

pen perhaps. But how to explain away the gross shabbiness of the comparisons laid out on page 14? Colonialists are presented as the do-gooders, the givers, the harbingers of Enlightenment, and black African leaders (or is it all colonized peoples) as corrupt, evil, violent despots. How different a message could have been given if there were also references to the scrupulous dishonesty of some colonial regimes, such as that of the British government in the (then) British Guyana and its role in rigging elections that led to a 29-year dictatorship which has left that country with one of the lowest levels of GNP per capita in the Western world. And what if there had been reference to African leaders such as Nyerere, Mugabe, and Mandela? But the message from Professor Gould is clear; without the benefits of Western civilization, how can we expect anything but barbaric behaviour from savages? If this is 'fair and honest geographical scholarship' (p. 14), I want no part of it. Surely, one of the most basic rules of any fair and honest scholarship is comparing like with like; let us compare colonial administrations with colonial administrations and African despots with African despots. And whatever the context of colonial administrations and governments let us not forget that their *raison d'être* was not so much to give as to get.

Professor Gould suggests that it is time we all grew up (p. 10). The problem is that the Young Turks, the (exclusively male) intellectual vanguard of academic geography to whom he makes reference several times, have a habit of growing up into Old Turkeys. Maybe it is time not only to grow up, but for some Old Turkeys to come down off their roosts. That would be just fine by me.

VISIONS OF GEOGRAPHY: AN OPEN LETTER TO PETER GOULD

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Dear Peter:

I wish I could have been with you in Ottawa last June, but reading the printed version of your address I could hear your voice – and hear in it, too, your concern. Although our ideas about geography differ in various ways, I admire and respect your ability to combine deeply held personal convictions with a sense of public responsibility and accountability: and for that reason I

Notes

- 1 The title is partially taken from the following quotation by Dr. Jonathan Swift, 'Proper words in proper places, make the true definition of a style.' Letter to a young gentleman lately entered into holy orders, 9th January, 1758. Reprinted in *Miscellanies on Verse*, Vol 7 of *The Works of Dr. Jonathan Swift* (Dublin: G. and A. Ewing)
- 2 Why is it that modern masculinities appear to be able to construe no higher accolade than that of a 'fine mind'?
- 3 The use of masculine pronouns as generic is not a mere linguistic accident. In 1746 John Kirkby established his 'Eighty-Eight Grammatical Rules,' Rule 21 of which stated that the male gender was more comprehensive than the female (Olin Hill 1986).
- 4 See Kamp (1993) for a similar argument in relation to gay chic.

Acknowledgments

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hope you will allow me to share this letter with a wider audience. An open letter may seem no more than a rhetorical device, but the issues that you raise are too urgent for the anaemic conventions of 'commentaries' and 'responses.'

Let me say at once that, like you, I find the intellectual variety and vitality of contemporary geography exhilarating and also, crucially, practically and politically

charged. But I'm not sure how you reconcile your advice to resist specialization (don't you mean, rather, to prise open the closures of compartmentalization?) with a commitment to – really, I think, a belief in – 'the' geographic way of looking. I'm troubled by that singular if it is supposed to imply that geographical discourse is (or ought to be) constituted as a totality, that there is some essential (and essentially coherent) intellectual project called 'geography' to be fulfilled. But so much of what you say seems to urge the opposite that I can't think this is what you mean. So let me pick up on one sentence which points in the other direction and suggest what I think it entails:

'All choices constitute conditions of possibility to illuminate, to bring out of concealment, but every concrete choice made in the course of a particular investigation may illuminate others, and so close off possibilities for seeing.'

Given the inescapable partiality of our perspectives, then, our inability to occupy some disembodied Archimedean point from which to view the landscape 'as a whole,' we need to find some critical and creative way of coming to terms with *theoretical dissonance*. This isn't an argument for realism, obviously, since it jibes against its insistence on rational abstractions, but neither is it a defence of relativism: choices have to be made, and my reasons for making the choices I do are (like yours) in part political and ethical, so it isn't just a matter of 'optics.' Our theories are modes of representation, ways of enabling us to figure the world like this rather than like that, and they have material consequences, often for particular people in particular places, that have to be taken into account – and called to account. But if I can't accept each and every representation, neither can I confine myself to a single one: and since I don't believe it possible to reconcile their various claims through a metatheoretical system or court of philosophical appeal, I have to accept that they don't just illuminate different areas but use different wavelengths to represent the landscape in different, often contradictory, ways. This is more radical than I'm making it seem, because – as you indicate – we have no access to 'the' landscape outside of that tangled web of representations. So far, so good. This means that, like you, I want to insist on the multiple and compound geographies of the European Enlightenment, to resist the simple oppositions between modernism and postmodernism (in the rush to be 'post,' I suspect that too many writers don't pause long enough to examine what it is they are so determined to be 'post' about), and to work towards the recovery of plural intellectual histories (or historical geographies) that help

us to understand and situate our own work better.

