

# Geography as the world discipline: connecting popular and academic geographical imaginations

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*This article addresses and connects two areas of controversy within contemporary geography: the parochialism of contemporary human geography and the gulf between university and non-university geography. It is argued that we can find the cause of the latter phenomenon in the origin of the former, namely in academic geography's unwillingness to re-imagine the 'global claim' that it has inherited from its imperial past. This difficulty has created the conditions for the representation of popular geography as intrinsically dated, as politically suspect and/or as mere 'traveller's tales'. It is suggested that geography cannot escape the burden of its global claim. Rather it needs to critically engage this formerly imperial paradigm and, in so doing, re-ignite geography's role in public debate and as public knowledge.*

**Key words:** popular geography, history of geography, future of geography, imperialism, textbooks (geography)

## Introduction

Geography has been chastised for its lack of global ambitions many times and for some while (Taylor 1993; Johnston 1985a 1985b). Moreover, Taylor's (1993) faith in the discipline 're-discovering' its world vision still appears premature. Many of the recent textbooks introducing students to the basic concepts of human geography, or to its sub-fields, discussed later in this article, give the impression that the only experiences that concern 'us' are those had by the 6 per cent or so of the world's population who happen to live in white and English-language dominated societies.

The fissure between popular and academic geographical debate has attracted less scholarly concern, although the relatively low public profile of academic geography and the 'decoupling' (Machon and Ranger 1996) of academic geography from school geography – a process which reflects a perceived 'withdraw[al] of [geography] academics from active involvement in secondary education' (Stannard 2002, 80) – have become widespread concerns (Clifford 2002; Johnston 2002;

Thrift 2002). University and non-university geography appear to inhabit different worlds. I will argue here that this situation has had deleterious consequences for both. However, the focus of my critique is upon human geography as it is structured and introduced within British universities. More specifically, it will be suggested that the chasm between the popular and academic and the parochialism of contemporary academic geography are both real and related problems. Moreover, that we can find the cause of the former in the origin of the latter, namely in academic geography's unwillingness to engage, challenge and re-imagine the 'global claim' that it has inherited from its imperial past. Geography's post-1945 attempts to define itself as a technical speciality, and its related research alignment towards the relatively local policy considerations of the post-imperial nation state, enabled it to flee the scene of its once intimate but increasingly uncomfortable relationship with the global imaginary. It is argued that this process saw the enforcement of academic geography's rupture from popular geographical knowledge. It also encouraged a pre-existing disposition against non-university

level geography. In sum, it created the conditions for the representation of both popular geography and the study of 'other societies' as old-fashioned and politically suspect.

As this set of connections suggests, the present essay is a critical engagement with familiar calls for geographers to re-discover their 'lost . . . "geo" ' (Taylor 1993, 181) and/or to travel, imaginatively or literally 'to the ends of the earth' (Johnston 1985a, 326) to find their proper object of enquiry. What has been missing from these statements is an explanation of why geography, in Johnston's terms, 'disengaged' from the global and why it matters. My claim is that the latter tendency is intimately bound up with two other forms of disengagement: that is, from the popular and from the discipline's imperial heritage.

I would emphasize that, although the prescriptive content of my argument concerns the need for a re-assessment of the relationship of university and non-university geography, it does not rely on a sentimental or intellectual fondness for the latter. Indeed, it is suggested that the task of academic geography is to inform, challenge and conceptually re-wire people's understanding of the world. Yet, however critical this engagement, it needs to be rooted in an appreciation of the way that geography achieves its definition, not merely through the deliberations of academics, but in relationship to its wider actual and potential audience. The notion of geography as the world discipline, combining two basic remits of inter/transnational and environmental study, arises from this relationship and suggests that an antipathy to insularity and parochialism is, or at least should be, the defining attitude of the discipline.

## Geography as a popular subject

The category 'popular geography' is taken here to refer to all forms of self-designated geographical knowledge and representation with a mass audience and developed outside of the higher education community. This definition is employed, not to suggest that popular geography cannot also be many other things as well, or that school geography does not have academic content, but rather to make clear my focus on the institutional and public culture of non-university geography. The two most significant manifestations of popular geography are the popular geography media and pre-tertiary geography education.

