ham radio culture in the USA between 1930 and 1970. Drawing on archive material, Haring composes an account as interesting to the historian of technology as to the cultural geographer with interests in concepts of home, leisure, masculinity and technology.

Emerging 'from the two interrelated processes of technical identification, creating meanings for technology and perceiving self in relationship to technology' (p. 161), Haring explores the technical culture of the hobbyist and argues for a closer examination of the social and personal aspects of technical communities. Enthusiasts are largely ignored by scholarship on technical culture, this volume, however, is a welcome addition to recent work on computer enthusiasts and hackers. Moreover she offers 'a reminder that there exist alternative ways of using and relating to technology' (p. 18).

Radio technology and its associated practices are inherently spatial, operating on a variety of scales and across a range of spaces; something explored to great effect by Haring, with the book's chapters travelling between the amateur club, the equipment manufacturer, the Federal Communications Commission and the domestic radio shack. The chapter entitled 'Ham Radio at Home' is particularly noteworthy. Haring discusses here how 'men's ham radio activity gained domestic acceptance' (p. 133) after being regarded for many years as a threat to social relationships and 'incompatible with romantic interests' (p. 122). She examines the location of the 'shack' within the home; arguing that the shacks 'grounded the ethereal hobby experience and situated hobbyists in the domestic context' (p. 145). Haring provides useful insights on questions of gendered architecture, hobby space, masculine sociability and changing technological values.