But – and you knew there would be at least one! – I want to think about the visual metaphoric that runs through what I've just said, as it does through your essay as a whole, and comment on what I take to be its implications for the two discourses that are subjected to your most stringent scrutiny: feminism and postcolonialism. Your critique is nuanced, I realize, and I should say at once that I share your admiration for many of those in both fields whose writings you cite so approvingly. But I read their work differently.

You make much of the etymological filiations between 'theory' and 'theatre', of the act of making visible, of the inscription of the supposedly 'detached gaze' of 'the public' at the heart of Western philosophy: but you don't, I think, make quite enough. You draw attention to Timothy Mitchell's work, but his disturbingly brilliant account, *Colonising Egypt*, is disturbing and brilliant (to me) precisely because it *interrupts* and *calls into question* that deeply sedimented tradition and the peculiar salience it has achieved within the world of Western modernity.

There is a lively debate about how far Mitchell succeeds in displacing the privileges of Western metaphysics and how sensitive he is to the gendering of its optics, but his work reinforces the cogency of many other inquiries into the connections between power, knowledge, and visibility. In human geography, Denis Cosgrove's early work on linear perspective is highly suggestive, and so too is Gillian Rose's use of psychoanalytic theory to interrogate the (masculine) gendering of the gaze. Their work has been remarkably successful in demonstrating the materiality and corporeality of vision. That said, I find their accounts insufficiently discriminating. For that reason I'm also drawn to Martin Jay's *Downcast Eyes* and to the collection of essays edited by David Levin as *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, which make much more of the heterogeneity of vision and visibility. Taken together, these explorations suggest the possibility of charting what we might call historical geographies of vision. I think one could show, through a project of this kind, that these scopic regimes and counter-regimes are never the 'detached' (your word) apparatuses that many of their engineers make them out to be: that their 'detachments' from one place and position have always turned out to be so many attachments to another place and position. Each of them installs a particular diagram of power(s) and knowledge(s) through a particular spatiality, and the result is a tense series of constellations, a force-field of struggle within and between overlapping spaces of

representation. Now I have said that these investigations only 'suggest the possibility' of such an intricate plurality of historical geographies, because in their present form too many of them turn around purely philosophical affairs: only in one chapter does Jay dissolve the walls of the academy, for example, and begin to tease out the implications of these intramural disputes in wider constellations of power, practice, and knowledge (as Mitchell, Cosgrove, and Rose do).

Let me try to explain why I think this matters so much. Do you know Donna Haraway's discussion of 'Situated knowledges'? She writes about the need for embodied vision – the need to acknowledge the physicality of our visual practices and our claims to knowledge – as a way of dispelling what she calls 'the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere.' I invoke her work here not only because I am persuaded by much of what she says, which bears directly on your own work (in *The Slow Plague*, for example) and on so many other domains of late-20th-century geography, but most of all because she constructs a wonderful passage between *positionality* and political and ethical *responsibility*. Isn't this what you are after too (most obviously in *Fire in the Rain*)? Yet when you talk in your essay of 'a' Verena Meier or 'an' Edward Said, I am worried by those indefinite articles, by the tacit erasure of particular positionalities and the situatedness of their interventions.

I need to be more specific still. You object to 'male geographers scurrying around in print flashing their gendered sensitivity.' I can't imagine that you mean to 'feminize' feminist geography – to limit its lessons (and its practices) to 'thoughtful', 'sensitive' and 'grac[ious]' women – so I assume that you wonder about the motives of men who declare their interest in feminism in these (other) ways. Well, you're not alone: I know that many women are dismayed at what they take to be a process of fashionable appropriation, a slide-show of gender tourism. But is that a fair characterization of all those men who have tried to think through the questions that feminist politics asks of them? In most cases, isn't their effort made in good faith? I don't understand why it should be misplaced to show a concern for such matters in a world where male geographers have for so long trumpeted their gendered *insensitivity* (and not only in print). And neither do I see how phallogentrism can be prised apart from language. Like you, I don't like venom or instant dismissal (though I know only too well that the temptations of public performance sometimes make us more outrageous than we would otherwise want to be). Even so, intellectual work is hard enough without the fear that, as soon as you say something, you'll be set upon with clubs.

We could – all of us – be more helpful, more encouraging, more supportive, without foreclosing on the prospects of a genuinely critical culture. But Peter: 'strident,' 'precious posturing,' 'shallowly flamboyant'?? I agree on the need for men to have a thoughtful and (yes) critical engagement with feminist geography, in all its versions, but are these the terms which enable us to do so? They illuminate, to be sure: but to continue with your own metaphor, what do they also plunge into darkness? In my own case, Haraway has helped me to understand how finding the terms for my situatedness, in all its contradictory complexity, makes it possible to construct 'webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology.' I value both, and it is in that double sense that I would prefer to invoke 'enlightenment.'