Geography is a popular subject. Its declining status within secondary schools in Britain today reflects the squeeze placed on the curriculum by the Government's emphasis on 'basic skills' (Rawling 2000; see also

Gardner and Craig 2001). Where people have a choice they choose geography. Geography magazines, such as *The Geographical* and *National Geographic*, and television programmes and channels with a clear geographical remit (such as National Geographic Channel) have a world-wide audience of millions. Indeed, in terms of size of audience, an interest in geography may be judged one of the most widespread, disciplinary-related, intellectual pursuits. Although, geography's non-university outlets are highly diverse, they share a reasonably clear understanding that geography matters because it is non-insular; that it enables people to look beyond (and thereby, perhaps, appreciate better) their own particular environment and society. Yet it is not too great an exaggeration to say that academic geography is conducted as if these forums did not exist; as if geography was an almost entirely university-based specialism. In contrast to other disciplines with a large popular audience, such as history and natural science, academic geographers have little active involvement with popular outlets (for example, not only do academics play a major role in magazines such as *History Today* and *The New Scientist* but they use these platforms to develop debates and encourage prospective students into their disciplines).

This state of affairs may be taken to suggest one of two things: that popular geography is hostile to academic involvement and/or that it is an embarrassment to the serious pursuit of the contemporary discipline; that it gets its geography badly wrong. Whilst the former explanation cannot be disregarded, those few academic commentaries that exist on the popular geographical media suggest the latter as the more significant explanation. This is certainly the conclusion one would draw from the depiction of these forms as offering nothing but 'traveller's tales' (Taylor 1986, 445) or, indeed, as the somewhat risible ghost of imperial 'geography militant' (Driver 2001). Such depictions illustrate the existence of a persistent tendency to imagine popular geography (especially, but not exclusively, in its popular media forms) as a throw-back to the imperial mind-set of racist 'foreign adventure', a benighted condition from which academics have managed to extricate themselves. In the next section I question the nature and completeness of this process of extrication. I suggest that, by failing to develop a clearly 'post-colonial' transnationalist identity and agenda, academic geography, far from having 'dealt with' or 'moved on from' its imperial past has merely avoided it, and in the process fled its responsibilities to both its past and its potential contemporary public. Before such a discussion can be opened, however, we need to explore the genesis and meaning of 'popular geography' in a little more detail.

The conceit of an encompassing, scientific, 'world view', along with its attendant logic of objectively classifying, comparing and contrasting different societies and environments, may be seen being disseminated and developed as popular and scholarly geographical knowledge from the sixteenth century (Livingstone 1992), and achieving its recognizable modern form from the late eighteenth century (see Gregory 1994; also Walford 2001). Amongst other things, it reflected the rationality and the political ambitions of two inseparable processes, European modernity and European colonialism (cf. Stoddart 1986). This way of looking at the earth represents the invention of 'modern geography' and provides a first indication of why geographical knowledge (and its highly visual sensibility) remains a basic component of the meaning of the modern. Although potentially politically fraught, in Britain the relationship between the relativism implied in exercises of global comparison and the emergent role of geography as a conduit for patriotism to school children (Capel 1981), appears to have encouraged the discipline's concern with foreign and colonial places to be turned inwards in the last years of the nineteenth century. Thus from being virtually non-existent in the *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* and the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* throughout the nineteenth century, studies of regions within the United Kingdom began to gain a foothold in the RGS's *The Geographical Journal* from the mid-1890s (it is revealing, however, that one of the first substantial contributions on Britain concerned its 'discovery' by the ancient Greek geographer Pytheas; Markham 1893). This particular chronology of geography's development indicates an intellectual trajectory rather than a rigid or universal sequence. Ritter's early regional studies addressed Europe, whilst his later 19 volume opus *Erdkunde* (1817–1859) dealt with Africa and Asia. Freeman (1971) roots Vidal de la Blache's regional studies in France in earlier geographical attention (more specifically, to the work of Coquebert and d'Omalius d'Hallois in the early nineteenth century) to the *pays* (for an account of the relationship in France between geography as 'colonial studies' and as 'regional studies', see Soubeyran 1994). These forms of local regional research appear to have a contradictory relationship to the global geographical consciousness produced by European colonial expansion. However, in France, as in Britain, it is difficult to abstract them from the spatial ordering of empire. In both countries geography's frame was 'the big picture'; its idiom one of exploration and comparison, suffused and structured by Eurocentrism.