You talk of the diversity of colonialism and its contradictions – of its multiple histories and geographies – and ask us, quite properly, how we are to evaluate them and their continued presence in this late-20th-century world. What are our responsibilities and what ought to be our responses? But, again, I can't answer these questions from anywhere and everywhere (and, in truth, I doubt that you do either). I can only respond honestly by thinking about my own changing situatedness, about the connections in history and geography that have for so long animated David Harvey's work and which, in particular ways, spiral through the trajectory of own shifting subject-position. This isn't a matter of being self-centred but of *de-centring* myself. Moving from Britain to Canada five years ago has made me acutely aware, in my teaching and in the rest of my daily life, of a series of appropriations and invasions bound up in inscriptions of 'race', gender, and sexuality that I had never properly examined before and for which, in myriad ways, I bear some responsibility. *That* is the white man's burden. Thinking like this constantly reminds me that I'm not, can never be 'detached'; and this isn't disabling either.

Like you, I want to insist on the heterogeneity of 'the' Enlightenment tradition, of the diversity of powers and knowledges that scored its compositions, and of its achievements *and* its attendant violences. But how, then, can you invoke 'Reason' in all its singular majesty? And who is this 'public,' this 'international community' of which you speak? The connections between Enlightenment projects and public spheres are tense and tangled, as I know you know, but they become even more so when they're moved from the national to the international arena. I'm presently trying to tease out the relations between imperialism, information circulation, and identity formation in the British Empire during the 19th century, and it's clear that these imagined

communities – with all their ironies, exclusions, and silences – simply cannot be understood without mapping constellations of powers and positions. When you demand that ‘what is decent and right’ be advanced by a ‘new, internationally sanctioned colonialism’, you are deliberately trading on that tradition. And so I wonder what my maps are to look like at the end of the 20th century? Who is drawing them? how? from where? It follows from these clumsy deconstructions that my reasons for arguing and accepting (some) international interventions, and for urging not only political but also economic responsibilities on ‘the international community,’ don’t issue from ‘a detached view, a gaze on the other.’ Instead, I try to root them in listening to other voices, responding to their needs, and acknowledging my inescapable involvement in the historical geographies that are our attachments to what the Canadian writer

Michael Ignatieff calls ‘distant strangers.’ And in doing so, perhaps I can help to lighten the darkness at home too.

Yours ever,

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REPLY

Peter Gould

‘To me, this idea that you can’t dispute the territory, that criticism or debate is not really tolerated outside of a certain set of very circumscribed parameters is dangerous. In order to be a vital movement, feminism should be able to sustain some kind of critique, voices that don’t all say just one thing.’

– Katie Roiphe, author of *The Morning After*,
 interviewed by Art Carey

In these postmodern days of different perspectives and hermeneutic stances, anyone who thinks that a publication, a ‘making public,’ will come to reflect the author’s intentions is either ignorant or naïve. We launch our little caravels into the stormy seas of critique where the waves buffet them as they will. Still, it is a more vigorous life than rotting in some quiet haven – as Tennyson’s Ulysses knew well. So I thank my commentators, Janet Momsen, Linda Peake, and Derek Gregory for the courtesy of their responding. Two of them, however, do not make it easy to respond in turn, since their commentaries barely touch, let alone engage, the questions that the text provided. Let me take these commentaries up first, starting with Janet Momsen, who sees me as a politically correct Super Mario – a character I have never heard of before, but who must be, from the context, both heinous and electronic.

Where in the text have I written anything that could be

even faintly construed as an apologetic look at ‘the “Quantitative Revolution” of the 60s’. I neither mention it nor the years. Where does this literally extraneous thought come from? I certainly do not feel in the least ‘a “traitor” to quantitative geography’ – this was not my term, but that of others – and I have regularly taught courses in quantitative methodology for 34 years, including our Spatial Analysis II this very semester (Spring 1994).

In marked contrast, my claims are based on explicit texts: whatever Ron Johnston said over a decade ago, at a meeting at which I was not present, he wrote, in 1991, a chapter of 37 pages in *A Sense of Place* entitled ‘A Fragmented Discipline,’ in which he did his utmost to support his contention that ‘Fragmentation is seen as a problem because it fails to acknowledge the integration necessary for a proper understanding of much of the subject matter of geography ...’ (p. 36). Whether he actually ‘fears this fragmentation as Gould suggests’ I cannot tell, but I can suggest that after 37 pages he does give the distinct impression that he is desperately worried about it. Why? Because at the end of the chapter he declares he is going to write the rest of the book to remedy it by arguing for ‘an integrated human geography focusing on the nature of places.’ Different interpretations are