The fact that geography's emergence as an academic discipline in Britain is now generally accepted to have taken place in the context of its role as 'the science of imperialism *par excellence*' (Livingstone 1992, 160), should not be taken to imply its ideological uniformity or the political stability of the discipline's global vision. What Said has called the 'primacy of the geographical' (in Eagleton *et al.* 1990, 77) within the anti-imperialist imagination mirrors yet also challenges the conceits of a Eurocentric 'world vision'. Moreover, we do not have to look towards explicitly oppositional or 'alternative' traditions of geography in order to witness the way imperialism could generate types of knowledge that exceeded the imperial problematic. The 'curiosity' and 'concern' about other places, environments and peoples that animate so much popular geography may swarm with colonial clichés, but they are neither necessarily determined by nor reducible to them. This is the dilemma and also the opportunity of geography. It is a tension that Schulten (1995) draws out in her discussion of *Reading National Geographic* by Lutz and Collins (1993). For Schulten, Lutz and Collins's political disappointment with *National Geographic*, their focus on its imperial and racist content (see also Rothenberg 1994), is not erroneous but neither is it sufficient (see also Pauly's 1979 account of the National Geographic Society's complex relationship to democratic populism). Indeed, Schulten is moved to assert that the magazine 'also strikes a more basic sentiment of human interest which ought to be taken on its own terms' (1995, 526). This last phrase is an unfortunate choice, suggesting as it does that 'human interest' about the world is an innate, pre-political human attribute. Schulten is surely right to criticize the mono-dimensional nature of Lutz and Collins's political dismay at *National Geographic* and right to evoke the possibility of other, more nuanced, readings of the magazine. However, the political and historical horizons of popular 'curiosity' must be explicit if we are to avoid any lapse into populism.

Within and through imperialism, popular geography generated and reflected a view of the world and 'other places' and peoples as an object, or arena, of public interest and concern. Ploszajska (1996) has charted school geography's role in constructing imperial subjects from the late nineteenth century. She also asserts significant continuities within this tradition, noting that in pre-tertiary education 'today the task of conveying an understanding of the world and the pupil's place within it is usually assigned to geography' (Ploszajska 2000, 124; also Ploszajska 1998). The twentieth century witnessed the importance of this type of 'understanding' become both more widely accepted by more people

(caused, in part, by an expansion of global travel and the dissemination of 'world news') and increasingly linked to diverse ideologies, such as internationalism and globalisation, that cannot be adequately represented as mere echoes of imperialism. The 'world view' became more plural. Thus, for example, the relativist logic of earlier geographies may be seen transmuted into the multicultural and anti-racist agendas developed by school geography teachers and planners from the early 1970s onwards (Gill 1983; Walford 1985). This chain of association allowed geography to become the 'natural home' of issues such as global change, 'Third World development' and world inequalities as well as contextualized local environment studies that afforded a sense of the mutually dependent (between the human and physical world but also between different societies) nature of environmental process.

The nature of this popular understanding was also witnessed in reaction to the attacks on symbols of US power of 11 September 2001. Soon after these events, Paul Brown (2001), in *The Guardian*, portrayed geography's world knowledge as essential to survival and sustainability in a dangerous new century. 'Just when world affairs underline the need for all citizens to have good grasp of geography, why' he queried 'is the subject facing demotion by the government?' Brown voiced this concern not from any sense of disciplinary loyalty but from a fear of what will happen if we allow the myriad insularities and ethno-national prejudices that threaten humankind to go unchallenged. 'Geography is needed now more than ever in a globalised world' echoes Stannard (2002, 73), a geography teacher, in a recent issue of *Geography: An International Journal* (the journal of the Geographical Association). Yet, Stannard also voices a certain discontent with the conventional disciplinary hierarchy, in which the subject's non-tertiary forms have to wait for 'scraps of inspiration from the high table of contemporary academia' (2002, 81).

Although it is relatively easy to demonstrate that popular geography has shape, force and is misrepresented if seen as the swill of empire, it is likely that many readers will remain unconvinced by the idea that academic geography has anything to learn from it. Why should 'lay geographers' be allowed or expected to have any power to define the direction and content of the discipline? Although some particular reasons may be drawn from the above discussion, I want to make the broader case that what modern geography means should not be regarded simply as a private academic matter but as a form and result of public knowledge. It is an argument that extends the critique of 'internalist' accounts of the discipline offered by Livingstone (1992),

whilst concurring with his assessment that there is no pre-social or philosophical essence to geography.

Attempts to define geography as and entirely within academic geography arise from the mistaken belief that geography is, in essence, a technical specialism that is invented by 'us' and disseminated (perhaps) to 'them'. 'Our' challenge then becomes to work out what that specialism should be (quantitative or interpretative, for example). Yet whilst geography clearly contains many technical specialisms, the discipline's relationship to and status as public knowledge suggests that it can never be reduced to technique. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that professional self-reflections often evidence a militant solipsism and related deletion of an *active* wider audience. In *Re-thinking History*, the historian Keith Jenkins offers a typical example: history he says 'is produced by a group of labourers called historians when they go to work; it is their job' (1991, 21). Yet Jenkins' own book rebels against this kind of bland assurance. Indeed, it rests on the 'common sense' belief that 'the past' is a meaningful and useful category understood across diverse arenas of historical work and across its various audiences. A great many of Jenkins' references are not to historians at all, but politicians, novelists and other intellectuals. Such folk produce work that is history, not because 'it is their job', but because there exists a widely understood, popularly *and* academically based, assumption about what history consists of. This process has, I believe, another implication: that those areas of academic enquiry with deep roots in the popular imagination (history and geography are the prime examples, although many disciplines have some claim in this regard) will inevitably run into difficulties if they attempt to rupture this relationship and try to define themselves purely in terms of technique. In academic geography, a predictable sign and symptom of this latter process has been the proliferation of myriad but very specialist-sounding definitions of what distinguishes geographical thought. From his survey of the literature Golledge (2002, 4) has recently detailed no less than 19, including such items as 'Comprehending orientation and direction' (for example, 'forward-backward; left-right; back-front') and 'Comprehending locations and places'. A related chain of thought has encouraged other geographers to seek out geography's distinctive contribution by reference to its 'complexity'. Yet, although it may be comforting to believe, as students are informed on the opening page of *Modern Geographical Thought* (Peet 1998, 1) that 'Geography has a permanent identity crisis because what geographers do is complex', it is not convincing. Indeed, the idea that academic geography suffers from

a lack of definition because there is so much more to it than other disciplines is suspiciously self-flattering. The argument I have introduced above suggests that a far more likely, if prosaic, reason for academic geographers' perpetual angst is the perverse instinct that they are alone are responsible for the aims and scope of the geographical tradition.

### Unworldly geography

The location of continuities and discontinuities within the discipline of geography is a contested enterprise. Gregory (1994) has written persuasively on the way an image of the 'world as exhibition' was sustained within and through the development of geography as spatial science. He argues that this reifying, classification-producing logic has been challenged by the deconstructive and cultural turns of the late twentieth century. My chronology of the discipline's development also concerns the way it has staged the 'exhibition' of the world. However, besides advancing a somewhat more literal reading of what 'the world' might be, my account suggests that the various 'turns' within geography in the second half of the last century (such as the 'quantitative revolution' and the 'cultural turn') may be cast as part of a single phenomenon: i.e. a turn away from the international and global and towards 'the West' (or more accurately, the English-speaking West), as the natural province of British geography. This process has been accompanied by three related tendencies: (a) the maintenance of geography's practical involvement with the 'policy making process', but shrunk down to a suitably modest post-imperial national scale; (b) the conceptual relegation of international and transnational study to sub-fields, such as area studies and development studies; and (c), the assertion of a technical vocabulary to define geography (the privileged terms within the new lexicon being 'space' and 'spatial').

This narrowing of scope and technicalization of vocabulary have made it difficult for academic geographers to locate themselves in relation to either the wider public debate on geographical issues or the imperial configuration of the discipline. The demanding task of challenging and re-forming representations and understandings of 'other places and peoples', and 'our societies in the context of others', as well as 'our shared environment', have been taken up by many. Yet a tendency towards insularity has exceeded this work, drawing the more adroit theorists and researchers away from the politically uncertain terrain of 'representing others' and towards one-sided 'engagements' with sociology and cognate disciplines that rely on the notion of the

spatial 'contribution' (for a polemical account of the limits of the spatial paradigm, see Eliot Hurst 1985; also Saunders 1981). This process produces an *additive model* of geography. To put it crudely, we take themes framed and defined in terms of Eurocentric social science and add space. By contrast, a vision of geography as the world discipline commences with its own set of problematics – both theoretical and empirical – that turn on such questions as the representation and formation of global processes, world regions and the economic, social and environmental processes (such as globalization and industrialization) that affect them. This agenda already has a place within certain areas of academic geography, and is well reflected in a number of recent undergraduate textbooks, such as 'The Shape of the World' series offered from the Open University (for example, Allen and Massey 1995; see also Daniels *et al.* 2001; Cloke *et al.* 1999; Johnston *et al.* 1995). Moreover, because of different sub-disciplinary histories, some sub-fields are markedly less insular than others. Yet it is a perplexing scene. There are signs that historical geography is opening to broader horizons (Graham and Nash 2000). Yet research methods in human geography can be communicated without even an allusion to the discipline's internationalism or, indeed, to comparative, contextual or cross-cultural issues (for example, Kitchen and Tate 2000). And whilst many political and economic geographers are fully engaged with connections, networks and societies beyond the English-speaking West (for example, Bryson *et al.* 1999; Storper 1997; Scott 1998; Taylor 1989; Muir 1997), social, cultural and rural geographers often appear to have no such inclination. Indeed, within social geography at least, the tendency to stick to policy-related and Anglo-American material appears to have become almost instinctual – in the sense that it is addressed and justified in the most cursory of terms – from the mid-1960s (for an exception see Eyles 1986). Thus from Pahl (1965), Jones (1975), Jackson and Smith (1982), Carter and Jones (1989), Knox and Pinch (2000) to recent, and otherwise very welcome, affirmations of the sub-discipline, by Pain *et al.* (2001) and Valentine (2001), the space allocated to non-Anglo-American material is meagre: indeed, in most of these texts, if it appears at all, it is only as an afterthought and can be measured in paragraphs.

This critique is not premised simply on the contention that geography should make more use of 'foreign examples'. More profoundly, it concerns the construction and naturalization of geographical knowledge as Anglo-American and European knowledge. This narrow focus may avoid uncomfortable questions about 'representing others'. Yet, by doing so, it sustains more

disturbing conceits, more specifically the sense that the rest of the world is not worth knowing about and/or that it does not fall within the intellectual remit of a discipline driven by national policy considerations.

It might be expected that textbooks in the area of 'geographical thought' – i.e. those that describe and assess current theoretical debates in geography – would be relatively immune from such a critique. They, after all, are addressing geography as it is, however 'unworldly'. However, this defence misses the selective nature of their project, as well as the way their narrative of geography has come to develop its own traditions and rigidities. The justification of a canon of geographical theory is not the explicit intention of *Modern geographical thought* (Peet 1998) *Geography and geographers* (Johnston 1983), *Geography: history and concepts* (Holt-Jensen 1988), *Approaching human geography* (Cloeke et al. 1991) and *The Place of Geography* (Unwin 1992). Yet the problematic that animates the structure and content of these influential works is very similar: namely that 'geographical thought' consists of a spatial perspective on the same set of ideologies that are familiar across the social sciences. In this way the contemporary intellectual history of the discipline is staged through a series of dialogues with a generic set of authoritative theoretical actors: first positivism, then behaviourism, followed by Marxism, humanism and feminism and, in their wake, realism, structurationism and post-modernism. My argument is not with the importance of these approaches, or the need for geography students to grasp them, but with, (a) their decontextualization from geography; that is, their production as Western theory and the nature and implications of their application in other parts of the world; and (b), their privileging as the structuring, determining and essential foundations of a generic field of 'social theory'. In respect to this latter point, I would suggest that there are other ways theory can be and has been approached; pathways that may have as much, or more, to say about the geographer's (whether university or non-university based) intellectual landscape. Examples of such pathways include the delineation of Anglo-American and other ethnicized or national traditions of social and geographical theory and an engagement with the theoretical and political fall-out of colonization. In a similar fashion, the themes of relativism and universalism have a distinctly geographical theoretical agenda, one which can be aligned with more empirical debates on multiculturalism, globalization, green theory and world-systems theory. These examples are not offered programmatically, in the hope of fabricating a new canon, but to illustrate that, far from being a residual category, an optional

'add-on' to 'famous isms', geographical theory is part of the fabric of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

My illustrations might also suggest that when geographers look at a theoretical tradition that is a core concern across the humanities and social sciences, such as Marxism, they will want to do more than sift out of a 'spatial contribution'. They should also, at least, be alert to the influence and development of Marxisms around the world, the nature and context of the so-called 'Western Marxist' tradition and how, more broadly, these traditions have constructed a global claim. It is at least likely that the conventional negative reception of 'ideas' themes amongst geography students – Smith's observation on student perceptions is that 'the traditionally compulsory "thought" course is often the biggest bore and a waste of time' (1988, 159; see also Phillips and Healey 1996; Lorimer and Spedding 2002) – may have something to do with their seemingly tangential relationship with what students, encultured into popular, public visions of geography, expect of the discipline. As I have already indicated, although these expectations need complicating and re-wiring, the temptation to cast them aside as anachronistic and irrelevant to 'university level geography' is not always justified.

For some readers the temptation to read these arguments as a kind of slyly politically correct way of returning to old-fashioned geography will be powerful. Indeed, it is interesting to note that area studies have of late started to be re-defined in ways that resonate with my position: 'the virtual demise of area studies in many Departments is a cause of real concern', note Thrift and Walling (2000) in a recent overview of British geography, because 'the net result is a kind of pious Eurocentrism in which much is written in theory concerning the necessity to appreciate difference, but this is too rarely articulated in practice' (2000, 106). However, the problem is not that 'area studies' – conceptualized in its traditional guise as the regional study of discrete regions/nations – needs to be defended but that geographers have found it hard to re-invent it. For such is the aversion to the colonial paradigm, misleadingly conflated with popular geography, that any sense of Western scholars claiming to represent, claiming to know, 'other societies' has become dangerous territory. It is a sentiment neatly expressed by Rogers when he aligns attempts to talk at the global scale with an imperial 'claiming of the globe' by 'the Patriarchs of Geography' (1991, 131). In fact Rogers's attack soon falls into contradiction, since like most people he is actually interested in societies and environments beyond his doorstep: 'While mindful of the pitfalls of the global claim', he also notes, 'I would not want to be placed in a position

of silence about current goings-on in Armenia, or for that matter Sudan, Indonesia or Brazil' (1991, 141). The uncomfortable position I have been advancing in this article is that geography is founded upon and inextricably tied to the 'global claim'. Moreover, that this claim cannot be escaped without severing academic geographers from the public meaning of the discipline and their own responsibility to create and disseminate critical and non-parochial traditions of world knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

In his radical manifesto for the discipline, Harvey portrays contemporary popular geography as a degraded, feral, form:

What was once an important preserve for the geographer fell into the hands of popular magazines and the producers of commercial travelogues and brochures, television films, news, and documentaries. The failure to help build appropriate popular understandings to deal with a world undergoing rapid geographical integration was a striking abrogation of responsibility. (Harvey 1996, 99; first published 1984)

Whilst agreeing with Harvey's last sentence, it strikes me as having an uneasy relationship to his first. The image of geography being the 'preserve' of academics, of being entirely within their 'hands', is offered as an ideal, yet in the next breath this same group is scolded for not entering into a relationship with popular geographical consciousness. Harvey's association, in that first line, of 'popular' with 'commercial' does little to ease the strain, especially since the capitalist imperative is often unclear or contradictory within the institutional structure of popular geography. It is precisely these tensions that make Harvey's statement a useful reflection of a common academic stance towards popular geography: 'they need us', he seems to be saying, 'but that just goes to show how important it is we keep our distance from them'. My argument in this article has affirmed that 'they' do need us, but also that 'we' need them. More fundamentally, I have tried to offer a vision of geography as a form of consciousness – rooted in but not determined by the imperial experience – which can be shared by specialists and non-specialists alike.

It will be noted that I have not had much to say on what has recently re-emerged as a commonly employed defining focus of the discipline, the environment. The precision of this putative focus is somewhat deceptive, since the term 'environment' is enormously flexible, being used as a synonym for many other ideas, such as space and/or for 'human–environment relations'

(Haggett 2001; Golledge 2002). While I cannot claim to have done justice to the environmental tradition in this brief essay, the implication of my argument is that, however defined, 'the environment' achieves its most cogent role within geographical narrative when it emerges from and within a disciplinary culture stressing anti-parochialism and the interdependence of peoples and places.

The perspective I have advanced clearly implies that university-level geography should explicitly engage (in terms of 'links' and/or as critique) pre-tertiary and other forms of geographical knowledge. It also raises questions about the issue of student progression within the discipline. More specifically, that undergraduates should be able to understand their university studies as a deepening of and challenge to their existing grasp of the global scene. The spirit and purpose of geography should be a militant anti-parochialism and a refusal of ethnocentrism. This agenda is politically mutable: it is suffused with egalitarianism yet also chimes with the rationale for the 're-discovery' of geography in the USA developed by the Rediscovering Geography Committee (1997). Taking their cue from popular expectations of the discipline, the Committee rationalizes the need for the re-assertion of geography by reference to 'a growing public recognition that our national well-being is related to global markets and international political development' (1997, 8). Clearly there are tensions here: being globally minded to serve our national interests is an ambivalent, if ubiquitous, ambition. A vision of geography as world discipline does not imply that the contested nature of geography can be overcome or resolved. However, the relationship of this contested enterprise to the wider society is something that can change, and must if we wish to move towards more informed and less destructive forms of governance and society. Unfortunately, the drift towards constituting universities as centres of entrepreneurial activity may be taking us in the opposite direction: locking researchers into structures of funding and consciousness that are merely national or reflect the priorities of pan-national corporate and government institutions. If geography is viewed as the flexible friend of these funders, prepared to add a pinch of 'space' to whatever agenda they generate, it may have a lucrative – although I would imagine, short-term – future. However, the vital task of sustaining a cosmopolitan and informed disciplinary and public culture will be chained down, leashed not by popular will or the academic imagination, but by a bureaucratized research culture.

I am not aware of a single academic geographical organization in the world that does not use a world map

as the principal element of its logo. In my own School, I climb the stairs past six enormous half globes, mounted on the walls like big-game trophies, all making sure visitors know which subject area they are in and what epistemological repertoire it claims. Indeed, there used to be a vast plastic globe rotating in the lobby (before it crashed to the floor one night). All these world images are part of the public and academic visual imagination of the discipline: they encapsulate its imperial conceit and post-colonial potential. Geography cannot escape the burden of its global claim or, indeed, of its vast and diverse public audiences.

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